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

English Transcript | Volume 46

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

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COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Good morning, everybody. We're about ready to start now. So we'll start with a prayer, and we'll ask Penote if he can come forward. He just got a call now though. We'll wait for just a second.

ELDER ANTUAN: Ready? Everybody here?

I'd like to say a few words before I start prayer. So first of all, I'd like to thank the people that have spoke in this session, especially the Milley family, and the other families who spoke about their situation at the residential schools, how they were treated.

Sometimes it's very hard for me, too. I wasn't in the same boat, that they were in that boat. I was a different category altogether because I was at Mount Cashel when I – I said it before. They were treated there very cruel.

And today, for my dedication for this prayers, I'd like to dedicate especially Kenny's family, the Milley family, how they were treated when they went to residential school, and the other families we haven't heard yet. I know there's people there in our community. They're the ones also, who were treated cruelly – cruel. It's cruel, that time.

And sometimes I wonder. I wonder, sometimes: Can we ever, ever stand in the court with them? Like, I don't see anyone to be treated as they were treated in their residential schools and the other schools. I don't think they shouldn't be treated any different than the white children who are in the school too.

When I hear the problems that they had, I don't cry in here, but I cry at home. To remember them, especially how they were treated, badly. Badly! And how come that Social Services doesn't have any – anything – that they can say: I'm sorry, to them. I'm sorry.

The other thing I'm very concerned about, reconciliation. To me, I won't say it's the same thing. I won't say the same thing. To me reconciliation is not worth it to me, because I've already had a scar in my – in mine, in me. When I went through Mount Cashel, I had a scar when I got in there, inside, in the building because the way I heard, in my ears ringing, ringing. Same thing as they were treated in residential schools.

So how can the reconciliation help me? No, it's not gonna help me. Nothing. Nothing is gonna help me in this earth. Nothing. The only thing I can say to you people, the thing that only helped me as far as – I'm 75 now. The only thing that helped me is prayer. Prayers every morning, every day during my life.

Sometimes, like, before that I was – tried to commit suicide, too. I was. I told my mother that I was gonna do it but I – but the prayers helped me, in my religion. Helped me to become here and speak to you people now. That's the thing I don't – I certainly can't stand it – the way they were treated as I heard them speaking about that (inaudible), how they were treated at the residential schools.

Especially, I can thank them because they're here with us, spoke us, spoke about it, but there's people on that other residential schools – 'cause the kids that never came back home in their communities. That's another worse part of our thing; that those other kids never came back home. So I'm only want to dedicate to people here, locally, and the people who didn't come home

So I'm gonna say a prayer, Our Father and Hail Mary and Glory be the Father –

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I also want a brief – this morning I say prayers to the people, Commissioners and the people who are lawyers – lawyers and

the people who's shown up here in the hearing, and I was very thankful for your co-operation.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you, Elder Penote.

Again, our housekeeping.

So our healing services are available every day as we remind people, particularly for people who haven't been here during the week. The healing services folks are Sean Allen as counsellor and Edward Nuna as the liaison worker for here in healing services, as well as Rita-Anne Sheppard – there she is – and drumroll for Audrey Snow.

Thank you.

We'll now – oh sorry, Annie, forgetting again.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you, Anne.

And so our first speaker this morning is Annie Margaret Nuna, and her husband will come up with her also.

Well, thank you for coming this morning.

A. NUNA: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I do appreciate it. I know you've spoken to Paula about how this is done and she's given you some information.

So as you speak this morning, are you going to speak English or Innu-aimun? What's your preference?

A. NUNA: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Up to you.

A. NUNA: Innu.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: In Innu. So then Anne will translate to English.

So what we ask you to do is say just a small piece, and then Anne will translate into English.

A. NUNA: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And just go back and forth like that, okay?

And if you forget, like I do sometimes, I might give you a little wave to remind you that Anne needs – you need to pause for Anne to translate, okay?

A. NUNA: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Whenever you're ready and, you know, what you wanna talk about is up to you, what part of your life or what parts, and how you want to talk, that is very open for you. This is your time to speak to the Inquiry, and there's no rush, so take your time.

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

A. NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): There are lots of things I need to tell about my children. CSSD first apprehended my kids when they were small. CSSD thought that I was not capable of taking care of my kids. They did not know that I was sick. They did not know that I was not well.

Today my kids are adults. They have lost their language, Innu-aimun. They don't understand me when I talk to them. They say to me, what are you saying?

I think that this is what CSSD has done to my children. My daughter tells me that she wishes she speaks Innu-aimun and hopes she understands it. As for myself I am not fluent in English, but I do ask my husband to tell me what my daughter is saying. My daughter have told me many times that she knows that I don't understand her when she speaks English to me.

CSSD has ruined my big part of my children's lives, being a mother. I've lost that to my kids, but CSSD did that work for me, being a mother to my kids. That's what CSSD has done.

I have never thanked, nor do I intend to thank what CSSD has done to my kids. They caused my kids not to listen to me nor my husband. They took that away from me.

My son, who was taken, was apprehended at the age of six. CSSD told me that I could have him back, but he doesn't want to come home. I already told him, and he said to me that he would miss his foster parents. He feels sorry for them, to leave them. I told my son that I understand and will allow for him to stay. I will accept it and that is what I told him.

We went through Family Court, and listening to CSSD's lawyers, they have lied about us and when I heard their lies, sometimes I felt like I wanted to explode, out of my frustration, just listening to the things being said against us in court.

And I want to mention that my late father requested that he wanted to see my children before he passed. We told this to CSSD, but did not allow it. My father told me he wanted to see my children the last time before he passed. This is also what happened to my husband's father. He also wanted to see our kids. I think CSSD's the one who is doing the devil's work.

The CSSD caseworkers for my kids also always either quit or they always kept changing. For my children and for – they kept changing our visits for our children as well.

Another time, what happened to my kids also, it was my son; we were not told, when they took my son to another community in Newfoundland.

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

INTERPRETER NUNA: She wants a break.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We'll break for five minutes now.

Recess

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yeah, okay, whenever you're ready.

A. NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): Today, I think, I have these feelings sometimes, I want to go to CSSD office and get my frustration out on them. But being told that CSSD will be after your kids, and that is what is keeping me from going there. They act like as if nothing is wrong or had done wrong to us.

Not long ago my son's uncle passed away. We wanted to tell our son the passing of his uncle and we went to ask him to come to the funeral, but I never had a chance to tell him. But I will tell him when I see him. He knew his uncle.

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

Okay, sorry, no, about his grandmother. My son knew his grandmother, and we never had a chance to tell him about the passing of his grandmother. And we haven't told him yet. I, myself, find it hard to tell him.

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

INTERPRETER NUNA: She's saying that that's all she can say right now, telling her story.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay, well thank you very much for that.

I have a couple of questions, just a couple of details, I guess. Now any questions I ask, you don't have to answer them, okay? So I just want you to know up front that – you really – it's entirely up to you, any questions that I ask.

But the first questions are related to your children. So how many children do you have and what are their ages approximately?

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

A. NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Three: 19, 17, 16. And the other one she gave for adoption.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And how old?

A. NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: 17.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And where are they located now? Where are they to?

A. NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: Her daughter is living with them.

And my son is with my husband's family. And my other son is near Roddickton, Newfoundland.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Apart from Roddickton, he's still involved with CSSD, I guess?

A. NUNA: Yup.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And the others also?

A NUNA: No.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: No, okay.

You said at the beginning when they took your children first, that you were not well, but then –

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

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Now if it's something you'd rather not answer, that's okay. That's okay.

Okay, then. So I guess Anastasia will speak after me.

I just wanted to thank you though, for coming in to tell your truth this morning and as you're probably aware, we've spoken to a number of people who've also told theirs, so all of these truths that we have will help us going forward with the Inquiry, to make recommendations for changes.

A lot of problems and issues that you've identified we've heard before, so that helps to us, in making our report. So with strong hope that things will change a lot; they need to change a lot. So that's what we're hearing.

So thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'm thanking Annie and her husband, Kenny, for coming and sharing her story. The work that we're doing here, it's hearing from the community about the treatment that they have gone through in dealing with CSSD and these are the stories that we are collecting and will be working with in our report once we do our report.

So, again, I would like to thank them for sharing their story.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We'll take five minute break. Five minutes will take us 10.

Recess

[redacted]