



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

English Transcript

Volume 65

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So nice to have you all here. Tshinashkumitin for taking the time to join the Inquiry once again.

Nympha, I think we're asking you to be translator for Mushuau today? You okay with that?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Yup.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

Good morning and welcome to everybody for joining us, both in-person and online. I will ask Ruth Steele to open the Inquiry formally.

Please stand.

CLERK (Steele): This Commission of Inquiry is now open.

Please be seated.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We're thanking Nympha for presenting us with the translation and, also, she's filling a second role as our Elder. She'll be opening the morning with a prayer for us today.

Ms. Riche-Byrne is an Elder – a very youthful Elder – and we're so happy that she has accepted that responsibility. She is part of the Inquiry. She has helped us with smudges; she has helped us with prayers; she has helped us with community liaison; and she holds community respect both from her own community as well as home – Sheshatshiu.

I know that Nympha doesn't like to talk about herself, but as part of our hearings, I want to say that she's wise beyond her years. She's very passionate about justice and she follows a long line of Innu Elders who – and she holds the knowledge and respect of everyone she meets.

I will ask Nympha to open our day with a prayer. Ordinarily, we would have a smudge and light the sage, but we don't want to evacuate the whole building. So we'll have to be satisfied with a prayer.

Please stand.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Would you like to do any other ceremony?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: That's okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You're okay?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay. Thank you very much.

All the participants –

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Gerry, can I just talk a little bit about sage?

I have sage over here. Sometimes we had to use that sage because to purify yourself. It's a protection. And sometimes you can use that sage – even though we can't burn it right now – you can take a little bit of that sage and put it under your shoe, that helps you ground it. Because a lot of times, we hear things that are very hard sometimes, and that's what I do, is just when I have to go to meetings and stuff like that and when I had to do ceremony, I have to take a little bit of that, because, right now, we can't really burn it. But you're welcome to take a piece of it and put it in your shoes.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You can pass it around.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much for that, Nympha.

All participants, this week will be our seventh formal hearing. There are many other participants who are joining us, virtually, on their computer. We welcome all presenters and all participants and we're so happy that you've all been able to make it today.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Good morning. Our witnesses will be Ms. Germaine Benuen, Ms. Amanda Rich and Ms. Wendy White, the executive director, agency director and assistant agency director, respectively, at the Innu Round Table Secretariat. They will present their report on Innu-led services.

And this afternoon, we will hear from Dr. Melody Morton Ninomiya and Leonor Ward from Wilfried Laurier University, who will present their work on specialized and land-based services access by Innu children and youth.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Hang on a second now.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: She translated it? Oh, did you want to –?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Do you wanna do the translation on that one? Are you okay?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Should I do translation there?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Commissioner Qupee and Interpreter Byrne in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

Go ahead, please, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Good morning, everybody. Just a few more comments.

This week we'll only hear from invited witnesses and lawyers for the parties. There will not be a chance for community members or anyone watching on live stream to ask questions. However, we welcome them, invite them to watch and to listen.

And just one final comment with regard to Jim's introduction and comments regarding Nympha. Nympha will do the opening and the closing prayers each day.

Thank you, Nympha.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

I'll ask lead counsel to take over from here.

C. URQUHART: Thank you, Commissioners, and good morning. Good morning to everyone in the room and those watching online. I'm Caitlin Urquhart, lead counsel with the Inquiry and before we begin today, I'd like to enter, as Exhibits, P-436 to P-444.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

C. URQUHART: So as was noted in the opening this session, we will hear results of several research projects commissioned by the Inquiry and those presentations will be virtual.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Twelve, you said?

C. URQUHART: Three presentations.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

C. URQUHART: And today we're fortunate enough to welcome in the room, three key folks within the Innu Round Table Secretariat in real life. The Innu Round Table Secretariat is often referred to as IRT, just to start us off is all. I'll continue using that throughout the day.

Commissioner Qupee has introduced them and they are here to present their report on Innu-led services, the current state and future needs for the communities and that is Exhibit P-441.

The report was a collaborative effort with a number of agencies and organizations that serve the two Innu communities. However, since IRT serves a coordinating function in

the transition to Innu laws and Innu child welfare, they are here to present the report and help to answer questions that the parties and the Commissioners may have.

Before we get into the presentation, I would ask that each of the witnesses introduce yourself, your role within IRT and how long you have been with the organization, please.

Before you do that, Madam Clerk has helpfully reminded me that you need to be sworn in, so if you could go ahead Madam Clerk.

CLERK: I'll start with Wendy.

Wendy, do you want to be affirmed or sworn in?

W. WHITE: Affirmed.

CLERK: Okay.

Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this Inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

W. WHITE: I affirm.

CLERK: Please state your name for the record.

W. WHITE: Wendy White.

CLERK: Okay.

And Amanda, even though I know your name, did you want to be affirmed or sworn?

A. RICH: Affirmed, please.

CLERK: Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this Inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

A. RICH: I affirm.

CLERK: And please state your name for the record.

A. RICH: Amanda Rich.

CLERK: And Germaine, did you want to be affirmed or sworn?

G. BENUEN: Affirmed.

CLERK: Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this Inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

G. BENUEN: I affirm.

CLERK: Please state your name for the record.

G. BENUEN: Germaine Benuen.

CLERK: Thank you, ladies.

C. URQUHART: Thank you.

So we'll start again with your names, your role within IRT and how long you've been with the organization, please.

G. BENUEN: My name is Germaine Benuen. I am from Sheshatshiu, a member of Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, and I work with IRT as an executive director, and I've been there since 2018, October 1.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. BENUEN: 2018.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Oh, 2018. Sorry about that.

A. RICH: Good morning, everybody.

My name is Amanda Rich and my role at the Innu Round Table Secretariat is the agency director for Innu Child and Family Services. We focus on prevention services, and I've been in my role since July 2021.

W. WHITE: Good morning, everyone.

My name is Wendy White. I am a member of the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation. I have been with the Innu Round Table for about

4½ years. My first involvement was beginning in about 2011 to 2015, and I've recently rejoined the Innu Round Table Secretariat as the assistant director for the Innu Child and Family Services agency in June of this year.

Thank you.

C. URQUHART: So before you begin to present about the report, I wonder if you could advise the Commissioners of just the different organizations and agencies that were involved in the preparation of the report and their role within the community, and it would also be helpful if you included any abbreviation or acronym that is usually used to refer to that agency, please.

A. RICH: Good morning, everybody.

I'd like to give the opportunity and have the opportunity to discuss this report to a very important audience in terms of Innu services, Innu-led services. In this report, there are six Innu organizations that mention and that talk about their services and programs. I will list all six: the Innu Round Table Secretariat, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, the Mushuau Innu First Nation, Shushepeishpan Ishpitentamun Mitshuap, the Mushuau EPH and Group Home and Mamu Tshishkutamashutau, which is Innu education.

One important thing that I wanted to make clear is that when we speak about the presentation, I think what we're going to be more referring towards is the prevention piece. We may not have all the answers with regards to the other organizations, and maybe they would have a chance to speak about it, but we're here to be able to give answers and give our report with regards to our focus when it comes to prevention services.

G. BENUEN: I just wanna add to the acronyms that we use when we're talking about the organizations within Natuashish and Sheshatshiu: Innu Round Table Secretariat acronym is IRTS and Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation is SIFN; Mushuau Innu First Nation is MIFN;

Shushepeishpan Ishpitentamun Mitshuap is SIM; Mushuau EPH and Group Home is MEG; and Mamu Tshishkutamashutau, Innu education, is usually MTIE.

C. URQUHART: So last question, before I hand the mic over to you, I wonder if you could just describe the Pathways Committee for us, please, who's at the table and a bit about the work of that committee as it kind of draws together a lot of these organizations.

Thank you.

A. RICH: The Pathways Committee is a committee that brings together different Innu organizations involved in Child and Family Services, both on the service side, but also on the law development side – about the work, but also about the Innu law.

The committee consists of representatives from SIM and MEGH, SIFN & MIFN Social and Primary Health, the IRT departments. We also have representation from council members from both Innu Band Councils and we also have somebody from Innu Nation as well.

Going into a little bit of detail, it was established to streamline and strengthen and focus on communication, and also the sharing of relevant information as we worked together to build the pathway to Innu self-government in Child and Family Services.

Pathways is also chaired and is organized by the IRT Prevention Services and, as the agency director, I am the chair of this committee. And the committee also meets monthly to discuss updates and coordinate services. We also provide direction to OKT in representing Innu organizations at the Inquiry, and also to keep the momentum and the engagement working towards the Innu law.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: OKT being Olthuis Kleer Townshend, your legal firm.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mm-hmm.

A. RICH: Okay, before we begin, I just wanna give, you know, a clear context with regards to what we're going to speak about. I think it's very important to also give summary with regards to the history, and I'm so happy to be sitting here today with my colleagues Germaine and Wendy.

So I'll give an opening, and then Wendy would be giving some of the past context with regards to services, and then also Germaine has some things that she's also going to say with regards to the affidavit. And then, if there is time, I'd really like to speak about some of the examples that we've seen so far within providing this service, but also talk about the future for Innu children and families.

The IRTS journey to the formal Innu-led and Child and Family Services agency began with Wendy. For me, I started this journey in 2021. When I started as the agency director, I knew that there was a vision, even though it wasn't all laid out, step by step, basically, you know, like a roadmap.

This vision came from our ancestors who, for hundreds of generations, raised Innu children in the Innu way to become competent Innu adults. This is not a new vision. This vision has been intact for a very long time.

Taking care of our children was the heart of our culture. Adults knew, Innu adults knew that they had to be the ones to pass down the knowledge and skills about the land, the weather, the animals and the spiritual ways to the next generation to help them to learn how to take care of one another and the generations to come.

Simply, when you think about that – when I think about that – really, it's about Innu parents, Innu grandparents passing on their lived experience and that's what's key when it comes to raising Innu families, Innu children.

Sadly, colonization brought a lot – like brought huge change and loss for the Innu. Many others have already spoken to the Inquiry about these impacts and, you know,

to really talk about the trauma that Innu have experienced.

So, today, we'd like to emphasize that we're building on an Innu-led service for children and families, where we're understanding and addressing the trauma, and it has to be the context of all our work and how we grow and how we develop our services going forward.

G. BENUEN: Hi, I introduced myself at the beginning. My name is Germaine Benuen. I just wanna, like, touch base of how we're gonna do this between my colleagues here, Wendy White and Amanda.

I started work with IRT in 2018, so Wendy had a history before that, and it's only when I started that the IRT history and the historic events that happened throughout in the last few years and to brought us where we are today.

So I think it's really – I'm very happy to be here to have a chance to talk with the Inquiry, and I also want to thank this couple of people on my side that are here, and they're working in Child and Family Services under IRT.

So when you talk about the services and the Inquiry of the treatment of the Innu children and the families, I guess, back – like, it's a history that CSSD – CSSD, what's the acronym?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I forget again.

G. BENUEN: They change so many times. I'll say child protection services.

So when you think about that and there's a lot of trauma that happened, a lot of history and cultures that have lost by the children that were taken away in the system. For example, with a permission from these two people that stay here, Wendy White is one of the children, I guess, that was taken away from her home, from her parents. She is from Sheshatshiu and she never experienced her Innu-ness. She lost a culture. She lost a language and she only

happened to come back home maybe 10, 15 years ago.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

G. BENUEN: Oh, I forgot.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. BENUEN: Amanda was also involved with child protection services growing up. I just want to say that there's no better people that can work on this Innu law, Child and Family Services, going forward with our services that we're trying to establish within our community. I always say we can't do any worse than what the province have done to our community.

So Wendy is going to start with the history before I got to IRT and then I will talk and then Amanda can go into more detail about the prevention services.

W. WHITE: For those who have read the Innu services report, you know that it provides a comprehensive review of Innu-led services; their evolution, current state and future directions in relation to child and family well-being; healing; education; and the broader exercise of Innu jurisdiction in Child and Family Services.

So this report was done in a moment in time, in 2025. In order to understand where we're going, we have to know where we've been. So the report opens by tracing the transition from a strong land-based Innu way of life, to the harms caused by forced settlement, residential and day schools, the Sixties Scoop and cultural disruption. And these traumas have led to intergenerational impacts including substance misuse and mental health issues, among other social challenges.

So over several decades, the Innu worked to rebuild their own systems of care. Major shifts occurred after findings of federal discrimination in the late-1990s and the recognition of Innu Bands under the *Indian Act*. And from 2017 onward, federal prevention and the Bringing Our Innu

Children Home Initiative accelerated the growth of Innu services and placement of facilities.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Can you repeat that again?

W. WHITE: From 2017 onward, federal prevention funding and the Bringing Our Innu Children Home Initiative accelerated the growth of Innu services and placement facilities.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

W. WHITE: So the Innu Round Table Secretariat is the central Innu-service organization founded in 2014 and it is governed by SIFN, MIFN and Innu Nation. It operates five departments: Management & Operations, Innu Prevention Services, Income Support, Health and Justice. Milestones include the 2016 devolution of Income Support, the establishment of Innu Prevention Services in 2017 onward and the launch of the Innu Midwifery program in 2023 and the IRT also leads tripartite coordination with Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador.

So what is not contained in the report, that is very important to discuss, is lived experience. I'm a survivor of the Sixties Scoop and for those who are not familiar with that, what that means is that Indigenous children, they were removed from their parents, their Indigenous parents, in my case, my Innu mother, and were put into care and adopted into non-Innu families.

This wasn't isolated to just Newfoundland and Labrador. This happened across Canada and some children ended up as far away as New Zealand, but I'm not going to go into that. What I prefer to talk about is my lived experience, which has certainly shaped my involvement in Child and Family Services today.

So in my introduction, I talked about being involved back in 2011, and you may wonder, well, the IRT wasn't really incorporated until 2014, and that is true, but there had been talks of Innu Child Welfare devolution. We didn't know what that was going to look like, how we were going to do it but there were things happening. There were discussions taking place. There were meetings taking place and things didn't really get traction until about 2013.

And at that time, the Innu Round Table Secretariat was – it was still going through that process of being incorporated as an organization, as an entity.

So with the Sixties Scoop – and I'm just gonna talk about my personal lived experience – what happened there is, as a toddler, I was taken, and according to my post-adoptive files – I did have some information from that – and like I said, you can pick up this report and you can read it and you can look at the history, right, and where we are today, but I think lived experience is so important, and the impacts from that.

And being a survivor of the Sixties Scoop, I don't let it define who I am; I look at it as finding meaning in the work that is being done through the Innu Round Table Secretariat and Innu Child and Family Services agency.

So the impacts from that was a loss of language, a loss of culture and a loss of identity. When I had the opportunity to become involved with child welfare devolution, I thought that it was important. I thought I had something to give because no Innu child should ever have to experience that. The mental health impacts are tremendous. And it's hard to even articulate that unless you've gone through this experience yourself. But I think it's important that I try and do that here, and it ties into the history of the Innu Round Table Secretariat as well.

So while I didn't have a say in my leaving my community, I did have a say in returning.

So that brings me now to talk a little bit about the history of the Innu Round Table Secretariat and my involvement. Things really started, I guess, like I've said, to gain traction back in 2013 and I remember going back and taking a deeper dive into those meetings that happened around 2013 and 2014 and also 2015, and I left the organization in about 2015.

During my years of involvement, it focused – a lot was referred to then as child welfare devolution. My role, I was called the CYFS transition coordinator. CYFS, that's an acronym for Child, Youth and Family Services at that time. Devolution had always been the goal and, you know, there was certainly challenges. There's probably some skeptics as well from the province and the federal government. We knew where we wanted to go, but we had to do it in small steps.

So the focus then turned to enhanced prevention funding approach and worked really closely with the federal government on that and, of course, the provincial government. And the federal government at that time was known as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. So it's since changed, I guess, names many times since then, but that's what they were known as then.

This enhanced prevention funding approach, it really focused on a business plan and a costing analysis. So I worked on those documents to really come up with a way of what prevention services could look like. What are some of those viable options that, you know that, could be put in place? Keep in mind there was a very limited funding and I was the only person who was leading this initiative on behalf of the Innu.

Those documents, they were submitted to the federal government. There was a lot of work put into those and a lot of revisions that were required. When it was all said and done, we didn't get the funding that we had asked for. I believe in the 2015-2016 federal budget there was no enhanced prevention funding for Innu Round Table Secretariat.

So, realizing this, we kind of had to rethink our strategy and what we decided to do was get some technical support. Realizing this and after doing some research, I had found this organization called the Child Welfare League of Canada. I said to my manager at the time, Steve Joudry, I feel like it's come to the point that we need to bring in some consultants to do this work, and I'll refer to it as a needs assessment.

Knowing that we had to do this work, we had to find this money somehow to fund this project. With the Child Welfare League of Canada, we did it. There was no other choice, right? We had to do it. I approached the Child Welfare League of Canada and they were very interested. We went back and forth on what we were looking for, what they're able to provide and, from there, they were able to say yes, we can do this for you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Ms. White, we like to give our interpreters regular breaks, so can you – do you mind if we have about a 10-minute break and let Nympha have a little rest of her brain?

Ten minutes, please.

Thank you.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so much, Ms. White.

Please, you may pick up where you left off.

Thank you.

W. WHITE: Thank you.

So we engaged the Child Welfare League of Canada with this work and it took trips and meetings in Sheshatshiu with foster parents, with leadership with other community members in both communities, of which I provided support to the Child Welfare League of Canada.

A report then was prepared by them with six themes. The first one is relationships and a

plan to support Innu children and families – and keep in mind this is coming from an Innu prevention approach. So the first one was relationships and a plan to support Innu children and families.

So, based on the report, there was also, in the current day, to build an Innu prevention approach that is multi-year and step by step; technical supports and expertise; capacity building and training initiatives; reintegration and placement planning for Innu children and youth; and to take an approach to ensure that cultural connections are being strengthened; and also the importance of infrastructure and capital.

It's important that we have those resources that, you know, can build buildings that are required to do the work for program delivery and service delivery for Child, Youth and Family Services.

So the work and the report that was done by the Child Welfare League of Canada, those recommendations, they are really the six themes that I just talked about which drives Innu child and prevention services.

So, to the best of my ability, I have provided historical context from about 2011 to about 2015, and in 2015 is when I left the organization.

I provided historical context of Innu Prevention Services, weaved with my own lived experience and trauma, and that's driven by an understanding for Innu children, with a similar experience as mine, but also empathy for those Innu children of today and tomorrow who deserve better. And I know Innu can do better when it comes to Innu Prevention Services and Child Welfare.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much, Ms. White.

G. BENUEN: Okay, so I'll start my speech, I guess. I was hoping I was gonna – I wanted to read my affidavit, but it's too long and I'd

fall asleep. So I'll just touch on it and if there's any questions that you guys have along the way, you can just let me know.

C. URQUHART: And just before you begin, that is P-169, so that will be in your exhibit books, Commissioners.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

G. BENUEN: I started with Innu Round Table Secretariat on October 1, 2018. Before that, I was working with various organizations in the community. I worked with Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation. I also worked with Innu Nation and Innu Development Corporation.

When I started with IRT, I was just into one week of my position there and then I was called to IRT main table meeting. Even though with the previous positions I used to attend the meetings, the same meetings, when I started and then I went to the meeting the next week, and I was asked to chair.

And I had no idea what I was doing. So –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Welcome to my world.

G. BENUEN: The excitement I had at the time, there was a little work that IRT gave me, just to translate just a small paragraph and I had to translate that. And it was one of the events that happened with the main table, which was led by Canada, and it was called main table meeting – main table. The paragraph I was translating for IRT was in 2012. The Innu walk away from that table said it was always talk, no action.

And then it was in, like a few – a year and a half later, I think, they came back and said this table is gonna be Innu-led. That was the only historic event that I knew about IRT when I started, and I was really excited it's gonna be Innu-led. So anything else that was involved in IRT, I didn't know. But I knew there was – Income Support was delivered from there because I was a part of the signing of the agreement.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

2015?

G. BENUEN: 2018.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: 2018.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. BENUEN: At the time I started with Innu Round Table, I was out of the loop. I was working with College of the North Atlantic for a couple of years, and then I was working with the airline for a year. So I really didn't – wasn't in the loop for what was happening within the communities and the leadership.

When I started working with the Innu Round Table, I think there was 10 to 12 people under Prevention Services, and that's between two communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

So when I went in and did my orientation with Steve Joudry at the time and Kylie Rose, who's an assistant director now – she was acting at the time when I went in. When I did my orientation with Steve and they were talking about prevention services, and it just blew me away that province was delivering protection services and it wasn't their mandate to deliver the prevention services.

So I was trying to put my mind around it, and I guess I could've done a personal perspective as a mom, as a mother of three children and a grandmother and part of the family, that how is this going to work, 'cause as a mother, you have those – you prevent your kids from getting into the system and you protect your kids. And with those two not working together, for me, it doesn't make any sense because, as mother, I protect my children and prevention is a part of it, that it don't go derail or something, stuff like that. So it appalled me that this service was this way.

After that meeting I was just – like I think it to myself, how are we going to work? How

is this going to work for the Innu and for the province to work together on it? 'Cause, at the time, I don't think there was any – there was a working relationship that wasn't followed at many occasions and it was there when I came in. And it was very, very hard to collaborate with Newfoundland child protection system.

When IRT had their Prevention Services, we tried to communicate. We had disagreements, agreements and all that with the province. When I say the province, I'm talking about the office. I don't even know what they're named now, so I'm just gonna say protection services. I think it's just across from my office there. So when I'm talking about that, that's who I'm talking about, and the kids that they have in their system.

So when I was there, when I started working, I think there were two social workers – three social workers. One was in Natuashish and two were in Sheshatshiu – three social workers were in Sheshatshiu office. And there were four prevention workers to serve the communities of Natuashish. There was four in Sheshatshiu and I think there were three in Natuashish at the time to serve the communities and preventing the kids going into care. And we didn't have any funding to hire any more than what we had. I believe there was only a little over \$500,000 to work with under Prevention to prevent the kids or children going into protection system.

In end of June 2019, there was provincial legislation passed for the Indigenous representative program within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's a program that was delivered in other provinces or the legislation was in other provinces in Canada.

We got a word from the province that the legislation was passed and that we would have Innu representatives now – Indigenous representatives. And we find out pretty fast that we weren't getting the funding for it. So within the Department of Prevention Services and the prevention workers that

we had on staff at the time, we just changed their titles to Innu representatives.

So just briefly explain what would that be, to the best of my understanding: Indigenous representatives are the community members in the First Nations communities that would work for the Innu organizations. So when there's a referral from the province protection system, they would have to get in touch with this Indigenous representative to let 'em know there's a referral coming and they would be involved in that process.

Innu representatives are also the advocate for the family in the court proceedings. They're advocating for the child and the families when court proceedings by the province in the protection system. They also advocating for prevention, to prevent the children going into the system. And the other, there was also around that time that there was another legislation through Canada that was passed in – I think it's called an act respecting First Nations, Métis, Inuit children or something, I think.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] respecting First Nations –

G. BENUEN: First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. BENUEN: And the Innu leadership had a meeting, internal meeting, at the time to really discuss taking over the jurisdiction of Child and Family Services. So, at the meeting, we made a presentation with my colleague from IRT and they were talking, discussing how do we go about starting the process of taking over the Child and Family Services? So they gave us technical, lead technical work, like they gave IRT that task to start looking at how would we go about taking over the child protection system from the province?

So Innu Round Table has took over, which we call Innu Law Development now, and we did some due diligence and did some research across Canada with other First

Nations just to start, how do we go about this work that was in front of us?

So we started forming the committee for that and also trying to fund – tried to find the funding through the federal government to start the work that we needed to do that was tasked to us.

So when we start this work, there was – I guess there was an excitement and encouragement happening, and everybody was very motivated to start the work to establish our own child welfare system, and to start working on the initiatives that we need to get there.

We – the IRT was – I guess it was trying to find the funding. We looked through federal government. There was no funding of any sort for Innu to start working on their jurisdiction to take over the child protection system. And we were told also that we have to be agency to receive the funding that other First Nations received across Canada for prevention.

And we worked like all angles to get this funding and we couldn't get it to the point that we had to go through Jordan's Principle funding to run this programs of protection – or prevention, I mean, and to hire more resources and to deliver programs.

I keep thinking that the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has received unlimited federal funding to take our children from our communities and from their families. We couldn't even get any money to prevent that from happening.

Just to go back about the agency part of it, 'cause we did go to our Bands to designate IRT as an agency and we went to the province. The province said they have no power to designate IRT as an agency.

So when we got the funding from Jordan's Principle, that's when we hire a few more people to work with the families and children. And that was a very, very difficult process. We tried to work it out in all angles and legalities and all of that, and we just couldn't get it.

That was very difficult process, that was going on for two years and we had the funding coming from Jordan's Principle for two years. While we tried to get the funding for the prevention, or the amount of money that other First Nations got over the years, the work was happening within the Prevention department. They did protocol with the province; we signed a protocol with the province on CSSD collaboration. We also hired more social workers.

I think we recognize that in order for our children to get in through the system, we need the programs and services for prevention. We need the children to have the programs where they can go without getting into the protection system and under the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

And that's how we got introduced to affidavit. So it's all there. You can read that, because we had – in order for us to get the funding for prevention that we have today. We did submit a complaint, I guess, to Human Rights Tribunal, the Innu Nation submitted, to really get the funding that we needed to the Prevention Services, to prevent our children from remove from our communities and from our – their families.

And when all this work was happening, there was also other work that was happening in the communities. There was emergency placement houses in the communities and there's also – they have to work to have a Level 4 group home so our children can come home and be a part of the community, have a relationship and connections to their families, and to prevent them from moving to another community of – a non-Native community, a non-Innu community or out of the community.

And that was happening between – like, two communities. Natuashish have their own emergency placement in the community and they also have established another one in Happy Valley-Goose Bay with older children. So that's when we went into – when we submit to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal for a complaint.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Byrne and G. Benuen in Innu-aimun.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. BENUEN: So during those two years when we were receiving money from Jordan's Principle, we also had discussions for our prevention money with federal government and as we had this complaint to the Human Rights, they came back and said: Okay, we'll give you this amount of money and going forward we'll look at it of how much you would be entitled to it, if you just stall your complaint for now. And we did say: Okay, well, we can do that.

And it took us a couple of years and then after a couple of years they agreed to give us the funding that other First Nations receive across Canada. And our complaint didn't end up in the proceedings of the Human Rights Tribunal.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Byrne and G. Benuen in Innu-aimun.]

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

G. BENUEN: So that will – that's probably all I have to say, but there's also one thing that I just wanna mention, regarding delivering the protection system – Innu delivering the protection system.

I know that we can do it 'cause during the COVID – 2021 or 2020?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 2020.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yes, yeah.

G. BENUEN: 2020. Natuashish had to have – like, the province social workers had to leave the community, and our Innu representative run that office for a few weeks, and they did amazing job. There were struggles, but what job isn't?

So that's just the highlight that I wanted to share. And so the stuff that's happening

now, Amanda is gonna talk to you in more detail about it.

Thank you.

Did you have any questions?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so much, Ms. Benuen.

And we'll continue. Did you want to make more presentations, Amanda?

A. RICH: I'd like to acknowledge Germaine and Wendy on explaining the story that I think the Inquiry will need when it comes to forming your recommendations for Innu children and families for both communities.

I'd like to give some context with regards to my personal experience and where that's given me the drive to do the work that I do on a daily basis for both communities, Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, for prevention services.

I was taken away from my birth parents from the child protection services at five weeks old, but luckily for me I remained in community. Talking – hearing Wendy's experience, we both share an experience but are quite different and unique. Wendy has talked about being away from community, with child protection being involved in her life. I also have the same experience as being taken away from my birth parents, my Innu birth parents, but luckily for me, like I said, I remained in community and eventually I was legally adopted by two loving parents. One, my mother – my adopted mother – being Innu, and my adopted father being non-Innu.

Even though my experience was painful as it was for many people that are in my life, I know, in the end, my birth parents having to make a decision to give me up for adoption, I look at that of them having so much strength to see that they wanted me to have the best care and the best chance at life when it came to my well-being as an Innu child.

That experience, you know, it was definitely experience that I had to face and I also had to face challenges with that growing up as well. Challenges such as how I seen myself as an Innu person, how I saw my community and, with that, in how much shame I had because I didn't understand what was happening to Innu people at the time. Because what I had witnessed living in the community was people in despair, people trying to escape the reality that they were living, and Innu people having to really face what their reality was at the time. That came with a lot of having to see Innu people – when I was growing up, having to see a lot of Innu people intoxicated, having to see violence, hearing what non-Innu were saying about Innu as well at the time.

I was exposed to a lot of that when I was growing up in the community. So when I talk about shame, I talk about my experience as growing up in the community. Even though, you know, I was lucky enough to remain in community, there was challenges for me growing up in community.

In saying that, as Wendy mentioned previously, the same goes for me as my past does not define me. I take that and that guides me into the person that I wanna be and the helper that I wanna be to Innu families, Innu community members, and to give the most support that I can in ensuring that Innu children and families are at the fort when it comes to supporting them when struggles do come along. Because that's the thing in terms of, you know, the communities having so much trauma from past outcomes, I don't let that define me. This is what keeps me going as the director, as a community member, as an Innu mother. I do have children as well, and I've experienced trauma.

So when I say in terms of, you know, Innu having the answers, Innu have been taking care of children since the beginning of time. Because of the trauma that has happened, I know in recent hearings, the Inquiry was also introduced to the Innu timeline and what kind of impact that had on Innu members, Innu families, Innu children.

When I started at the Innu Round Table Secretariat, I started in July of 2021. I am the first agency director for Prevention Services for the Innu Round Table Secretariat. Like I said in my intro, I was very excited to start my role because I knew that there was a vision. But that vision didn't have a road map of how we were going to get there. So a month prior, before I came to the IRT, there was an agreement that was signed between the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Innu called the Innu-CSSD Protocol.

As soon as I started my job, I obviously needed to read the Protocol in terms of understanding what this agreement was about. I look at the Innu-CSSD Protocol as part of the foundation of relationship building with the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. And, at the time, I think it's always felt that between the province and the Innu, it's always looked at or it's always felt like us versus them.

You know, I don't think there was ever a relationship built concrete when it comes to really working collaboratively, because one group as protection – having to do protection services and the other group, the Innu group, having to do prevention. The Protocol – and I'm going to assume that the Inquiry Commissioners have that copy – what it really is, is an agreement in really building the relationship but also giving us, Innu, the opportunity to apply our services that Innu families may be at risk of the child protection system.

So when I say this was a piece of foundation for relationship building, I took it upon myself with talking with my team on how we can best work together, because it didn't make sense that at one side of the table would be making these decisions and we would be just there letting it happen.

I want to give a few examples of some of the things that we've done in the last couple of years since I've been the agency director. And when I think about the relationships I thought, well, currently, I felt like there was barely a relationship. Everybody knew what they needed to do; but it was like, okay, how

are we going to come to understanding of why this is so important?

I had led with some of my colleagues at Prevention and I spoke about, okay, in order for the province to understand why the Innu is asking for what they're asking for, they need to understand. So I got with my group and I was, like, I think we need to invite the province on Innu territory. Not in offices, not in a formal meeting boardroom; let's bring them on Innu territory and have some real, honest discussions.

I invited the provincial directors that are in child welfare and I also invited the zone managers of the areas that – the zone managers that are focused on the Innu zones. And there was huge opportunities to share openly and honestly. I was able to share about my history, which include racism. I was able to include and share about how I felt shamed, because I was shamed. And then giving information about I really changed my mind about my history; not looking at it as a negative, but looking at it as strength.

I think, when I think about the relationships, right now I feel that I do have a relationship with the province, in terms of work going forward, but it took time because the important piece to that was never experienced, where provincial officials or provincial directors ever had the time to be able to listen of what an Innu person had personally gone through. And I took the risk of sharing that with them at a retreat that we had a couple years ago.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay, I'm gonna ask you to hold that thought please, Ms. Rich. I'm gonna to ask a lead counsel to check with the parties and the witnesses as to whether we continue in the afternoon and then come back to the Commissioners and let us know your decision. And also, you'll have to be in touch with the people we had lined up for the afternoon and maybe tell them there might be a bit of a delay.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Who are these guys? Who are they?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

Another word from the Commissioners, and that is earlier this morning you heard a disturbance in the background; we never saw it on our screen, but I've been advised that there was an unfortunate – a disturbing video or image placed by somebody who was a participant online, and it was quite disturbing for people who saw it. So I want to offer our apologies. At the same time, we will make sure that our technicians ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Did you get that, Nympha?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Yeah.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So we'll take a few minutes, allow counsel to speak about when we continue, and we'll be back, of course, and then make sure we notify the other presenters that they may be delayed a bit.

C. URQUHART: Commissioner, if I may, I have notified the other presenters for this afternoon and so they're satisfied that we should continue and, given the time, I would suggest we come back at 2, if that's acceptable.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Perfect. We're taking a break until 2 o'clock, please, Nympha.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Okay.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Welcome back, everyone.

Thank you for attending again this afternoon, and viewers online, you're welcomed very much to the Inquiry. I'll ask lead counsel to bring our witness back in again.

C. URQUHART: Thank you, Commissioner, and thanks for the patience for everyone who was online and in the room. We are pleased to welcome back our panel from Innu Round Table Secretariat.

I would, at this time, invite you to continue, Ms. Rich.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'll just interrupt you to say that the afternoon is yours. So we're not working with the other witnesses today, so take your time.

A. RICH: So is she gonna translate that or should I go?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

A. RICH: Good afternoon, everybody.

Before we ended for lunch, I spoke a bit about some examples that we have experienced – well, also what I've experienced within prevention services and the unique situations that we come about.

I'd like to go back to talking about the Innu-CSSD Protocol. In the Protocol, there are different processes that are written, and it also entails on how we can work together with the province protection services with regards to some of these processes.

In day-to-day work, obviously we have to communicate with the protection system services. As I was speaking earlier, this is the start of gaining information, receiving information, and I want to speak about an experience that I had with meeting with the zone manager that's in the Sheshatshiu office.

So, at first, the zone manager invited me to a meeting that we had in our office at the Innu Round Table Secretariat and it was to discuss cases that were potential of heading to a permanent transfer of custody. A permanent transfer of custody is the department handing over legal rights to a caregiver through a court process. That when that is in process, the judge makes the decision that when that goes ahead, the legal custody of that child would be going to the caregiver and CSSD no longer has the decision-making of that child. So I was in a meeting with the zone manager to talk about that process.

It also leads into a different process that families – because it leads only to – there's a process to the permanent transfer of custody. So we went to talking about in terms of, okay, in order for a caregiver to get the responsibility and have that decision-making of that child, there would have to be some steps that need to be taken and placed before that happens. That would include six executive visits – home visits – from CSSD to the foster home. And if everything on their checklist is marked complete, then it would go into a court process where CSSD is providing the information and a judge would make a decision whether that child will go into a permanent transfer of custody.

But, with that, that child and that family would still have minimum supervision, I guess, from CSSD, only because there is still a financial benefit for that family. So I believe that it is once a year that CSSD would come to that family making sure that, you know, everything is okay and the child is still being supported.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: What year was that, Amanda?

A. RICH: I believe that was in 2022 or 2023.

When we were in that meeting, when she first started discussing that with me, you know, the cases, I then started thinking and then I stopped her. I stopped her so I could ask a simple question. It was my first instinct, I think, as an Innu woman, as an

Innu mother. And I asked her, where is the role of the birth parents in this? And then she said there was no role.

I felt overwhelmed thinking how this could affect with past pain of Innu parents that have lost their rights because of their circumstances, how wrong it was. I advocated in that meeting that this process would not move until the Innu representatives spoke to the birth parents, with giving them the news of what was going to happen to their Innu child.

Through this process, most parents were very supportive of the plan of what was going to happen to their child because they were going to remain with their extended families, whether that was a grandparent or auntie or uncle or sister. But there was a few that didn't want to go through that process. But CSSD honoured our request that if parents did not want to go through that process, that they would not push it.

This is truly an example of what services might look like in an Innu law. Birth parents may not be in a position to make decisions for their Innu children, but should always be informed about what happens to their child. This is a given. We can't repeat what history has already done.

I'd also like to give an example of the advocacy that we do for Innu families that are currently within the system as well. Back in 2023, you know, as we're going along and building our relationships, as we get more information, we have more questions. And I found, through this process, there was just more to ask, and understanding why certain decisions were being made or that was already made.

As my relationship got stronger with the provincial government and the provincial directors, I had a lot of questions with regards to the current situation of Innu foster families, after having to be told about the different levels of the continuum of care. There are four levels.

Within the Protocol, the province has to give us information as we request it. And within

our data, we can see that there were many Innu foster families within both communities. There are children that are placed outside but the larger number is with Innu foster families in both communities. When I had asked in terms of what the financials looked like for supporting that Innu child, or Innu children, I was forlorn, I guess, when it came to the different levels.

So the first level of being a foster family, a foster placement, you would just be getting basic funding – basic base funding. The second level is a level where you would be getting additional funding from CSSD if you have the program that is training you when it comes to PRIDE training. And it's a western program that focuses on the safety of a child, but it does not clearly give emphasis on culture, language, identity. So that was something that raised a concern with me.

I spoke to my team members about how concerned I was for that. Because, at the time, I knew that Prevention staff was working tirelessly with giving recommendations of where children – you know, there could have been foster breakdowns or there hasn't been very many removals. But I wanted – and I thought about it and I thought, well, who else is going to advocate for Innu foster families in order to get what they need in order to support their Innu children?

I looked at the most important things that an Innu sees, that I see, you know? Making sure that that child is exposed to Innu language, that it's connected to their extended family, that they still have their identity, even though they may be going through a hard time in their life, but to always feel that they belong.

You know, and I thought – I spoke to my boss, Germaine, and said, I wanna advocate on this. So I got in touch with the deputy minister of CSSD and I requested a meeting to talk about this. And I wanted to see change.

It took me about a year to see a good result in that. I had a first meeting with the deputy

minister at the Confederation office here in St. John's. A few months went by. I did not receive any correspondence with regards to my request, and my request was making sure that Innu foster families would be compensated at Level 2. Not because that they had PRIDE training, but they were offering so much more than what PRIDE training could give to an Innu child, which included, as what I said earlier, being exposed to Innu language, connection, identity.

Finally, earlier on this year, in the spring, I received a letter from the department, from the deputy minister saying that he was going to honour and approve all Innu foster families to receive the Level 2 funding arrangement because it was the only way to recognize that this was so important.

And if I may say, when I look at how Innu families were being treated in terms of just even getting basic funding at Level 1, like, to me, that was discriminatory. Like I say, it's every day, almost, an Innu person has to be faced with challenges when it comes to racism or having to be very tired in explaining of why. I took me a year to advocate for that, and I remember when I got that letter, I felt like I could breathe. I was so angry because it's, like, this isn't right.

So I'm really happy with the result of that, and that is, you know, another true example in terms of when we come to develop our law, when it comes to making sure that Innu children and families are so supported in every area that we can think of in making sure that family has – they're safe and their well-being is at par when it comes to being Innu.

Giving the examples today to the Inquiry really speaks with regard to the path forward. As you may be aware, and with Germaine's testimony this morning, the Innu are on a pathway to an Innu vision of taking over the protection system but that comes also with challenges.

Our services going forward, we do see that we make a difference in advocating for Innu

families, but that does come with challenge as well because we are still, currently, under the provincial legislation when it comes to Child and Family Services. The Innu do not have – won't have – a clean slate when we do take over this service.

So, for the past couple of years, there has been a tremendous amount of Innu coming together to talk about those services and the prevention staff in both offices have different types of experience of seeing some very sensitive cases that are coming about, the referrals that we see that are coming from the department – when I say department I'm talking about child protection. When I think about in terms of the Innu law, I think, a ring, like a bell starts to ring and it's like, hmm, what are the Innu going to do? Because we're not going to have a clean slate when it comes to this service, what are we going to do? Just because we're going to be taking over a service, this particular service, it doesn't erase the harm that's already been done.

So I'd like the opportunity to talk about current staffing that we have at the Prevention Services. I've been saying protection many times and now that's stuck in my head.

Currently, we have 35 full-time staff and we have four part-time staff between both communities. As mentioned earlier by Germaine, the number definitely has grown over the years, when we talked a bit about when it came to the funding, the growth of the services going forward. I also wanted to give an example – well, not an example, but it's something that has to do with children that age out of care.

So, currently, CSSD provides a service called Youth Services and that is supporting children from the time that they age out of care to the age of 21. From going back and having conversations with the directors, for a long time, that number was very, very low. Understandably because of, you know, because of the impact that the department had on the communities. So – yeah, I'll stop there.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

A. RICH: There was a new program rolling out from the federal government, very new, has never been done before which was called post-majority support services, which would align and be comparison to the current youth services that the department was offering. With post-majority, there were new rules and eligibility when it came to this new funding program. So with youth services that the province was delivering only went up to the age of 21, with definitely some limitations. For post-majority, that support would stay intact until a child turns – or a youth would turn 26 on their birthday. So they would be receiving those supports 'til the age of 26.

And it also emphasized so much more within the program because it had so much more funding to support a child in their well-being, when it comes to making sure that the connection between their families were supported. Any financial for a child that wanted to continue on or, you know, pursue a career with going to school, they would be receiving a personal allowance.

But one of the biggest things that I found really intriguing was the cultural component to that program and really there was no limit in terms of – it didn't seem, at the time, that there was no limit in supporting an Indigenous child when it came to that component of the program.

I think, at the time, it was understood by the province that the group that should provide that service, that should deliver that service, would be the Innu.

I got a call one morning from one of the provincial directors and she spoke to me, you know, as human to human because that's the type of relationships that I need going forward. Then she had asked me: So, Amanda, do you guys want to deliver post-majority support services? And I was fairly new in my position. There was a lot that I had to do within my position, being the head of the department. And what I had said to her, I said: Yes, we will take over this

service, we will deliver this service, but for right now we can't because we are in development of an agency going forward. But I said: Don't misunderstand what I'm saying that we will deliver this service.

I'm proud to give the Inquiry the news that November of last year, we were able to hire the first post-majority support services coordinator and now there is five staff under this coordinator. Well, she's a manager, we renamed her because she is looking after post-majority in Sheshatshiu and also in Natuashish.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Let's take a break now and give poor Nympha a chance for her brain to recover.

Ten minutes, please.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Welcome back, everyone.

We're gonna pick up again where we left off.

Thank you.

Please continue, witness.

A. RICH: Within my role as the prevention agency director – the agency director – there were many layers to getting to that Innu vision of Innu taking over full jurisdiction. And at the time of the excitement and the momentum that had happened with leadership of both communities making that very firm that this is what the Innu was going to do, I took that information and really looked at where we wanted to go and how long would it possibly be in order to get ready for this huge change that was going to happen for the Innu.

The same process that I did with the province with regards to building relationships, it only made sense that I

would do the same thing to the federal government, who is ISC, Indigenous Services Canada. My goal was also making sure that the federal government knew, you know, why we wanted to go where we wanted to go with regards to Innu-led services, within the whole scope of Innu Child and Family Services. A couple months ago, I had a conversation with one of the CFS managers, and because of our relationship, we're able to have some good, honest conversations with regards to child well-being.

When it came to that conversation, I was very clear about how the Innu were going to succeed in the direction that we wanted to go. And he gave me some examples that are happening across Canada with regards to other Indigenous groups that are going for the same goal of reclaiming and redesigning their own Indigenous child and family services. I think at the time when Innu leadership had made the decision that they were going to declare their own law, I believe at the time there was a lot of chaos that had happened with regards to the harm that was continuing on with regards to child protection.

I can say that there was no resources that exist now at the time and I think there was a lot of pressure in making sure that Innu children stayed in community and not be sent away with regards to maybe not having a placement to be placed, the services and programming that needs to happen for families.

In the last couple of months, I really had to think about in terms of what's achievable and what can we do in order to practice inserting the law.

So I've had conversations with leadership, and at the last Innu Round Table, main table meeting, I did announce to leadership – and the leadership was already aware of the announcement that I was going to make – that we were going to shift a little bit – still going for full jurisdiction – but we were going to do this in a phased approach.

So the first phase of that approach would be developing a prevention law. This was, I think, a very smart decision on behalf of us having to develop a law and get to the processes that we need to get through when it comes to increased funding, in making sure that, you know, the elements that we're saying that is needed for us to insert our law needs to be supported, and that includes funding. And that also includes our principles and also it includes what our governance is going to look like for the agency going forward.

There are many initiatives that are happening within the communities to get to that goal.

One of the things that I wanted to mention as well in terms of capacity building is, obviously, we want Innu to be trained in certain trainings in order to support them when it comes to this type of work. You know, it's hard work, and it's something that I think the Innu are going to be needing in order to assert themselves in some of the many, I think, difficult situations that may come, that have come to us, but that will continue until we get to a better outcome when it comes to healthy Innu families and children.

One of the initiatives that we have going on right now for both communities is a ladder approach program to give opportunities to Innu individuals in both communities to really build on their capacity when it comes to Human Services work, but we also know that we also want to make sure that there's opportunities to become an Innu social worker.

So, last year, we had 10 students that completed and graduated the Indigenous Human Services Certificate. I'm actually one of those graduates. I don't know the amount of time – I don't know how I did it, but I did it and, right now, I am also doing – because I finished my certificate in Human Services, I am also doing the diploma piece, the diploma program for Human Services and eventually after that we would be doing our first year in social work.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Where are you doing your training?

A. RICH: So the program that we have ongoing right now is through a partnership between the IRT and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, which is an Indigenous college out in BC. We were able to connect with them and this program is actually a hybrid program. So, it is – the college is able to accommodate through online courses, but they have also been very accommodating with making sure that if there are any instructors within the area, that they would be hired and they'd be able to instruct us in our courses.

There is, you know, many other initiatives that I could speak about, but I know the work tells itself with regard to what's happening in the communities. The results are coming from these initiatives that we are in process with.

So, in everything that we have presented to the Inquiry, I wanted to lastly repeat a quote that was done by the late Rose Gregoire because I think it's very important to know that this vision still lives on, even with the past advocates that have passed on.

Here's the quote: Thirty years ago, when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples visited Sheshatshiu, the late Rose Gregoire told them, while speaking about social services as it was then called, we are not stupid; we can do the jobs ourselves. With probably some training, we can certainly do this.

Thank you.

C. URQUHART: Tshinashkumitin.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshinashkumitin.

All of the panel members, thank you so much.

Lead Ccounsel, you can direct the order of cross-examination.

C. URQUHART: Yes, firstly, I just wanted to put on the record there are a number of documents that were referred to. One was the Child Welfare League report, which Ms. White provided a number of the recommendations from; that is P-343.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

C. URQUHART: As well, Ms. Rich was speaking about the Protocol from 2021, which is P-049.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

C. URQUHART: We – Commission counsel have conferred and we feel, given the time and the nature of the questions that we had anticipated, that we will actually send those in writing and do them by interrogatory afterwards.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

C. URQUHART: So if Nympha can ...

INTERPRETER BYRNE: I'm lost, you just go on (inaudible).

C. URQUHART: So we'll ask our questions in writing after.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Mm-hmm.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nympha, you know a lawyer can't say something simple. It has to be hard.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: I know that. I know.

C. URQUHART: It's prohibited; we would actually be disbarred.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, you'd be fired. If they could speak proper English, they'd be fired.

Counsel, is that all parties?

C. URQUHART: So, no – for the Commission counsel. So next, we have counsel for the Innu Representative Organizations.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

J. ASHINI: Can I do it from here?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yes, you can.

J. ASHINI: That's good.

Good afternoon, my name is Jolene Ashini, and I am co-counsel for the Innu Representative Organizations. I have a couple of questions this afternoon. I'm going to ask a couple of clarifying questions first, so this will be towards the panel, so if any one of you can speak to it, go ahead.

From my understanding, from the report, the Innu services report which is Exhibit P-441, page 12 to be exact, and then also testimony this morning, that IRT receives prevention funding, but this funding only comes from ISC. Is that correct?

We'll let Nympha translate first.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

A. RICH: To clarify your question, that is correct. The only funding that we receive is from the federal government.

J. ASHINI: And the province still doesn't contribute anything; is that correct?

A. RICH: That's correct.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

What did you say – the last one?

J. ASHINI: The province still doesn't contribute anything.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

J. ASHINI: Do you know why this is?

G. BENUEN: The province doesn't deliver prevention program; they only deliver protection. I'm assuming that's why.

J. ASHINI: So my next question will be open to Ms. Rich or Ms. White.

This morning you gave us a brief summary of Innu Prevention Services and what you currently offer. I was just wondering if there was anything else that you would like to add to your current Prevention Services areas from this morning?

W. WHITE: Could you repeat that question, please?

J. ASHINI: I guess to clarify, you told us a bit about – well, Ms. Benuen told us about the Innu representative programs and then Ms. Rich explained the post-majority support services.

Was there anything else that you would like to add to those service areas?

A. RICH: As we are developing and doing the work of development, we're in constant communication with staff when it comes to the things that they need in order to support families in both communities.

Last year, we took the prevention team and brought them in an environment where they would be speaking about what they witness on a daily basis of families that are coming to us and that need support. So in the two days that we had met with staff, actually in those two days, we developed a program that would support Innu families in different areas.

W. WHITE: So we do have another program, it's called Uauitshitun and it's to provide, like, general prevention services. And it's for crisis support but also urgent family support program. That's what we refer to it as. Just some examples of some of what we're able to provide: with food insecurity, we're able to provide assistance to families who are struggling. We're also doing parent education programs with

parent and tots – that’s what we’ve called that – family recreation activities, and those are social and physical.

We also have – we support outdoor gatherings and community events. We also have after-hours and crisis response as well. We also provide respite care to primary caregivers. So if they’re experiencing some challenges, they may need some assistance, they may be feeling a bit stressed, that we’re able to provide that so that they can get a bit of a break and get that support as well. Because that can make a really big difference in the life of a parent and also in their family as well.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

What’s the other one, Wendy?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

J. ASHINI: So my next question is going to be another question that is going to be open to the panel.

Can you explain CSSD’s current rotational model for its social workers within the Innu zones?

G. BENUEN: The province social workers are doing the rotation of 14 days out, 14 days in, and that has been – it’s not working for the Innu, for the lives of the Innu children ‘cause when the social workers are in town for a couple of weeks, and their clients, they work with them, and they’re gone for the next couple of weeks and nothing moves for the children when they’re gone because they’re gone. Usually, the supervisor said their social worker is not here, we can’t do this, we can’t do that until he’s back or she’s back. But that doesn’t work. Life happens; life still continues on for the children, and something that – when something needs to be done for the children, it can’t be done until the social worker comes back.

W. WHITE: So just to add to that as well, so with the two-week rotation schedules, as Germaine has said, I guess you would call them a cross shift perhaps, if that’s the

correct word. So when they leave the community, the files can remain untouched for long periods and this can stall progress for families and this can cause harm to Innu children because of delayed decision-making, a lack of relationships and inconsistent practice.

J. ASHINI: So to confirm, once a child’s case worker is off the rotation, so they’re on their 14 days off, is there another social worker that becomes the child’s case worker?

W. WHITE: No.

J. ASHINI: So then would it be fair to say that for periods of up to 14 days or more at a time, a child in care does not have that case worker?

A. RICH: Yes, that’s correct.

J. ASHINI: So my next question is kind of related to that and you all spoke about this earlier and touched on it about how you’ve experienced your own traumas or relationships with the child welfare system, but I wanted to ask: Would it be fair to say that there are extra things that Innu staff need to deal with when working in this type of environment, versus a non-Innu rotational staff worker?

A. RICH: The difference between the two teams I see is that the rotational staff that leave the community are actually leaving all of their work behind, but for the Innu staff at Prevention, all of the Innu staff live in the community. They feel the struggle, they see the struggle, they’ve lived that struggle. So when I think about an approach that staff need and that have been practiced in various ways is making sure that when we approach families, staff have to be aware in terms of, obviously the trauma, that it has to be trauma-informed.

CSSD can’t provide that because they haven’t lived through that experience, they don’t know the Innu that they’re dealing with and they may not necessarily have the correct or accurate information that they need in order to work with the family. Innu

Prevention, the workers that are working in both communities, have that. They are able to work with Innu people because we are Innu ourselves. We speak the language; we've all lived the trauma.

G. BENUEN: Can I just add to that? We do have non-Innu social workers, rotational social workers for Natuashish office, but the difference with our social workers, IRT social workers and CSSD, when our social workers are in the community and when they're out of it, they're still working, they just work in through the phone or virtual. They don't stop work when their rotation is done. And there's also – they also have a collaboration in what's going on with their clients and the other clients for the coming social worker, through the office.

J. ASHINI: My next question again will be open to the panel for comment.

We've seen through witness testimony and evidence in this Inquiry that CSSD has continuously and currently is going through understaffing issues, and I was wondering how this – if it does – impacts the Innu and your department.

A. RICH: It does create a huge impact on our services, and when I say this, there are a lot of delays that happen. There are families that are coming to us seeking support in order to get the support that they need going forward. In all, we can't do our jobs without CSSD doing their jobs. Through the Protocol, there is an agreement that if any referral that comes in, that their first call needs to be to Innu Prevention, so we have the opportunity to go out and see families and to see where we would need to support. If they don't have the social workers to do that, then we don't have the ability to go out there with the proper information that we need in order to support these families.

G. BENUEN: I'm just going to add on that 'cause – and the other impact it has on our services is also impact on the children that are in care and the families that involved with CSSD, 'cause when something happens while they're on their rotation and

out of the community, nothing can be done 'cause they have to wait for their social worker.

And, also, the other thing that we did recognize this very fast, that's why we have our Innu people train, capacity building, because of the – so we can have the Innu deliver the services to the Innu 'cause they understand, they live it, they experience the traumas of CSSD. So I just wanted to add that.

J. ASHINI: That brings me to my next question, which is also again open to the panel.

So as not only professionals in your fields, but also as Innu women, have you seen a difference, if any, that Prevention Services – so Innu Prevention Services – has made for the Innu and the communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish?

A. RICH: In the last couple of years that I've been in my position, I've seen tremendous successes seeing the Innu provide prevention services in different areas. We've seen children come home that are reunified with their families because of the advocacy that the Innu representatives do.

There are Innu members that come to our office looking for support and entrusting us with the information that they give us. They're able to communicate that in our language, rather than in English, and there is a sense of belonging and a sense of comparison in that we're all human, we're all Innu and we want what's best for Innu children and families.

G. BENUEN: And the other support that we have, I think, make the difference in the lives of the family and the children that are involved in the protection system is our staff are able to advocate for them in a court process, which they didn't have and which they didn't understand when they were going through that. So they talk to the Innu reps in their language and they're able to get their message across through our Innu reps to the judge in the family court process.

W. WHITE: I also just wanted to add, too, about the Uauitshitun program. It's designed to be short term for clients, but we find, too, that once we're able to provide a sense of support, whether it's to issue a grocery PO or a PO, say, for diapers, or formula or clothing as well, we find that helps build up the relationship. And then we're able to ask them, you know, how are things going in their life; what other supports do they need.

Getting them in the door and to build up that trust, we're able to help them, say, with Child Tax Benefit. They may not know that they are eligible for that or how to even go about applying for it. They may be eligible for Income Support; we would help them through that process as well. We would link them to Income Support program, and even status cards is another thing that we could help them with as well, right?

So it just goes to show that it's not just – the Uauitshitun is just not about providing money or a transactional relationship; it's there also to build trust and to also look at what other supports that Prevention Services can provide them with.

J. ASHINI: In looking at the time, I also wanted to point out, and for the Commissioner's reference, we had also in our submissions Exhibit P-444, which, I think, in relation to everything that Ms. White and Ms. Benuen and Ms. Rich talked about today, really brings together – these are written submissions by IRT that I think it would be important for you to go through because we've heard the principles and the values behind it today and I think that would just tie in very well.

But as of right now, unless anybody from the panel has anything else that they would like to say, those are my questions.

A. RICH: Just going back to an update that I wanted to provide that I didn't provide when I was speaking. So when I talked about the permanent transfer of custodies that have happened within both communities to date, there were 26 that have gone through that process. So there's 26 children or families that have gone through that process that

CSSD is no longer the decision-maker of that child. It is the Innu foster family themselves that has that custody. So there's 26.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, young Daniel. Well done.

Yes, go ahead, Caitlin.

C. URQUHART: So, next, we would have questions from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sir.

P. WARREN: Commissioner, I would just like to thank the panel for being here today and thank them for their presentations and their evidence. We don't have any questions. Ms. White, in particular, answered some of the things that were on my mind with some really good, on-the-ground examples of what she means by providing prevention services in the community, so that's all we really had.

So thank you, everyone, for being here.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

You're a lawyer?

P. WARREN: I am.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: I think I'm getting tired.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken].

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Sir. And we've reminded ourselves, as Commissioners, that we can submit written questions if they come to us, so can you.

C. URQUHART: Government of Canada.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

I'm noting the time and I did have two questions for the panel, specifically about the Innu services report. I'm prepared to ask them now, but if the opportunity to ask them in writing is extended to Canada, then maybe it's a better use of time to do that so we can end for the day.

So if that is appropriate, then I'll just also thank the panelists for their testimony.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you. (Inaudible.)

C. URQUHART: Those are the only parties who have standing to ask questions.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you all very much.

Nympha, go ahead.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

I'll ask Nashtash – Commissioner Qupee – would you like to make any comment at this time, and then Commissioner Devine.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'd just like to say that I'm glad that we had this presentation today. It's really important to hear the presentations and to hear what's happening in both communities and the services that are being delivered and the programs that are also going to be delivered and developed.

So I appreciate the panel coming today and, hopefully, like I said, we'll see them in a second round when we have the leadership and the manager's round table later down the road. So as the work progresses, we'll hear more of what's happening.

So thank you. Tshinashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much. She translated, so that's good.

Commissioner Devine.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes, I also want to say thank you.

A few comments. I've been around for a long time and I could never really understand why governments didn't take on prevention services in a serious way. There have been different ways that they've done some, but really not in a way that you've described today, and it was really hard to understand because, to my mind, prevention services is kind of where it's at, if you like. And that there's so much that can be done to prevent, you know, trauma, distress in the lives of children, families and communities. And I think, in particular, of, you know, Sheshatshiu and Natuashish and what I've heard over this past three years or so.

I think, that being said, the other part that you've highlighted a few times now and that I think is also important is you mentioned about trauma, and certainly that's something that's on the radar of the Inquiry. We have somebody who we had to do some research in that area, an Indigenous scholar and she'll be presenting, I think tomorrow – either tomorrow or Wednesday. And so we really – that will certainly be part of what we have to say in our report, because I think the two are connected also.

But I have to say that I'm very, very impressed with what you've done in Prevention Services in a very short time, really. You know, you've got it. You know what prevention services can do and you're beginning to see what it has done, and it's kind of, you know, early stages, almost, in my mind, because oftentimes for prevention services, it takes a long time for to see the results, you know what I mean?

And so for the child protection side of it, you know, you have to keep that in place. And you've talked, Amanda – Ms. Rich, I should probably say, formally – about that taking over and what that's going to be like, what you're inheriting and the challenges of that. And so you'll have to keep that system in place while also building prevention and,

eventually, I do believe firmly that you'll see the need for child protection services diminish. It's not only – you know, financially, I think government often thinks about, it's a serious consideration, but when we're talking about the lives of people, I think that we can't emphasize that enough.

And the fact that you've gone from, you know, the tertiary level of service, starting off first when children were imminently coming into care and now moving onto the secondary prevention and then primary, even doing social and (inaudible), like, it's a wow.

So I really commend all of you and your communities and the Innu Nation on the fine work that you've done.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You get all that, Nympha?

INTERPRETER BYRNE: He is so fast; he talks so fast.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: And I had your name here so I wouldn't forget it. (Inaudible) myself.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much, Nympha, I appreciate that, and thank you to the panelists. You are following in footsteps of so many leaders: Lucy Rose, and Ben, and Peter, Lyla, Tshaukuesh, Apenam – all those people. So we have to say thank you very much for teaching us a great deal more than we have heard and continuing in that work.

We really appreciate the efforts that you are making and the way that you are informing the Inquiry.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Oh you can say Utshimau, you don't have to say Jim.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Do you really want me to say that?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, not at all.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, you can say Utshimau. You don't have to say Jim.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: Do you really want me to say that?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, not at all.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I wanna say thank you to Eastern Audio, to Ruth and her crew for setting up this room for us. Thank you to all of you for your interest and participation. And thank you especially to Nympha for her work today. We really rely on her to deliver all the work today.

G. BENUEN: Utshimau, can I say one more thing?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Go ahead.

G. BENUEN: That way you can say yes.

I just want to say thank you all for inviting us to share the information with you that we think is very important. And I also wanna – like, sitting here, sharing the information and the impacts that CSSD has on our children and families, last month we went to Vancouver for a conference that's called

Our Children Our Way, and there were a lot of First Nations that are doing the prevention and protection part of it.

I want you to think about this quote that we heard – and thanks, Lyla, for reminding me that. It's by Cindy Blackstock. I'm gonna quote her in saying: no Indigenous child should have to recover from their childhood.

So I'll just leave you with that and keep that in mind.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you all very much.

We're going to pick up again tomorrow at 9:30. We started with a prayer, and we're going to ask Nympha to end our day with a prayer as well.

INTERPRETER BYRNE: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Amen.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.