

INQUIRY RESPECTING THE TREATMENT, EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF INNU IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

English Transcript | Volume 45

Commissioners: Retired Judge James Igloliorte, Dr. Mike Devine and Anastasia Qupee

Thursday | 7 November 2024

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Good morning, everyone.

We were expecting a speaker for 9:30 to speak here and also somebody in a private session, but neither of them have shown up yet, so we're kind of just gonna have to wait until we see what happens.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I was just saying that yesterday when [redacted] spoke, we all saw how difficult it was from him and that he wanted a break, and said that he would come this morning. So he hasn't shown, but we can understand where he's at, just how difficult it was for him.

So we will wait and if there's anybody that would like to speak, you're more than welcome.

Thank you.

Tshinashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so we are gonna start. Elizabeth would like to speak to the Inquiry, given the other persons haven't shown. So we'll start now in a minute; give people a chance to gather, sit.

So first of all I would ask – Elizabeth's coming forward, so she can say a prayer first, and then I'll do a few housekeeping items.

Thank you.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Thank you, everyone.

Just on the housekeeping. I just want to mention, again, about the healing services people that are here; so we have Edward Nuna and Bernice Webber and Rebecca Rich and Sean Allen here this morning.

So everybody's here for the day.

So we'll have Elizabeth speak now.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): I will excuse myself when another speaker comes because he was scheduled to speak, and that was [redacted].

I thought a lot about [redacted] yesterday after he spoke and there were things that he said that kept me thinking. He said after he finished his treatment, there was no aftercare. And I think a lot of families, people in our community are feeling that thing too, about not having aftercare, because they assume that they will get their kids or grandkids back to their families, but that has not happened.

When kids are apprehended and when families finish their treatment, I think there should be an aftercare in place for them because these families look forward to having their children back in their homes with them and I think maybe that is why people give up, because CSSD keep telling them it is not time, yet, for the kids to go back home. This is what one of the parents told me – they were very happy when they finished treatment. They did all the things that CSSD have asked them, but I think it is CSSD did the wrongdoings for families in their communities.

I think that's why sometimes parents gave up. They go back drinking, doing drugs. Maybe if their kids were given back to them, maybe they would go on trying to live a healthy lifestyles that were given to them before. And I think that is why parents give

up when they are told that their kids are not ready to go home.

I have witnessed these kids that were taken away from the parents and they were in foster care and the mother went to visit them. The look on those kids' faces, I still remember, and the mother's look on her face when they saw each other. I bet those kids were looking forward to going back home. I think CSSD breaks hearts of the families here in our communities when they take their children away from them. They break the love that the parents have for their children.

CSSD thinks families will follow the government's policy. I know that social workers follow the government's policy because they are scared to go against it. The Innu do not have policies that the government does. I hope that the Minister of CSSD come to our communities and listen to our people. We would have our Elders as our support like we do here.

So this is what I think: Our leaders go to see the government, tell them to stop hurting families, Innu families, and that we and our leaders should work together. I think this Inquiry, like our Commissioner, Nashtash Qupee, should invite the minister to hear us first-hand because those kids have been affected the most. Maybe some of the social workers are not doing their jobs as they should be. Maybe their boss, the government, don't even know that. And we should tell our stories to the minister ourselves.

I also think – maybe I should not say this, but I want to say it – the government's policy should let us know what their policies are, what the social workers are doing and what are their job descriptions regarding the child apprehension, especially. We want to see what kind of work they do for the policy. But again I think we may not be allowed to do that.

As I sit here, I know I have mentioned this before, that I like telling my own stories, too, regarding my two great-grandsons that were apprehended. I saw with my own eyes that they were not taken good care of where they were at their foster parents' home.

The foster parent came to me one time asking me for money. As soon as he asked me, I thought of my great-grandkids, so I went to their home. The mother was not there but the father was in the house. He was angry. I don't know what happened between them but when I saw my great-grandson was put in a child's walker, Pamper all soaked, his clothes were soaked, he was standing on his own pee. I asked the father to get his Pamper and wipes because I wanted to change him. He had Pampers, but he did not have the wipes.

When I tell this, all the other stories that Innu tell, they are not lies. I asked the father if I could take my great-grandson home. He just yelled at me: No.

So after that I went home, I cried, and I called one of my daughters-in-law and I told her what had happened. She called the CSSD on my behalf and nothing was done, nothing ever happened. But later on, the social worker called and told me: Everything is good with your great-grandsons. I don't think nothing was ever done about my complaint.

Today, my great-grandson is not well. He is sick. CSSD don't look into families of foster homes. I think they only do it for the money that are given to the foster parents. I know there are other women like me that feel this way. Maybe if my grandson did not have a drinking problem, a drug addiction, maybe my great-grandson would be healthy.

Today I am trying to help my great-grandson; I take care of him, and I wanna do this as long as I can. I do this because CSSD did not do their job, and again, I want to stress I may not be the only Innu woman

saying this, feeling this. My great-grandson is seven years old, will be eight in the spring. The love I have for him comes from my heart. Yes, CSSD have hurt me and a lot of us here in our community.

Many of us has spoken and have heard, been heard, how wrong has been done to the Innu. Well, today the Innu have woken up and be heard. There are a lot of us, and I know there are other Innu people that will be heard.

One Innu woman phoned me at my house and told me what had happened to me, happened to her. And so that is the reason why she is looking after her two grandchildren since they were very small. I think CSSD should understand how much they have hurt our people, like me and the others.

This summer I went to see the CSSD worker, my grandson's caseworker, only to be told that she was away. I went back home disappointed. I thought maybe she should have another worker while she's away. I was disappointed when I went home because I could not get to see a CSSD worker.

I know it is not only me telling these kind of stories I am telling here right now. Yeah, the government thought we would never wake up to tell our stories. In my days children were taken care of by the parents. In Nutshimit – in our land – they were free, they were healthy and there was a lot of love shown to the children. Yes, we take good care of our children.

And then I also think CSSD take our children because of parents drinking, the addictions. But the love of their children is always there. Will always be there. And I do want to say again that the Minister of CSSD come to our community to hear from us, because when we speak, we speak the truth.

What I have said, I have told the truth. We have heard other Innu speak. We have seen the hurt that they carry within them. We have witnessed on first-hand when we are here at this Inquiry. Some of them told their stories, but not strong enough to finish them. Yes, we will hear them again. And I think of them.

Innu never lie. We try to tell our stories, the trauma, intergenerational trauma. We heard those and I hear those.

And that is all I can say. And I thank the Inquiry for listening to me.

I want to mention one more thing before I conclude. I have a story to tell, for the love for a child. One time, when we were young, my mother and my sister went to Sept-Îles because that's where my parents originally from. They went to visit; she visited her brother who was there.

When my mother and my sister reached the house that they were going to visit my uncle, my mother saw his brother's kids, one of the boys. There was drinking in the house. She saw her nephew, she went outside, went to talk to an Elder with my sister. And then the Elder told her she should take her brother's son: Take him home with you to Sheshatshiu, because there is always drinking in that house.

Then my mother went back to her brother's house and asked him that he want to take his son with him to Sheshatshiu. With no hesitation, her brother allowed her to take the six-month-old; he was already sitting up, the baby. She took him home and when they came back to Sheshatshiu where we, and my brothers and my sisters, were all surprised that she took him. We thought, how can she look after him, because my mother was an Elder then. We went to see the little boy, very surprised.

And she did take care of him; she reared him up. She bought her things out of her seniors' pension then. She bought him the

essentials for a child's needs. She took him to Nutshimit, to the land, and there, again, we watched her every day, how she really took care of him. She put him first, then us. Now that is what I call love. The love that Innu family have for their children, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren, a lot of love there.

And then, I want to conclude. I want to thank the Inquiry for letting me speak again.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you, once again, for your words of wisdom to the Inquiry and, particularly, a touching story about love that you told at the very end. So thank you for that gift, because that's what it is.

Thank you.

[Dialogue between Elder Penashue and Interpreter Nuna in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, people so – thank you again, Elizabeth.

At the current time we don't have any more speakers for this morning. We do, at 1:30, have a session but it's a private session. So we will be here, and we will stay around in case there's some walk-ins who might want to speak to us.

So that's what the rest of the day looks at the present time. Thank you.

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