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

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[redacted]

Recess

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, we're ready to start now this afternoon.

So we have – first of all we have a public speaker, and we also have a private speaker. So the two of us will start, and then one of us will step out to meet with the person who wants a private session.

We wanted to acknowledge the sad news that people heard just yesterday, of a young person who passed away. So in acknowledging that, we've asked Elizabeth if she would say a prayer in that person's memory.

Thank you.

ELDER PENASHUE: Okay.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, so if Vanessa wants to come up.

Good afternoon to the both of you. So just to explain a little bit how this works is that it's very much open. So you're just here to tell your story, whatever part of it that you want to tell us. Anne will, I assume – do you want to speak in Innu or in English?

V. ANDREW: I don't mind speaking in English.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: English, okay. So in that case, if you say a few sentences and then Anne will do the translation, so it will be, like, back and forth. So sometimes we all forget, including myself. So I might indicate to you to stop if you forget, to tell Anne. She can take a lot, though, if you do forget, she seems to remember it all. Any questions or anything you'd like to know? Okay.

V. ANDREW: At first I wanna have a question about my daughter, Victoria. She was here; she was talking to you guys, I think. And we never heard from it and, like, we never get back, I guess, like, what's going on, on it. And that was my question; Victoria McKay – her name, my daughter – she's 20 years old – she's 21 yeah, and I'm questioning what's going on there.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: What's going on with her situation?

V. ANDREW: Yeah, like, she was here talking about the same thing. The social workers took her away and she had injections

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

V. ANDREW: – and she got medications and everything.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay. Yes, sure.

So a number of people have come forward to tell their stories about experiences that they have had and problems they've had. As an Inquiry, we hear all of people's stories –

V. ANDREW: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – and then we'll gather all of them together and that'll end up in a report.

V. ANDREW: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So this is hearing what she had to say, along with other people. The things that are identified that have been a problem, we will include those considerations in the report, okay?

V. ANDREW: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So it won't address a particular situation, but it will look at like, there may be a situation that were common to other people where the system broke down. Those are the kinds of things that we're looking for.

V. ANDREW: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So there won't be answers specific to hers but there may be in the report.

V. ANDREW: It's the same thing that my other daughter – her name is Ava Andrew. She's been out in St. John's since she was a teenager. I don't know, probably 11 or 12 years old when she was taken away. At first, she was normal, like, normal as a kid, like a teenager, and ever since that she remove in our community, she's been given depression pills and all kinds of drugs, medications.

Now she's 19 and she's still living in St. John's, and she's now – she's not normal as she was when she was young. Like right now, she's talking to herself. She got an imaginary friend, I guess – like, I don't know. She's been talking to herself. She's not herself.

She's living in St. John's. There's a house there for rent I think, and she got two workers there in that house – two workers and by herself. When I'm – me and my parents goes there, we'll say like every probably one year, all of us go there and visit her and for me, I go there every month for five days or a week or so. I visit her because I'm worried about her, because the way she is right now, like she's in –

[Dialogue between V. Andrew and D. Andrew in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

V. ANDREW: Yeah, it's while she's in different world, I guess, her own world, and I'm worried and well, those two workers, there are sometimes two males in there, too. You know what I mean?

Like, she's sometimes undressed. Do you know what I mean? Like – I report this in the CSSD. I told them and nothing has been done, like, there's no, I would say, like –

[Dialogue between V. Andrew and D. Andrew in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

V. ANDREW: – there's no female workers there sometimes, but when I complain about that and there are – they hired female workers, and I complained about that two

times now and I think that's where the complaint stopped; in the office, I guess, because nothing has been done.

And I'm worried about my daughter and my daughter doesn't want to come here in the community as well. She's comfortable in that house because, I guess, it's for the medication or what she's been given or – I don't know what is it, but she says she's not feeling home as – in her community. She said she feels home in St. John's where she is right now.

And I went to the office today, this morning, but I was waiting the workers to call me yesterday because I wanted to fly there again for the Christmas, for my family and also my parents. And I asked them for support, to support me, for helping me to go there and my parents would drive there. And I asked them to support me or helping me to a place to stay because I wanted to spend time with my daughter on Christmas, because I never see her in Christmas time. Like, it's been years and years since she's been out there and right now, I don't think – I'm just waiting for them to have a meeting and get approved, they said.

But ever since I'm dealing with them and like, I feel like there's no support and they don't tell me what's going on in the household where my daughter is; because sometimes, she undress herself and like the workers I'm talking about, the male workers – I don't think there would be – would be a male worker working with her, like, the way she is.

[Dialogue between V. Andrew and D. Andrew in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

D. ANDREW: These workers are foreign people. They're from Nigeria and those places. These workers that are working now with my granddaughter. We went there one time and there was many males working as, like, there were about two females. So there are many – so I kind of worried about that and I told a social worker about it, and I said: Shouldn't there be more females than males, I said? And they said they were going to look into it, but they never got around to getting more females. They're still there, those males.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We'll give Anne a chance to translate.

V. ANDREW: Okay.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

V. ANDREW: And like, Ava, she goes in the middle of the nights, like, knowing where she's going or knowing – the workers – where she is going. And I never got a call to tell me what's going on and where she's going or like, she's been gone for hours and hours.

She's walking towards to I will say the big mall over there, Avalon Mall, where – she lives in Portugal Road. That's what they call – way in the airport. There's like – it costs like $50 to go in a taxi to (inaudible) to where she is and I find it is very far, that Avalon Mall and towards that, down where she lives.

D. ANDREW: Hitchhike.

V. ANDREW: She's hitchhiking, and like in the middle of the night. She walks out in the house, and I don't know where the workers are, and I think the workers are sleeping. That's what my daughter was saying, that the workers were sleeping when she goes out. Then I never – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] – notify me where she's at, and then I heard a week after that. Wasn't I supposed to be notified, or telling me what's going on in that house or where she is, or where she's at and what she's been doing, but nothing.

Her social worker's name is Cindy Stone, and she seems like she don't want to

communicate with me, or don't want to tell me what's going on. I found out over my other daughter, Victoria, because they'd been talking to each other – Ava and Victoria, they're talking to each other, checking what's going on – and that's how I found out where she's – what she's been doing.

Even her cellphone, she – the way I see, the workers don't do what they're supposed to be doing, looking after her. And I'm scared my daughter would committed suicide, sometimes there was nobody to watch her while she's – her mental issues, and all that.

The social workers, when I talk to them, they seems like they don't want to tell me anything. They said: I have to call the house where she is, I have to talk to the staff and I'll get back to you, but they never did. She never did.

D. ANDREW: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

V. ANDREW: Yeah, and also Cindy, her social worker – we asked for a second opinion about her medication, and it seems like the social worker didn't want to do nothing about it. She said: There's nothing wrong with her, but, for me, I see she's not hurt while she was at home when she was young; right now, she's totally different.

They said I have to use her word about – next opinion, like, to change the medication. They said she's 18 now and I have to use her word, but when they gave her the medication, when she was 11, they didn't use her word, you know what I mean? They just gave it to her right away and that's what I told the social worker about it. I said: You didn't use her word, and she didn't want to take them. And they forced her, you know what I mean, the medication.

And now that she's 19, then I said: I want to check what's going on, you know what I mean? Like, what's going on with her, what kind of a medication does she need. Does she need a medication? I need to, like – and I'm always asking for updates, that what she's been doing, and I never heard.

And that's where I'm, like, I'm at right now. I'm just waiting for the social workers to call me or whatever, like, to get back to me because I really want to see my daughter.

And now she's on the street drugs, you know what I mean? Like, drugs: like weed, cocaine, drinking and everything. She's doing them; she's doing that over there. That's why I think she keeps going out in the middle of the nights.

Then also me and my mother was in St. John's and we went to Waterford; they called the hospital, and the social worker, Cindy, came with us and we wanted to be there in the room with her talking to a doctor as well, but Cindy Stone didn't want us in the room and she choose the doctor that – I don't know, they probably have their own doctor, but they didn't have another – I was looking for a second opinion for me and my mother, and they didn't want us to be in the room with her, while the social worker was there and the worker and the other doctor.

Then, like, I didn't feel right for that when I seen that was happening where we were at the hospital. I had to step out and wait in the truck with the social worker and my daughter and the worker and the doctor. We didn't hear anything of it when they came out.

Then I didn't know where else to go when I see that was happening. Then I just, I guess, let it go and we went home that – after like – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] – after one week, we went home, and we didn't hear anything of it.

And they prescribe her a same medication again. My daughter said she didn't like them, because she was – making her more like, psychotic, I guess, like hearing voices in her head? And she didn't like to take them, and I said: Don't have to.

Then they think that I'm the one – that I stopped her for her medication. She told me that she wasn't right to take them, like she felt really wrong, I guess. She hear a lot of voices, and suicide thoughts she had, and I was more in fear, I guess. Because it wasn't feel right.

Right now, that's what I'm telling you, everything what's been going on, what's been – I've been back and forth to St. John's every month, then I see her, she's been really downhill, you know what I mean? Like, she's not getting better at all.

She's talking to herself, she's walking around, she's drinking, she's doing drugs, and she don't even understand her own language, and she can't even speak her own language now. And she seems like a whole different person, I guess, like, she's not my daughter anymore.

And also where she is in the house where the workers – she's like when something happens there – when she was naked in the hotel, she undressed herself and looking at her in the mirror. I told her not to do that 'cause her sisters and brother was there. And I said: You shouldn't be doing that, and I said: Is that, are you doing this, the same thing, over at the house where you're living? And say: Yeah, 'cause they don't mind, and they don't care what I'm doing in there.

And well, I was talking about the two male workers; they never like to –

[Dialogue between V. Andrew and D. Andrew in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

V. ANDREW: – to write the things and send to over at the social workers. They never –

D. ANDREW: Read the reports.

V. ANDREW: – yeah, reports; they never had reports like that, while my daughter was talking about, she's doing that at the house where she's living. And the workers, there's no report, anything like that. And I checked and there's nothing. When I came back, I went to the social workers here and they said they will check in on it. And I never heard from them again, them too.

And when I fly out and they seems like no financial helping as well. Like taking my three kids and myself and my older daughter, and she's 20 year old, like six of us, they only gives like three or four hundred for meals. How would that be enough for one week? That's how I felt, like there was no support and that's just for the social workers.

What's gonna happen if my daughter doing that again, like if she's missing. I never had any call me to notify me anything what's going on, and I don't think they're gonna notify me when she's missing, or if she committed suicide, do you know what I mean, like: The medications, oh she took all the medications.

What's gonna happen there and are they gonna notify me or are they going to tell me: It was an accident or, like – that's where I'm at right now. I'm in fear and I'm scared of my daughter, like that kind of stuff.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Well, first of all thank you very much for coming to share that today. You've identified a lot of problems, a lot of issues for you that you don't have any understanding of, and don't seem to be getting the answers that you're looking for.

As I said at the beginning, I just want to explain this in a bit more detail so that, hopefully, I can be clear to you.

So with the Inquiry, people come and tell their stories about issues that they are having or that they've had, and this forms part of the Inquiry, of a report that we'll do at the end. So we don't deal with particular cases like – what I'm hearing from you, very much, is: These are the problems I have. I'm looking for some answers. And so that's

not something that an inquiry would follow up on. Okay?

And that may be not the answer you wanted to hear today, but what I can say to you is that if you want, after we're – because we'll take a break now when we're finished – and myself and Anastasia and the lawyer here, we can meet with you privately – both of you – and tell you what some of the options could be in your own particular case, that you could follow up on. We wouldn't be able to follow up on it, so we could make some suggestions from what we know, with the different systems you're working with. But that's all that we can do today for you so, does that sound …?

[Dialogue between V. Andrew and D. Andrew in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Do you understand – I guess, do you understand it, first thing?

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

V. ANDREW: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Like, I came here to share my story; to share it with you guys, what's been happening to me, and I've been co-operate with them and I been communicate them, the social workers. Because that is my job to do that to them. And I will – to respect me as well, doing the same thing that I'm asking, like to, you know what I mean? See her more often than once a month. You know what I mean? Like to go there because she don't wanna fly here. She don't feel home, at all, in this community. She really, like she dislikes – she's really – I don't know how to say it –

D. ANDREW: She's been away for six years now.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah.

D. ANDREW: So she doesn't feel like the family is here. Even though we tells her we are here for you, and we'd like you to feel comfortable when we come here, when you come in to the community and we would like you to speak your own language to your siblings.

And it seems like it's so hard for her to come here in her own community. It's so hard for her come here and sometimes we ask her to come and, like, Christmas she doesn't want to come. She barely came at the gathering. There was a gathering this summer. She barely came. She just wanted to go home after three or four days. She wants to go home. I said, this gathering is not finished yet. It's gonna be finished in one week. She said: I'm not – I don't feel like I should belong here – I belong here – but I said: Yes, you belong here. This is your people. This is your family is here. But she said: No, I have to go home. Then she called the social workers, and she went home.

So that is why we are kinda worried that it's beginning to feel like her family is strange to her and her community is strange to her. Like she doesn't belong here. That's how she feels.

She stated that, too, when we went to St. John's. She said, I don't feel like coming home, because I'm here now and I belong here, but just so much we can say. We can't force her. We can't force her to come here. It's really up to her, and all these things – these things that are happening to her. Sometimes I go there, with her, to visit her so I'm the one who talks to her all the time because she was in my care when she was very young, until she was 11 or 12 years old. That's when things got out of hand. She became rebellious, and then she was sent out to St. John's in Newfoundland.

Not only in St. John's but she was sent out to foster homes in Newfoundland. That's where she was. So this is very a long time thing that happened to her, it wasn't a one

time. It's one time she went out, she never came back again, so the next time we saw her there was a change in her, in her attitude, in her personality, in everything. She's not the Ava that I used to know.

I used to take her to Sunday school. She went to Sunday school; she learned about the bible, and all of this is not there anymore. She don't believe in anything. She said she just want to stay in Newfoundland, and I don't know what she loves about it in the city.

Like right now, as we hear today, she's in the home of that foster care – she's in foster care, and sometimes these workers, they don't know where she is, where she goes. So I asked the workers when I went to St. John's: You should go and check her out see what she does.

Like sometimes I hear people from here saying that they saw her. She's picking up butts outside the mall and she's asking money for – she's just like people on the streets. That's how she is over there, they told me, and it hurts me very much to hear something like this. The girl, the grandchild that I raise up, to be like this. Everything has changed for her, ever since she went out, and I hope that these social workers have consideration and make her a priority, but it doesn't look that way.

It seems like when you're out there, you're not a priority. You're just there for workers, that they get paid to look after you, but they're not doing their job. That's how I feel.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'm saying to Vanessa and her mother, Danina, that I'm glad that they came and shared their experience, what they're presently going through with CSSD. And at the Inquiry, these are the stories that we are hearing, and it puts a light on what's happening with families in the community, in regards to their grandchildren and children. And I hope that what she's requesting of CSSD that she gets those visits, and her request filled.

So thank you for coming.

Tshinashkumitin.

V. ANDREW: Mm-hmm. Tshinashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you. Have a good evening, everyone.