

Lang Smith
4900

Hyman B...
NOV 17 2000

BRISTOL

BRISTOL GROUP
P.O. Box 2220, Suite 100, 139 Water Street, St. John's
NF, A1C 6B6
Phone: 709-753-7242 Fax: 709-753-5820

DATE: November 16, 2000

PROGRAM: On the Go

NETWORK: CBC Radio

TIME: 4:35 P.M. (#4)

**CHILD YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES FACING A HUGE PROBLEM IN
SHESHATSHU**

THERESA BLACKBURN: As we heard in the news, Child Youth and Family Services is facing a huge problem in the Innu Community of Sheshatshu. Leaders are calling on the province to take in a group of more than 30 children sniffing gasoline. Chief Paul Rich says the kids' parents aren't looking after them and he wants the government to step in. But dealing with children addicted to solvents is not an easy task. Paul Pigott was in the community this morning. He joins me in the studio now. Good afternoon.

PAUL FIGOTT: Good afternoon to you.

THERESA BLACKBURN: Now, first I guess we should start about things now. What's the situation in Sheshatshu now?

PAUL FIGOTT: Well as you said I was there this morning and it's kind of an unprecedented situation. You got Innu leaders calling on the government to step in. Most often, it's the Innu leaders who are asking for control of the programs themselves. So I think what's precipitated the situation is what Health Care Workers there have described to me as an epidemic of gasoline sniffing. They say the numbers are getting worse. There's younger and younger children that are appearing and they just decided that they had to act. A number of different agencies came together in a sort of a working group and looked at the situation and they decided. One of the things that maybe sparked it last week was a worker who found a seven year old child sniffing gasoline, sparked a few people to try and make some changes. The group met yesterday morning and they made the decision, we can't handle the situation as it is. They've asked the

NOV 15 2000

2

government to come in. And one of the people that I talked to about this is Lynn Gregory. She works at the Charles J. Andrew Restoration Center. Now if you remember this is the center that was built near Sheshetshiu to deal with children with solvent abuse problems. It deals with all of Atlantic Canada and they've got kids there from all over. And Ms. Gregory just gave me a general outline of what's been going on there in the last couple of weeks that have led up to what we've got today.

LYNN GREGORY: Some of my staff here went to find one of the kids that had left our center, AWOLed and went to place where some of the kids have been sniffing and there was a seven year-old girl sniffing. That's something that none of us feel very comfortable with and you know, can go home and say everything's is OK. And so through some discussions and whatever, we recapped some of the things that were going on last spring and again the escalation and felt that at this point in time, that action needed to be taken for the safety of our children.

PAUL PIGOTT: You can hear the emotion there. It's a very emotional issue and I mean the people at that center have been working very hard to try and deal with this problem. But as I said the center is designed for Aboriginal people, solvent abuse from people in Atlantic Canada. And right now there are only three students, three people at the center getting treatment from Sheshetshiu.

THERESA BLACKBURN: Is that the maximum that they can have?

PAUL PIGOTT: That's about the best they can do right now, she was saying. It's also a problem that the center is right across the street from the community so, she mentioned there one of the kids went AWOL, and it happens. You know if your family or friends are just across the street. It's not a closed facility. They're allowed to come and go. They're discouraged to leave but they are allowed to come and go and they are doing it.

THERESA BLACKBURN: But what about the parents?

PAUL FIGOTT: Well, the parents have been really, the finger has been pointed very strongly to them by a number of different people in the community saying the parents are not looking after the children. And it doesn't necessarily relate just to alcohol. There's a number of different things. You know, parents who are not at home, maybe working long hours. Some people with addictions to gambling as well. It's not just an alcohol problem. The basic fundamental here is that the parents aren't there for the children. And the children are able to go off and do things on their own, I guess, and without that supervision, that support, they are able to go off and get into some trouble. Now, I talked to a few people and I must say not everybody is really keen on this idea of the government coming in, stepping in and taking these kids away. A lot of people say this is going to create more problems. One of those people I spoke with is a fellow from the community. His name is Raphael Gregoire.

RAPHAEL GREGOIRE: I don't think it will do any good. I think when you start messing with the lives of families, especially children, taking them away and putting them in safe houses. It's bound to have the opposite effect of doing some good. I think anytime you put kids in group homes, in so called safe houses in Sheshatshiu, kids rebel against things like that. They don't like it so they do more of what they're not supposed to be doing, in this case gas sniffing.

PAUL FIGOTT: And Mr. Gregoire says he's got examples of this where the kids have gone to the safe homes and they've been right back into it in a short time. Now, he's not knocking it, but he just, he thinks that there's other solutions. His really big suggestion today was that taking these kids out of the community and into the country. He says that there's Innu kids that are not learning about their traditions. And if they got them out of the community, away from gasoline, that would make a big difference.

TERESA BLACKBURN: Having an on the land program.

PAUL FIGOTT: On the land program. You'll hear it from a lot of people there. And I must say there is nothing there where you can take, a child can go out and live in the country for a time. If they're lucky to have a family that still uses the country then they can do it but there's no programs. Now having said what we just said from Mr. Gregoire, there are a lot of people in

the community that are very scared. And what they are afraid of is that you've got this combination of kids maybe smoking cigarettes and sniffing gasoline at the same time. Last spring a 12 year-old lost his life in a situation like this. It's happened where people have been very injured and the people who are calling for the government to step in are saying, look, we just can't bear another accident like this. The numbers are going up we have to do something.

THERESA BLACKBURN: So how will the government apprehend all of these children?

PAUL FIGOTT: It is a huge job, I must say Theresa it is a huge job. What'll you have is a group, the numbers have bounced around between 30 and 50 children who are unsupervised in the community. They don't go to school unless they fall like it and the parents are not there to give them supervision. They kind of run around in groups together. Quite often I've been told that they have little forts in the bush.

THERESA BLACKBURN: Tree houses and what not?

PAUL FIGOTT: Tree houses is one thing I've heard talked about. They go off into the country, into the woods around, and police can't get to them. And so it's very difficult to get them, to actually apprehend. But after that there's a lot more legal problems. For Child Youth and Family Services to apprehend a child, they have to develop a case file that says this child has a certain amount of abuse, a certain amount of neglect and it all has to be documented. And if the parents stand against this, you know, they have to have all off their facts, they have to have everything in order to do this procedure. And Roger Grimes talked to us a little bit about that this afternoon, about some of the difficulties the Health Minister might have in trying to implement this plan.

ROGER GRIMES: You can't just take a child without some justifying cause. So individual assessments will have to be done so that if there's been neglect, then we can take the child into a safer environment. It's the government's responsibility to respect the individual rights and the individuals family's rights. And that if in fact there were to be an action taken to remove a child from a home without justification and without full examination, and if it was resisted by the

family themselves, then there has to be an assessment done that verifies and justifies the action being taken.

PAUL FIGOTT: So they have to have their facts really solid. But the other problem is, is that Social Services here in Labrador is, I mean, absolutely strapped.

THERESA BLACKBURN: I think that's the way across Canada, country actually.

PAUL FIGOTT: Probably across the country. So the man hours, the working hours that have to be put in to develop those case files, nobody knows how that's going to happen. And the other thing is, once you take the children, what do you do with them? The Foster Care in Labrador is very minimal. There's a lot of families that do their best but there's only so many people here. Where do you put the children? The group homes as we said before, doesn't seem to be working. So there's a lot of questions here.

THERESA BLACKBURN: All right. So we'll be hearing lots more about this in the future.

PAUL FIGOTT: Indeed we will and I think one of the things to watch in the near future is, if the parents do start opposing Social Services coming in.

THERESA BLACKBURN: Paul Pigott, thank you. Paul Pigott is a report with CBC Radio in Happy Valley/Goose Bay.