



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

English Transcript

Volume 34

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Inquiry in progress at start of recording.] – here, so that we'll make arrangements to have other transcript or translation produced later on for the community.

I want to welcome you all here, and I'll ask Kevin if he could translate for us. We'll try to speak slowly and not make these sentences too long. Thank you, Kevin, for being here.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Morning.

P. RALPH: Kevin was pointing out to me earlier that it's been a while since he's done this, so he thinks he's – be a bit rusty in the beginning.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I'm just nervous, I haven't done this for quite time, I do a lot with courts and probation, but it's been a while I done it, so I'm very nervous.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Don't be nervous, only Anastasia understands what you're saying. Me and Mike haven't got a clue.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I want to thank the community for welcoming us back here again for another week session of hearings.

Usually, I begin by explaining what we are doing this week, but I think it is most important, because we have Elder Tshaukuesh Penashue here, that we should begin with her services of a prayer for us and for the Inquiry, for Innu children and for the Innu.

I'd like to ask Tshaukuesh to come up to the mic and open our week and our day with prayer.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshinashkumitin, Tshaukuesh. We really appreciate your attendance. Happy to see

you well and so grateful that you're here today.

This Inquiry from the province is titled an Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I think you're doing a good job, Kevin.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I would say so too.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

Usually, you have seen us come here and ask anyone in the community to tell us their life history and their views about Innu life and child protection.

This week's proceedings are a little bit different. Just like when we asked Jack Penashue and Paul Rich to come here, we recognize that many witnesses have special skills and special information to offer the Inquiry. And we're inviting Mary Pia and Lyla to make presentations to the Inquiry this week.

The Inquiry lawyer, Mr. Peter Ralph, starts off by questioning Mary Pia and Lyla this week, and then the other lawyers around the room may have the opportunity to ask some further questions.

We continue to ask people from the community if they'd like to make presentations about their opinions and their life history and we'll be coming back and forth to the community for those purposes as time goes on.

I'm going to ask Nashtash if she would like to have a few comments.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I'd like to say that I welcome everybody to the Inquiry and especially to Mary Pia and Lyla who will be speaking this week and speaking about their experience in their professions.

I would also like to mention that since February we've had 11 deaths in the community, one being in Natuashish. So we acknowledge the families and the communities, and also thinking of Bernadette Nui and her family, who is very sick in St. John's. And I can understand there's been so much grief in our communities. And to continue to do this work and I know it's difficult, but we have to keep doing this work in order to work towards a change.

So again, thank you.

Tshinashkumitin.

Mike?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

That was translated, of course, by Nashtash. You don't need to add anything else, do you, Kevin?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: No.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

We will now ask Commissioner Devine to have a few comments, please.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: It won't come on.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: What is it?

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: I'm not sure what's happening. Too many mics –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible) one off first.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Oh, yup.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Maybe that's – that's a first.

Good morning, and I would like to add my thanks to the Elders and the leadership for their support, and to the community for their welcome.

I look forward to another week here at the Youth Centre to hear of the – to learn more about the history and the experiences of the Innu and the child protection system. To date we've had three weeks of formal hearings, and last year we had five weeks of the community meetings where people told their stories.

We've heard from close to 100 people speak to the Inquiry, from both Natuashish and Sheshatshiu, and we appreciate people coming forward to tell their stories, as difficult as they may be, but we need to hear the stories to help us to understand the experiences of the Innu with the child protection system.

And sometimes when people are telling their stories, or if they're listening to the stories, they can be triggered themselves, in terms of the emotional impact that it has upon them. Innu leadership has established a healing services team, which operates both here in Sheshatshiu as well as in Natuashish. And in that regard, we have Edward Nuna here as part of the healing services team, who can sit with people when they're speaking, or if somebody is triggered and needs to go to a private place, Edward can be with them.

As well, we have Sean Allen here for clinical support, and finally we have a tent that's still in the making, I think, but it should soon be ready. That will be available outside if people want to go to a quiet place any time during the hearing. And finally, it is our wish that people will take care of themselves as well as take care of each other.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

We might be changing the order a little bit, but just before we recognize and take a moment of silence for the people from this Inquiry as well as from the community who have passed in the last while, I should give an opportunity to the people who work with the Inquiry, with the Round Table for the Innu, with the federal government, for the families, for the provincial government, to introduce themselves. Sometimes they change, and we'll start with Mr. Bill Kennedy over here at the end.

W. KENNEDY: Generally not that hard to hear me most of the time. However, William Kennedy. I'm representing the Tshakapesh family who lost their son approximately six years ago now, and anyway, we're certainly hoping to get to the bottom of some of the issues that arose in that circumstance.

Thank you.

A. DING: Good morning.

Adrienne Ding, and I am representing a family. Thank you to everyone.

The Piwas family.

B. BROOKWELL: Good morning.

My name is Benjamin Brookwell and I'm here representing the Innu organizations in this Inquiry.

N. SHEAVES: Good morning.

Nikita Sheaves, I'm one of the lawyers for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

P. WARREN: Good morning.

My name is Philip Warren, and I am now representing the province in the Inquiry, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm new to the Inquiry. It's my first time here and I thank everyone for allowing me the opportunity to appear.

J. TARLTON: Good morning, Commissioners, Elders, members of the Community, counsel.

My name is Jonathan Tarlton. I'm here along with my colleagues, Ms. Kim Duggan and Ms. Kathryn Hill, on behalf of the Government of Canada.

Thank you.

P. RALPH: Yes, good morning, Commissioners, Elders, others in the community and other co-counsel.

My name is Peter Ralph, and I am lead counsel in the Inquiry.

Commissioners, I don't know if you're going to talk about Devon O'Grady.

Okay.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Kevin.

We'll now move to the end of the building where the other members of the Inquiry team who are not part of the legal side but the side that runs the Inquiry, plans the Inquiry, does the long-term considerations of how the Inquiry is run. Please, starting with Brian.

B. HARVEY: Thank you, Bill.

Brian Harvey, lead executive officer with the Inquiry.

R. STEELE: Thank you.

Ruth Steele. I'm the project lead with the Inquiry.

P. BATTCOCK: And my name is Paula Battcock. I'm the hearing Clerk with the Inquiry.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Commissioners, have we missed anybody?

At this time, we should recognize that the community of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish have lost some valuable members. We should remember them.

Also the Inquiry has lost one of its young lawyers. He passed away not too long ago.

His name is Mr. Devon O'Grady. And I'll ask, now, Commissioner Devine and Qupee to remember the others. After that we will stand for a moment of silence.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We'd like to also acknowledge and express our condolences for the passing of Annette Budden, who was so central to the life of Nathan Penashue, the Inquiry's community liaison worker here in Sheshatshiu. Annette was the sun in her son's galaxy, and we lament her loss.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Finally, as many of you know, Elder Theresa Andrew passed away. Theresa was always so generous in sharing her knowledge and wisdom, and in preserving and promoting Innu culture. We will and do miss her greatly.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We'll now take a moment of silence as we stand and remember all these important loved ones in our memories.

[Moment of silence observed.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you all very much.

We have with us a continuation of testimony being given by Mary Pia, and our senior counsel, Mr. Ralph, will begin the day's proceedings of the Inquiry.

P. RALPH: Thank you, Commissioners.

Kevin, I'm not sure – I guess you're familiar, obviously, with Sheshatshiu dialect as well?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Yes, I do.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Do you want him to do double work?

P. RALPH: No, no, I just – I mean, if there are words that are perhaps different in Sheshatshiu than in Mushuau, then maybe you can point that out.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: There's a difference between Natuashish and Sheshatshiu, there's two dialects different. Natuashish has different dialect and Sheshatshiu has different dialect.

P. RALPH: So it's not just words, it's –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: It's not just words, it's –

P. RALPH: – grammar and –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Some I'm good, some I don't, but I do both in court as well when – but again, like I said, I'm a little bit rusty. I haven't done it for a while and –

P. RALPH: Fair enough. Perhaps you can translate that, it's good information.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Commissioners, before I start asking questions, a number of housekeeping items. The first one is that I asked the Commissioners to admit Exhibits P-057 to P-151.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So admitted.

P. RALPH: So yes, and Commissioners – and Mary Pia Benuen, Ms. Benuen will be testifying for today, perhaps into tomorrow. For a number of reasons she did not complete her testimony in January, and one of those reasons was to explore with counsel their position on qualifying Ms. Benuen as an expert.

And there was discussions with Innu Nation, Canada and the province, and these parties have no objection to Ms. Benuen being qualified as an expert, so therefore, I ask that you qualify Ms. Benuen as an expert in public health nursing and/or community health nursing, particularly in relation to the Innu of Sheshatshiu.

The opinions which Ms. Benuen has been asked by Commission counsel to provide address the following matters: current health of the Innu of –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: One second –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I didn't catch all of it. So we might have to start from –

P. RALPH: Start over again, I apologize.

The exhibits –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I got that.

P. RALPH: You got that part?

Commissioners, in January Ms. Pia Benuen, Primary Health Director, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation began testifying.

For a number of reasons, she did not complete her testimony. One of those reasons was to explore with counsel their position on qualifying Ms. Benuen as an expert. Counsel for the Innu Nation, Canada, and the province have no objection to Ms. Benuen being qualified as an expert.

Commissioners, I therefore ask that you qualify Ms. Mary Pia Benuen as an expert in public health nursing and/or community health nursing, particularly in relation to the Innu of Sheshatshiu.

The opinions which Ms. Benuen has been asked by Commission counsel to provide address the following matters: current health of the Innu of Sheshatshiu, trends in the health of the Innu of Sheshatshiu –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: (Inaudible.)

P. RALPH: Trends? Sort of, history.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: – causes of the health issues of the Innu of Sheshatshiu, possible solutions to the health issues.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

The Commissioners and Inquiry are grateful for the co-operation of all counsel in recognizing the expertise of Mary Pia Benuen in these areas.

P. RALPH: I want to point out, Commissioners, that the consent by these parties does not mean they are accepting every opinion that Ms. Benuen provides. They may question her during cross-examination, or they may comment on some of the opinions that she provides, in their closing submissions.

Do counsel for Canada, the province or the Innu Nation have any comments about Ms. Benuen's qualification as an expert?

Ms. Benuen, thanks again for coming today.

And today, we'll explore some similar things that we did before, but first thing I want to talk about is the department that you run now if I can call it that.

M. BENUEN: Okay.

I was hired by the Band back in 1997 as a public health nurse, and I've worked as a nurse back then, community health nursing. And in 2010, I was just promoted to be the health director for the Health Commission in Sheshatshiu.

P. RALPH: I'm going to give Kevin a chance now to –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: And was that the first time there was a health director or had there been a health director before that?

M. BENUEN: That was the first time.

P. RALPH: So, presently, what comes under you as director? So it's Primary Health director, that's the name of the position.

M. BENUEN: Yeah, Primary Health director is looking after the public health department

and there's three public health nurses there and two office support workers.

Also, the clinic is under SIFN and I have one Innu hired as a site facilitator to make sure that the clinic is in a good running condition.

P. RALPH: What's the name of that clinic?

M. BENUEN: Mani Ashini Health Centre.

P. RALPH: And when was that built?

M. BENUEN: 2000.

Okay. Do you want me –?

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: Okay. I'm also responsible for the medical transportation. We do have a 24-hour service and I have three full-time drivers and five casuals.

And I do have a patient navigator stationed at the hospital to liaison for the Innu around the hospital and the medical trips and stuff.

P. RALPH: When was that position established?

M. BENUEN: It's a year now. It was a year in May.

And I've got a referral clerk and an interpreter is at the hospital too and she's – she works out of the hospital, but I have three positions under that because it's a 24-hour service too. I got three people under that one referral clerk and the interpreters.

P. RALPH: And when did that start – that program, the referral clerk and the interpreters?

M. BENUEN: Oh, God. That was when I worked at the hospital as a nurse back on the base. It was already there when I –

P. RALPH: The '90s?

M. BENUEN: – got there in 1990.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: Yeah.

And I got an Aboriginal Diabetes program. I got two people working under that program and they're more into health promotion and illness prevention.

And then I have the home care department. I have one nurse manager there and an LPN, licensed practical nurse. And there's like, 15 home support workers that provide services in the community, in the homes of our clients.

And I got foot care services. That's run by one nurse. And I'm also looking after the Hart Haven Personal Care Home. There's one nurse manager there and there's 10 full-time staff for the five clients we have in that personal care home, which is run by 24-hour service – like, we have people living there.

That's all, I think. Too many.

P. RALPH: Dental program?

M. BENUEN: Yeah, I'm in the process of trying to hire. We have a funding come through to hire somebody to – some kind of a dental assistant, kind of thing, to help the dentists when they come in.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: And I also have the Atlantic Eye Care come in every two months to see the people down here because a lot of people don't like travelling to St. John's for their eyes to be examined, and glasses. So we had Health Canada approved us to get these guys coming from Corner Brook.

P. RALPH: Apenam's House?

M. BENUEN: Huh?

P. RALPH: Apenam's House, does that come under you? No?

M. BENUEN: No.

P. RALPH: Public health? How many work in public health?

M. BENUEN: There's three public health nurses and two office staff workers.

P. RALPH: Any idea how many employees come under you in total?

M. BENUEN: Thirty-six.

P. RALPH: So in '97 you started and, basically, you were by yourself. I guess there was someone – administrative support. Lorraine? Is that –

M. BENUEN: I came by myself in January of 1997, and then I hired – Lorraine got hired in April of '97. So I was by myself for a couple of months before Lorraine came.

P. RALPH: Yes.

So most of this program – and you mentioned that in 1990, I guess, the interpreters were established at the hospital – but most of these programs were developed while you were director.

M. BENUEN: Most of them, but there was another director – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I think Nashtash was health director at the time, and there was already some programming, but since 2010 I have gotten some programming going.

P. RALPH: Right.

I think in '97 the position that you had as Public Health nurse was with Labrador-Grenfell, is that right?

M. BENUEN: No, it was the Band.

P. RALPH: Oh right.

M. BENUEN: The Band Council.

P. RALPH: So would that have been the first time there would have been, sort of, a health professional working for the Band Council?

M. BENUEN: It was run under the Health Commission, and I believe the Band – the Chief at the time applied for monies to have a nurse work here in Sheshatshiu.

P. RALPH: And I don't need the details of this, but I'm assuming the majority of this funding for Primary Health comes from the federal government, is that right?

M. BENUEN: Yes.

P. RALPH: Commissioners, we will certainly be getting more into the weeds of that later on in the testimony, but we don't need to cover the exact details today.

Ms. Benuen, you and I met yesterday and reviewed some documents.

M. BENUEN: Yes, we did.

P. RALPH: And the first one I wanted to talk to you about is P-149.

Can you find it?

M. BENUEN: Yup.

P. RALPH: Do you want to read the first page there, what that document is all about.

M. BENUEN: *Visit to Northern Labrador Native Communities and International Grenfell Association Establishments July 18-23, 1971.*

P. RALPH: And perhaps you can go to the next page, and you can read the first few sentences in the next page to explain what this document is all about.

M. BENUEN: Okay. Introduction one?

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: "The administration of financial arrangements with the Newfoundland-Labrador Government and the International Grenfell Association became the responsibility of Atlantic Region during the last year. Costs have been rising and the International Grenfell Association has been asking us for increased

assistance to continue and improve their service to the Indians and Eskimos of Northern of Northern Labrador. So that we would be in a position to understand such requests, it was decided that Dr. McCaw and I should visit the Labrador communities, confer with the I.G.A. officials, and study their operations at first hand.”

P. RALPH: That’s good.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

I have a question for the Inquiry – Commissioners. Do I go read – interpret this introduction as well, or just what the wordings are saying?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: No, you can read it (inaudible).

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.] I don’t like to use the terms Indians and Eskimos.

I don’t think – we don’t need with that anymore, and I don’t feel comfortable interpreting that in any way or form.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

M. BENUEN: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

P. RALPH: Kevin, where are you reading from now? What page are you on?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I’m reading Northern Labrador (inaudible). This is document, right?

P. RALPH: Yeah.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: So I’m here –

P. RALPH: Okay.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: – and I read it – this part (inaudible).

P. RALPH: (Inaudible.)

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: All of that –

P. RALPH: What’s that?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: – it’s public.

P. RALPH: Okay.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I think it is.

P. RALPH: Okay. Okay.

Ms. Benuen, I’d ask you to go down now to where it says Northwest River. I’ll ask you to start reading and I’ll tell you when I want you to stop.

M. BENUEN: Okay.

“North West River is a village of 1000 population divided approximately 50:50. Indians to Whites and Settlers. Separation of the races is somewhat apparent since the Indian Community of 500 people live on the south shore bordering on Lake Melville. Approximately 50 Eskimos also live in the white section. It is in this section where the I.G.A. Hospital, child care establishment and other buildings are located. The two sections of the village are connected by a cable car crossing the river. There is no road connection between the two sections. However, it is the white section which is most isolated from the outside, since a gravel road from Goose Bay (25 miles) ends at the Indian community. Conversely the medical facilities ate somewhat difficult for the Indians to reach, especially in emergencies.”

P. RALPH: That’s fine.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: And Kevin, just for your benefit, this document was written in 1971. And so if you’re not comfortable – I mean, obviously the language that was used is not acceptable in 2024, and if you’re not comfortable using that language, then you

can use whatever words you want to use and replace them.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Yes, thank you.

[Mushuau-aimun spoken] – what was the year, 19 –?

P. RALPH: What's that?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: What was the year again?

P. RALPH: Nineteen seventy-one.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

I'd like to be excused, take a break.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

I was going to ask you that in just a few more minutes, but that's good. Let's have a break (inaudible).

Recess

[Inquiry in progress at start of recording.]

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Keep reading.

M. BENUEN: "One public health nurse, based at North West River, covers all the native communities in Labrador – an impossible task which will be discussed later.

"The Indian community at North West River is located on a slope overlooking the river and Lake Melville. The population of 500 is housed in what appear to be neat, attractive homes until one comes closer – and then enters!! These houses, though built recently in an area of severe winter weather, have no foundations, no insulation, no water, no sewage disposal facilities. Furnishings are sparse, and heating is generally by obsolete wood stoves.

"The homes generally contain a general purpose room and three or four small bedrooms, and for the most part evidence of housekeeping was non-existent. Sewage and waste water is disposed of from the back door, and garbage is strewn everywhere. Water is provided by two taps in the community but the water is foul tasting, full of iron and so the Indians carry their water from the river – some as much as ½ mile.

"A few of these Indians have employment in a saw mill one mile from the community – a few work in the woods cutting trees for lumber and pulp, some are employed by I.G.A., but most are unemployed. The people appear fairly healthy except for the inevitable infected insect bites. According to the priest and Dr. Paddon, abuse of alcohol is a major problem in the community. Tuberculosis is the major medical problem."

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, these documents (inaudible.)

Ms. Benuen, this document was written around 1971, and I think that would make you about –?

M. BENUEN: Yeah, 11.

P. RALPH: So when we read the description of the houses, does that match your experience in your home?

M. BENUEN: Yes.

Yeah, when we were first given the houses, it was just like, I guess, a dwelling. It's true that there was no running water and there was no heaters or anything, so –
[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

M. BENUEN: And I remember when we first had our house. We, the kids, were really excited because we moved from a tent to a house and we were happy and excited, like, the first few months and then winter came. The houses were really cold, and we had to go and get wood and carry water from the

pond to – and then a lot of times my mom used to just warm the water up to do some laundry.

And those houses, eventually in the end we had to sleep in the kitchen where there was a stove, because the rooms were all frosted with – on the walls, there was ice frosting on the walls, possibly because of condensation from us breathing in the room.

And my parents were so used to the tent because it was warm and people were close to each other in a tent and, eventually, in the late 70s, I believe, my parents abandoned their home because they weren't happy in there and they moved to a tent.

They weren't happy in there because of the way the house was built; no running water and the houses were really cold. And if you don't have wood – like we kids used to get the wood and gets water because my dad and my mom were trying to do the big stuff like hunt and go and get a lot of wood so that we'll be warm in the house.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, your family was from Davis Inlet, is that right?

M. BENUEN: Yes.

P. RALPH: And you were born in Sheshatshiu in 1960?

M. BENUEN: Yes.

P. RALPH: And they would have moved from old Davis Inlet to Sheshatshiu before you were born?

M. BENUEN: Yeah.

P. RALPH: So how well did they adapt to life in the community and life in the house?

M. BENUEN: After they moved or when they moved into the house?

P. RALPH: When they moved to Sheshatshiu and into the house.

M. BENUEN: Oh.

My parents were – my grandparents moved first to Sheshatshiu and then my parents followed after, and we all lived in a big building. It wasn't like a house. It was a building that when they came, they moved in with my grandparents and we were all – they were all together.

And then my parents moved to the tent when my grandparents moved to their tent. So my parents moved to a tent and we lived there up until 1966, '67, when we moved into the new house, and it was there that things start to go downhill because we were not used to that house and it didn't feel comfortable there because there was no water, there was – it was always cold.

And I believe that's when the alcohol abuse started, parents started to drink a lot and we were left in the house, in a cold house most of the time, and there was hardly any food because they spent their monies that they got from welfare on booze and molasses and yeast to make their homebrews.

I believe my parents found it very difficult and unable to adapt to the new surrounding of a house because they were not used to that kind of a building that they were given and feel like the government wanted them to stay in a house instead of a tent.

The only good thing I remember about that house is, like, we had some privacy. And that when the child welfare workers came, my father was able to lock the door on them and wouldn't open the door. So I think that was good in a way that he was able to keep us safe from being taken away.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, last time you spoke to the Commissioners, you talked about how well they would do in Nutshimit, your parents. I wanted to ask – I mean, so there's this description about this raw sewage being in the community and garbage around – would you have a similar experience in Nutshimit? Was it a different – ?

M. BENUEN: There is a difference in Nutshimit. People were more – because Nutshimit was a sacred place for the Innu,

people looked after the land. They know how to dispose of garbage 'cause they burn it, and the honey buckets were like being disposed of in a way that it's not noticeable at all in Nutshimit.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: Because people looked after Nutshimit and take it as a sacred place, a safe place for them so they have to respect the land as it was really – it was a place where they feel happy and a place that they want to be. They feel more happier in there and –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mr. Pastiwet, how are you feeling? You good?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Yes, yes.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: A few more minutes, you're still good?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Yes.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, I guess you eventually realized that there was something wrong with your house as a child?

M. BENUEN: Yeah, we noticed that you can live in it and stay there, but it wasn't comfortable. You don't have running water; you don't have heating servicing the rooms. I mean, it seemed as though everybody was going in their different directions.

As in a tent, people were very close and talking and being loving to one another, but in the house, it seemed as though everybody just kind of disappeared in their own little rooms and that communication was falling apart and that communication was falling apart and the togetherness was sort of falling apart too.

Even though that the house was there for all of us to live in but it seems as though everything was just sort of falling apart once we moved into our house.

P. RALPH: So it wasn't just the house physically falling apart, but the sort of, fabric of the family was also affected?

M. BENUEN: Yes, the family was – I don't know about other families, but it is with my own experience what I remember happening in my own – in our household.

And that's when I also notice that there was a lot of alcohol abuse and there was a lot of violence that we had to see and that there was a lot of child neglect and child abuse, not sexually but physical abuse. My dad was mad all the time and I guess he thought punishing us – like hitting us was a punishment if we didn't listen, or he'd just get mad at something and take it out on us.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, but it was a very different experience in Nutshimit, with your parents.

M. BENUEN: Yeah.

P. RALPH: Why is that do you think?

M. BENUEN: I don't know. I'm not going to say I know what it was but, what I see and what I can understand from what was happening at that age, every fall, since the early '70s, that we used to go to the country in September and come back in December, and my parents were really, really healthy out there and they worked really hard for our survival, and that they were very loving towards us.

But soon as we came into the community, we know we were not going to see our parents because of drinking and partying and that. I know then that we won't have food in the house to feed our younger siblings, because soon as they got off that plane, that they left us home and we were the ones attending to our younger siblings, while they go off with their friends and drinking with them.

Because we missed a lot of school when we're going three, four months at a time in the country – and then the school system was run by the RC school board at one point. And also then, that's when they said,

the school said, to my parents: You can't take your children to the country. They have to go to school or your Family Allowance will be cut off.

And I think the last time they took me, I was 14 and they had been threatened by child welfare and the school that if I don't go to school their child welfare allowance – I mean the welfare cheque and Family Allowance will be cut off. So they told me I had to stay behind for school.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, yesterday we talked about you became aware that there were, I guess, houses in the community that had running water, sewage and heat. Can you remember how old you would have been?

M. BENUEN: I might have been around 12.

I had friends across the river, and sometimes they take me to their house and I'd see water, and could see their running water there, and the heaters on the wall, I see them. And I was kind of envious, at the time, of them. And I told my friend, I said: We don't have that at our house across the river while you guys have it here.

So I kind of said to myself in back of my mind – I was a little child thinking this, you know – I felt like we were treated differently from the people across there. We're all in the same area, but our housing was different. And I had thought of myself, why can't we have what they have in their house, running water and heat. And like, their kitchens were nice, their houses were more nicer and our houses here were all the same and no running water and no heat.

I was a kind of a little bit jealous when I go visit my friends over there.

P. RALPH: Were there houses on this side of the river as, that had running water and sewage?

M. BENUEN: Yeah there was some.

There was teacher residences here in Sheshatshiu that – all the teachers lived

here at one point back then, and there were teacher residents here and some of them had families so we were friends with their children, so we kind of go and visit.

Sometimes they'll ask us to come and visit if we're playing outside. There was a playground there by the church and their kids used to play there too, so we kind of go out, go with them to their houses and sometimes they'd let us come in and we have cookies. But they did have running water. The teachers did have running water and they have heaters in their homes, while the rest of the community didn't.

Sometimes there were a few times that I babysat for the teachers when they go shopping or something for a few hours, so after I did my babysitting I asked one of the teachers if I can have a bath in the bathtub. So they usually let me.

P. RALPH: Yeah.

M. BENUEN: 'Cause we didn't have running water, and the school had a shower program at the – where each grades have maybe once or twice a week, you take a shower there at the school.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: Mm-hmm.

There used to be two people that worked there that take the kids to the shower rooms and supervise them.

P. RALPH: Right.

M. BENUEN: Mm-hmm.

So the one lady would – did the boys and the other lady did the girls, kind of thing, yeah.

P. RALPH: So in that report, in that part you just read there was three, I guess health issues raised.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: There was a lady for the boys and lady for the girls.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: There was infected insect bites –

M. BENUEN: Mm-hmm.

P. RALPH: – abuse of alcohol and tuberculosis. Do you want to talk about those?

M. BENUEN: A time in the early '70s, I guess, we had – there was a lot of impetigo. Like, kids were scratching onto their insect bites, and they all got infected and there was a lot of that. And then also the kids had a lot of impetigo and lice on their heads.

And with tuberculosis, there was a lot of it back then too. I remember my dad had it too and my older sister. She was 12 and she had to stay in the hospital for 18 months getting injections every day, the medication, so she would get better from TB. And my dad spent a whole year at the hospital for TB, trying to get treated for TB.

Eventually, the hospital was rampant with TB patients so they took off the one wing at the hospital where all the TB patients were – and most of them were Inuit and Innu. And the hospital got – it was kind of overcrowded with the clients with TB, so my dad was sent out to the sanatorium in St. John's where he spent another year.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I'm going to ask that you clue up in the next few minutes in consideration of the interpreter, and then we'll have a lunch break.

P. RALPH: So, Ms. Benuen, in terms of infected insect bites, tuberculosis, is that related to the conditions that the Innu were living in?

M. BENUEN: Poor hygiene, I believe, because there was hardly any running water for moms to clean up their children. And lot of times the only water you can use is from

the pump or the pond. And I assume 'cause a lot of it has to do with poor hygiene and lack of nutrition. Like, there was a lot of children that were malnourished too, and I think a lot of the parents were spending their monies on booze – I mean alcohol – when they had small children at home, so the monies were more so spent on the alcohol than food.

So there was a lot of malnourishment and a lot of kids with different kinds of skin conditions. And with TB but you can't – if you don't have good nutrition the tuberculosis usually attack your body. When my dad and my sister had TB back then, we were all in a family – my mom and the whole – my siblings, myself, were all treated with chemoprophylaxis for one year so that we don't develop. We did have TB germs in us but they weren't attacking our body to make us sick. So they gave us this medicine so that we don't get sick with TB.

P. RALPH: Just a few more questions. In terms of alcohol abuse, what would you – how would you, kind of, explain why that was happening in the community and so not in Nutshimit?

M. BENUEN: I think it's more readily available here in the community because in Nutshimit, you don't get alcohol there and that the people were more busy in Nutshimit and they were, like, hunting for their survival. And when you're here in the community, it's like it's available and you don't – houses are always open for you to go in and enjoy yourself and drink with your friends and that.

I know my parents, when they weren't drinking they just stayed home with us. When they're not drinking, they're inside our house not doing anything, just being with us. But when they're drinking and drunk, they're out to socialize, so it's probably also used as a socialization.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: For people to get together and be amongst each other with their drinking partners.

P. RALPH: Do you think your parents had a greater sense of control over their lives when they were in Nutshimit?

M. BENUEN: Most definitely because they were so happy out there. They worked really hard, and they provided the love and the support to the children – to us.

It seems as though the Nutshimit is a free country. People can do whatever they want and that, roam around whenever they feel like it. And once you're in the community it means as though there is some control, either by the Catholic denomination or the child welfare or some kind of a government. It seems as though you always have to look out for yourself when you're in the community, that you'll be doing something wrong and then you'll get a punishment for it.

P. RALPH: Break?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yes, thank you.

We'll now have a break for an hour and a half. We'll be back at 1:30 this afternoon.

Thank you, Kevin.

P. RALPH: Thanks, Kevin.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: [Inquiry in progress at start of recording] – lunch break.

Mary Pia, I'll remind you, you're still sworn and giving sworn testimony.

Thank you, Kevin, I understand that you have to leave around – just after 3ish. You let us know when you want a break and you let us know when you have to leave, no problem.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Yes, thank you, okay.

P. RALPH: Mary Pia – sorry, Ms. Benuen, we're still talking about that document from

1971, that report, and just a few questions I want to ask you about that.

Page 4 of that document, there's a sentence that said, "The people appear fairly healthy except for inevitable infected insect bites." Any thoughts about that? Why, despite the fact they were living in difficult circumstances, they were still healthy.

M. BENUEN: The people were like, I guess, healthy around that time, but there were a lot of children playing outside where there's a lot of mosquito bites, mosquitos in the summertime –

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: – and they got infected, I guess, when they're scratching their bites. I think, that's the only thing that I can think of right now is the mosquito bites were like – there were a lot of mosquito bites – I mean, mosquitos back then because there was hardly any houses, and it was all woods and stuff. There was a lot of trees near around the houses and tents.

And I think it was there was a lot of – there was no running water around, so parents would probably be unable to keep up with keeping the little ones clean.

P. RALPH: Yes.

But the people themselves were healthy.

M. BENUEN: Yeah, they were healthy.

P. RALPH: And what do you make of that? I guess it's a very different picture right now, in this community.

M. BENUEN: Back in 1971, I guess, there was hardly any diabetes. There was no heart disease. There was no eczemas and stuff like that, and people were – there was hardly any vehicles at the time, so people were walking a lot and if they had to do anything, they walked to wherever they want to. A lot of them just doing their work without any vehicle.

I'm going to tell you about my parents before. My parents were very healthy – fairly healthy. They weren't overweight or they didn't have diabetes when I was growing up and it was only recently – in the '70s that my dad got TB and my dad died from reactivation of his TB in his lungs, and my mom died of brain aneurysm.

P. RALPH: Is – diet play a factor now compared to [audio loss due to technical issue.]

M. BENUEN: I strongly believe it has to do with diet. A lot of it has to do with diet, because we do not watch what we're eating, and we do eat a lot of processed food, while people in Nutshimit used to eat the wild meats and stuff. Even when we weren't – when my parents didn't go to the country, they always had some wild meats given to them or sent in from Davis Inlet because my dad had his brother and his sisters were there.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, can you recall when the community would have – most homes would have received water and sewage?

M. BENUEN: It might have been in the '80s, like, early '80s.

P. RALPH: And do you know how it came to pass that the house was built that you eventually moved in? Do you know – did your family build it or was it built for you?

M. BENUEN: It was built for us, maybe by the government. I'm not sure. Maybe through the Band.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, I guess during this period of time, it seems to me that there were many children who were living in circumstances that were a risk to their health and well-being.

M. BENUEN: All the houses were, like, overcrowded. There were a lot of people having a lot of children and the houses were overcrowded. And that still happens today, overcrowding in the house. So I believe at some point that there were – like, whatever

they may have, any illness or anything, it was passed on towards each other.

And also, when there was a lot of drinking going on, there was, like, children stealing from parents to drink. So a lot of the youth drinking were stealing from parents to get drunk, too. And it's also been known that – I know in around my family circle, people were – my siblings, when they try to kind of tell their children not to do drugs and not to do alcohol and the child returns back and says: You used to drink, too. But I think we did taught our children the bad habits they're now facing – experiencing.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken] –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Some of those bad habits were passed on.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, I'm going to ask you to go to the page 8 on P-149, the document we were just looking at.

M. BENUEN: This one?

P. RALPH: Yeah, the last paragraph there. Can you read that?

M. BENUEN: "I believe that the native communities would benefit from a program similar to our community health worker program. Could we explore the possibility of offering assistance to I.G.A. in one or more of our training programs? There are many other problems connected with the inadequate housing, lack of water and sanitation equipment which will take many years to improve in an area of very severe climatic conditions. However a good public health education program could be very beneficial in helping the people improve their health status within the existing facilities."

P. RALPH: Community health worker program – that was a program that was eventually created here, is that right?

M. BENUEN: Yeah. I believe it was created in conjunction with the IGA at that time, and the federal government. And it started in the early '80s, I believe, and it was called community health representative program, and it was offered at the Community College in Goose Bay.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: And it was a year-long program and there was a couple people here that did the program. I know the late Mary May Osmond and late Mary Jane Nui did that program, and a couple from Natuashish and some people from up the coast, Nain and Hopedale and that.

P. RALPH: Was that too long – that was too long, Kevin?

[Dialogue between M. Benuen and Interpreter Pastiwet in Innu-aimun.]

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I think, you know, Commissioners, that I asked that one person finish their questions and the answer comes back after I interpret one –

P. RALPH: Right.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: – instead of trying to do same at the same time.

P. RALPH: Let's start over.

M. BENUEN: Okay. Huh.

P. RALPH: I'll ask the question and he'll go.

M. BENUEN: Okay.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, so the community health worker program did eventually – was established here in Sheshatshiu?

M. BENUEN: It was offered to the people in Sheshatshiu, but it didn't go – they didn't do the studies here. They went to the Community College in Goose Bay, but it was in conjunction with the Grenfell and the government, I believe, the federal government.

There was two or three people from Sheshatshiu that took that program and two from Natuashish – I mean Davis Inlet. It wasn't only for the Innu. The Inuit people from Nain and Hopedale, Makkovik and, I believe, Rigolet or Postville did that program. There were two from each community, I believe.

P. RALPH: Who were some of those people that did the course?

M. BENUEN: The people that took that program was late Mary May Osmond and the late Mary Jane Nui.

P. RALPH: I read this report, it's interesting to note it doesn't appear as though the authors of the report spoke to any Innu, or they don't – they don't record in their report that they spoke to any Innu.

M. BENUEN: I don't think the Innu were consulted in regards to this paper here and – because I've never heard of it and it's the first time I seen it was yesterday when you showed it to me. And I don't ever hear of anybody talking about it, like, in the past.

P. RALPH: Those are my questions about that report.

Is there anything else about that report you'd like to comment on?

M. BENUEN: I guess with this report, I think the good that it – that came out of this report was the development of that community health representative program because Mary May and Mary Jane, when they finished the program, they came back and work with people with what they were trained with, and they did work for the community for a long time.

P. RALPH: Maybe you can spend a few minutes describing the kind of work that they did.

M. BENUEN: They did a lot of work in the community. They visited – they did do home visits and they ordered stuff, like some pamphlets. And if an Elder needs a work at

home, they provided that work. They looked for funds how to provide the work.

P. RALPH: (Inaudible) works in the community. When did they pass?

M. BENUEN: Mary May passed maybe 10 years – about 10 years ago. And Mary Jane passed three or four years ago.

P. RALPH: I guess they did other things aside from being community health workers, did they have other positions?

M. BENUEN: Yeah, they did a lot of work. They were the pillars of the community, doing a lot of work in the community for people and youth and children.

I know Mary May was more so into counselling, mental health and doing some work in the alcohol and drug abuse program, and Mary Jane was more into children and youth at school and trying to keep them clean, I guess, and making sure that all the children get their immunizations. So they did a lot of work in the community. Those were the two – well, there was another one, Rose Gregoire – that worked together and trying to make a healthy community.

P. RALPH: Yes.

P. RALPH: The community health worker program might have been very helpful for the work that they did in the community.

M. BENUEN: Yes, it was very helpful and, I believe, they did learn a lot because it was a year-long program, and after each module, they came to the community and put that knowledge into practice.

P. RALPH: And you think that they would have done that course at what time, approximately?

M. BENUEN: I believe it's around the early '80s.

Oh, there was three of them. Anastasia's sister took that course too, Germaine. She has been long gone too – passed away too.

And Germaine and I worked together up until her retirement, which was maybe five, six years ago.

P. RALPH: So once you became a public health nurse in '97, you would have worked fairly closely with these women?

M. BENUEN: Yes, I did. I worked with Germaine very closely until she retired, and she loved her job. She loved visiting the Elders and the Elders loved her, and sometimes if she don't go for a couple of days and the Elder calls: Where's Germaine? We lost Germaine, kind of thing. So I tell Germaine go and see them again.

Yeah, she did her job really good.

P. RALPH: Yes.

M. BENUEN: She was really good at it.

P. RALPH: Commissioners, I'm going to move on now to another document and it's P-145.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

I'd like to take the short break.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good. (Inaudible) thank you very much.

Recess

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible) you're ready.

P. RALPH: The next document that we'll address is P-145, and this is a letter written June 9, 1977.

And it's written by a J. G. Sinclair, director general, Program Development, Medical Services Branch.

The letter is addressed to Dr. Katie Cooke, Director, Research Division Policy, Research and Evaluation Branch, Indian and Eskimo Affairs.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.] Katie Cooke. Is that the one?

P. RALPH: Yes.

Ms. Benuen, have you got that document in front of you?

M. BENUEN: Yeah.

P. RALPH: Could you read the first paragraph?

M. BENUEN: "In April of this year our Department received a report from Dr. Peter Sarsfield entitled 'Survey of Health Facilities in Northern Labrador, 1977'. Dr. Sarsfield has been commissioned by the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association and the Labrador Inuit Association to undertake this study for/on their behalf. A copy of this report is attached for your information. Following receipt of this report a team of Medical Services Branch Medical Officers visited Northern Labrador during the period" April 11 - 15, 1997 –

P. RALPH: I'm sorry, '77?

M. BENUEN: '77.

– in order "to ascertain whether or not Dr. Sarsfield's report on the situation of health and related conditions in Labrador were as desperate as described. The Medical Services Branch team was unanimous and thought Doctor Sarsfield's report was understated with respect to the living conditions of the Native People in that area of the country."

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

What would be the word for understated?

P. RALPH: Yes, understated.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: It's not expressed strongly enough. It's not stated strongly enough.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Commissioners, I should point out that at this point, we're relying on the federal documents as opposed to provincial documents to get some of this information. Some of the historical provincial documents are in the archives at The Rooms and we have an archivist collecting those. That work has not been complete but the records of the provincial government –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: So the documents that were given to us by the federal government included those historical documents but the province wasn't in the position to do the same thing. The older documents that we have, came from the federal government.

The provincial documents, the older ones, we have to get ourselves. The Inquiry has to collect them ourselves. That work is almost complete, so in subsequent hearings, some of those documents will be admitted.

Ms. Benuen, Dr. Sarsfield, Peter Sarsfield, do you know who that is?

M. BENUEN: Yes, I know.

I knew Dr. Sarsfield back in 1976. The summer of '76 and summer of '77 and summer of '78, I worked at the hospital across the river as a summer student and I have met Dr. Sarsfield there as a doctor. I kind of sort of worked with him because sometimes I interpreted for him when the elderly clients are there and are not able to understand. And I found Dr. Sarsfield to be genuinely careful of the community and the community members in Sheshatshiu.

P. RALPH: Commissioners, I've been unable to find that survey that's referenced there. We may have it, I've just been unable to find it in the thousands of documents we have. So hopefully we'll find it soon.

What we have are reports based on visits by these doctors responding to Dr. Sarsfield's report.

Ms. Benuen, could you read the rest of that letter, please.

M. BENUEN: Yes, I did.

P. RALPH: Could you read the –

M. BENUEN: Read it?

P. RALPH: Yes, out loud, sorry.

M. BENUEN: Okay.

"We also attach a copy of Dr. O. J. Rath's observations regarding health and related problems which the Native People of Labrador face on day-to-day basis. It was felt that you and other members of your Department should be aware of the findings since they relate in large measure to the social, economic and living conditions of the Native People.

"The Deputy Minister in our Department has been made aware of the situation and will no doubt be contacting your Deputy Minister. Would you be so kind as to let us know when your Department becomes involved to the point where you may be placing the issue before your Deputy in order that we can keep Mr. Rawson appropriately informed. In our view any effective approach must necessarily be comprehensive and therefore multi-departmental in character.

"Should you wish further information regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly, J. G. Sinclair"

P. RALPH: The next document I want to refer to is P-151.

And this is a document referred to in the previous letter, and covered is "Visit to Northern Labrador Native Communities April 11-15, 1977."

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: If I could just interrupt you for one second.

Elder Penashue is wondering how the Inquiry is able to get these documents which go back so long ago. What is the procedure by which the Inquiry was able to get these documents?

One second, Tshaukuesh?

ELDER PENASHUE: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: She's wondering.

P. RALPH: The Counsel for the Government of Canada might be able to explain how their records are recorded, but we gave them a summons. The *Inquiries Act* grants you authority to summons documents and we gave a summons to the Government of Canada. And perhaps Mr. Tarlton or one of the counsel for Canada can explain how they keep their documents.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: (Inaudible.)

J. TARLTON: Thank you.

To answer Elder Penashue's question, some of the documents are kept electronically. Other documents, there may as well be written or microfiche copies.

Each government department for Canada has a retention policy – how long they keep the documents. If the documents are determined to have certain relevance or importance after the retention period has passed it will be sent to Library and Archives Canada –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

Canada?

J. TARLTON: Canada, yeah.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Canada, yeah.

J. TARLTON: – located in Ottawa, and they may be classified regarding their accessibility or access by the public to them.

Just give me a second – depending on the type of document, the public may have a right of access or it may be restricted to researchers who obtain permission to go and look at them.

It can be a very lengthy and time-consuming process and we often hire researchers to go and do the work for us. We have been doing this since the Inquiry began and we received the request to provide documents.

That is (inaudible) the Elder and to the Commission and the members of the public who are here.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you both for your responses.

Tshaukuesh, it's a very good question you asked. You passed Grade 12 today.

Thank you for helping people understand the authority that an Inquiry Commission has to get documents that might be quite old if we have to do that.

Got it, Kevin?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Just give me a second. I do, yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, no sweat. Not to worry.

Well, thank you for asking about how the Inquiry has the power to reach into the government's history and receive these kinds of documents from a long time ago.

We're only allowed to ask for documents or receive documents that are relevant, that are important to the mandate of the Inquiry. You can't just get anything in the world from them. You have to ask exactly what you're looking for.

Thank you so much.

P. RALPH: So the picture is a bit different with the province. There are a lot of documents written by officials of the province, perhaps even before it was a province, before 1949 and post '49. We've hired an archivist by the name of Michaela Doucette.

Some of those, I think, go back to the '20s and '30s. Interesting letters between Roman Catholic priests and brothers and the government. We'll be presenting those in other hearings later on.

Ms. Benuen, if you could turn to page 2 of that document and read the first three paragraphs.

M. BENUEN: First three?

P. RALPH: Yes. I'll tell you when to stop.

M. BENUEN: Only on page two? Okay.

"Visit to Northern Labrador Native Communities April 11 - 15, 1977."

"This visit to Northern Labrador communities was organized so that we could compare conditions with those seen during a previous visit (July 18 – 23, 1971), meet with Native leaders to discuss the health needs of the Native people, and to appraise the total environmental conditions and health needs in the light of a report prepared by Dr. Peter Sarsfield who conducted an extensive survey of the health facilities in Northern Labrador for the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association and the Labrador Inuit Association.

"Arrangements for visiting the communities were made through Dr. Tony Paddon, Director Northern Health Services, International Grenfell Association. Over-night accommodation in Grenfell establishments, and transportation was by Turbo-Beaver ski equipped aircraft.

"The following medical service officials, accompanied by Dr. Paddon, toured the northern communities:

- Dr. Brian Brett - Principal Medical Officer, Program Management
- Dr. Otto Rath - Senior Adviser - Indian Health
- Dr. Lloyd Hirtle - Regional Director - Atlantic Region
- Dr. Dermott Waldron - Acting Assistant Regional Director - Atlantic region."

P. RALPH: You can stop there. That's good, thank you.

Ms. Benuen, I ask you to go to page 4 now. At the top there it says, "The International Grenfell Association also operates...." Could you read those three paragraphs?

M. BENUEN: Okay.

"The International Grenfell Association also operates a number of other institutions at North West River – an Infants' home, which cares for disadvantaged and misused infants (up to age 4). This is a newly constructed facility, and provides good facilities and what appears to be excellent care for these children.

"There is also a dormitory for children up to age 14 who because of family problems are attending school at North West River. This building has recently been remodelled and extended and provides good care and boarding facilities.

"Another new dormitory building provides accommodation for 75 high school students. The northern communities do not have any schools providing teaching beyond Grade IX, so high school students must come to North West River."

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, so this report was based on a visit that happened April 11 to 15, 1977.

When's your birthday?

M. BENUEN: June 21.

P. RALPH: So you would have been 16?

M. BENUEN: Yeah.

P. RALPH: Do you remember these homes? Do you remember the Infants' home?

M. BENUEN: Yes, I remember the infants' home and I remember the dorm, the young adult – I mean the young children's dormitory, and the one for the high school students.

P. RALPH: Were any Innu children in these –?

M. BENUEN: There may have been some, but – yeah, the majority of the infants' home, I believe, was the Innu children. When I was working at the hospital in the summers, like as a summer student as a nurse's aide, oftentimes the infants' home didn't have enough staff, so my supervisor sent me there to help out.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Was it 1987?

P. RALPH: Sorry, 1977.

M. BENUEN: And also the dormitory for the older children – some of the kids, I know them from Sheshatshiu; they were our friends. Some of my friends were there at the older children's dormitory.

P. RALPH: And did you know, at the time, why the new infants would have been there? (Inaudible.)

M. BENUEN: From what I can remember, I know some of the babies that were admitted at the infants' home, they were first admitted at the hospital. And at that point, I think, it was the doctor's decision to send them over to infants' home because of not being looked after right. And some were maybe under the advice of child – I mean welfare, that they were placed over there.

The older children's dormitory was mostly welfare-apprehended children that were taken there.

P. RALPH: To your knowledge, the infants and children that were there, was that a

short-term thing or long-term? Did they go home again to Sheshatshiu?

M. BENUEN: They did go home eventually but some of them stayed there for couple years. And those in the infants' home, once they were became of age they were moved into the older kids' dormitory.

P. RALPH: And would you have known some of those children and their families?

M. BENUEN: Yeah, some of them were my friends. I know about maybe four or five of them were my friends. And they were family, my parents were friends with their families, so I kind of know all them personally.

P. RALPH: And how did they fare? I think, last day, you spoke about some of the people you'd met or you knew in the community that went to North West River and then they were sent elsewhere.

M. BENUEN: Yeah, I had friends staying at the dormitory for the youth, like older children. And when it closed down, they were sent out to St. John's – so on the Island somewhere. Two of my friends were sent out there. And they did come back at one point in their lives, after they became of age, around 18, but they kind of didn't really fit in, I guess, and they left again.

P. RALPH: Yeah.

M. BENUEN: And their parents had gotten into severe alcoholism, so I guess that's when they decide to go back onto the Island.

P. RALPH: When you would spend time in the infants' home, were the parents of the infants there at the home as well?

M. BENUEN: No.

Sometimes they would put the kids at the infants' home when families go to the country and the babies are sickly. So sometimes the doctor, kind of, I guess advises to the parents that you can't take

your child to Nutshimit; then maybe we can place them over there.

P. RALPH: Kevin, I asked if when she was working in the infant home, whether the parents of the infants would be there.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

P. RALPH: Do you want to answer that question again?

You want her to answer it again?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: Yes.

P. RALPH: Okay. Let's do that again.

M. BENUEN: I'll do it again?

P. RALPH: Yeah, do it again.

M. BENUEN: Okay.

I didn't see any parents there the few times that I was over at the infants' home.

And, I believe sometimes the doctors, kind of, suggested or advised the parents to leave their babies there if they want to go to Nutshimit or somewhere, that they leave them due to illness or sickness. So if the babies are prone to sickness.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Sorry to interrupt.

How's your time going, Mr. Pastiwet? How are you feeling?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I'm okay.

It's just like I, you know, asked earlier that one person finish their sentence, then –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: – instead of –

P. RALPH: I'm so sorry, Kevin. I'm sorry.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: But it's like, I can't keep up anything –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We will –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: – and because this Inquiry is very important –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good for you.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: – and I don't want to mislead or mis-say anything in the Inquiry.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We totally appreciate it.

P. RALPH: I'll ask him a question –

M. BENUEN: You'll ask the question.

P. RALPH: And then he'll say Innu. Okay.

M. BENUEN: Okay. Okay.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, could you start reading where it says North West River.

M. BENUEN: "The community of North West River straddles the shore on both sides of the river as it enters Lake Melville. On the south side reside the 500 Indians – on the north approximately 500 white people, settlers and approximately 75 Inuit people. The only link between the two halves of the community is a six passenger cable car.

"All the hospital and International Grenfell Association facilities are on the north side of the river, so the community is divided by geography, by culture, and undoubtedly by biases. Housing on the north side is relatively good, and most are serviced by running water and septic tanks. However, the south side Indian community is a totally different picture. Housing in this community can only be described as deplorable.

"Most houses were built around 1967, and for the most part are now beyond repair. There are no foundations, little insulation, windows are broken and stuffed with burlap and plastic bags, or covered with cardboard or boards. Many houses have been torn apart by vandals during the occupants'

absence – so that only the framework now stands. None of the homes have running water or sanitary facilities – most are heated by ancient wood burning kitchen stoves. Garbage and toilet wastes are disposed of in heaps outside the front door.

"There is only one water tap in the community, so water must be carried long distances from this tap or from a lake approximately ½ mile from the community. This community is a picture of apathy and hopelessness, alcohol problems are rampant. Yet this community has a large, well maintained school with gymnasium. We are told that it is only available to the residents during school hours – it could be a recreational and training centre for the benefit of all in the community."

What –

P. RALPH: Yeah.

M. BENUEN: Go ahead?

P. RALPH: Well give him a chance now too.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: What?

P. RALPH: You can read now some of that.

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: How much time do you have there. Kevin?

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: I've got, I'd say, four minutes, but –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

(Inaudible) and then I'll ask Tshaukuesh to close our day with a prayer.

P. RALPH: Ms. Benuen, what's your understanding in terms of how it came to pass that people in the community sort of settled here and lived most of the time? Do you know how that happened?

M. BENUEN: From what I heard and from what I understood from the Elders that

passed on, they were kind of forced into the community by the missionaries to settle here in Sheshatshiu.

P. RALPH: Do you know if a promise of houses was part of that arrangement?

M. BENUEN: I believe there were houses, and schooling was one of them. Your kids will be schooled and something like they'll grow up to be professionals. And there were going to be nice houses you can move into. Those were the kind of things that were imposed on the Innu people in Sheshatshiu.

And there were also, if you don't stay in the community, we're going to take your children or stuff like that, that if your children don't go to school, they'll be taken away.

P. RALPH: When you read these reports – which I don't think you've seen either of these reports before – how does it make you feel?

M. BENUEN: It seems like it's all real now. I only hear this from people, my parents and my grandparents, the stuff that was said to them. And now that I see it in black and white, it seems as though the outside people were in control of us and we were not able to make our own decisions back then. It seems like either do this or you'll face consequences. That's the way I understand it now.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Kevin.

We've been pretty tough on you today. It's a long day for you; maybe short for us. Lawyers work hour after hour but all the grey-looking people from St. John's should get some sun. We'll give them a chance to do that today and we'll be back tomorrow at what time, counsel?

P. RALPH: Is it 9:30 we start? I'm not sure.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nine –

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Thirty.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nine, 9:30, in that time period. We want to make sure the coffee is here.

And we will ask, Tshaukuesh, if you would be so kind to close our day with a prayer, please.

P. RALPH: Kevin wants to –

INTERPRETER PASTIWET: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, all.