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**THE ONGOING NEGLECT OF SOME CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY CAN NOT
 BE TOLERATED**

ANN BUDGE: Well if you heard our news today, you heard about a letter that was written by the Chief of the Sheshatahik Band Council to the manager of Child Youth and Family Services and it is just a three paragraph long letter, but it ask for immediate and drastic action to address the problem of children in Sheshatahik who sniff gasoline. It says the ongoing neglect of some children in the community can not be tolerated. The band council is asking, the children be taken into care immediately, perhaps away from the community to ensure their safety. In just a moment you will hear an interview that I did with Paul Riche, the Chief of the Band Council about that letter and the events that led up to the writing of that letter and Natalie Clancy is a reporter with CBC Television and today she is in the community of Sheshatahik and she is on the line with me now. Hello Natalie.

NATALIE CLANCY: Hi Ann.

ANN BUDGE: Natalie have you had a chance to talk with people there this morning?

NATALIE CLANCY: We have, you know the Chief and council knew there would be reaction to their drastic measure to write this letter and indeed there has been action. They knew that families for example who feel targeted by this letter who are being accused of being bad parents are furious and they know they are going to have a fight on their hands, should the province decide to come in and start taking children out of homes. But there is another reaction in the community from a lot of the families we've been able to speak to. We are visiting with a home right now, a young family, they are having lunch and their reaction to this news is one of

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absolute relief, they think that this is a complete a drastic measure but one that unfortunately is necessary. The community says its exhausted all of its efforts to deal with this problem and they're tired of going out every evening and very consistent, last night, earlier this morning and seeing children as young as six sniffing gasoline right in the open on the street. Not only are they worried about those children but the whole impact it has on what's a very small community. The family we're visiting with now they have two young children who have not been impacted directly by people who are gas sniffing. They don't sniff gasoline but their friends do and their parents' friends are the parents who are involved here because it is a small community. So there are people relieved saying this is absolutely a last resort but it has to be done if we're ever going to get the families, both the parents and the children the help they need.

ANN BUDGELL: Natalie, you'll have a story on Here and Now tonight?

NATALIE CLANCEY: Yes we will Ann.

ANN BUDGELL: We'll be watching for that and thank you so much for calling us.

NATALIE CLANCEY: Your welcome.

ANN BUDGELL: That's CBC Television Reporter, Natalie Clancey in Sheshatshiu. Well I spoke with Paul Rich earlier today. He is the Chief of the Band Council in Sheshatshiu and he's the person who signed the letter that I was talking about. Paul Rich, hello.

PAUL RICH: Good morning.

ANN BUDGELL: Paul, it sounds like it was a very serious meeting that you took part in yesterday. Can you tell me who was there?

PAUL RICH: Well there was, the inter agency meeting that we have is all the organizations combined in the community like the RCMP, the Innu Nation, the Menonite central committee, all the organizations that help in this community met yesterday. And that's

where we decided that we're not going to take anymore of the watching of the kids on the street sniffing gas in broad daylight.

ANN BUDGELL: Yesterday when you went to that meeting. Was this your intention to make, to do this type of action or did it come up in the discussion at the meeting?

PAUL RICHE: No it was our intention to quickly try and move on dealing with the Health Issue of this community. And one major part of that Health Issue is the kids that are gas sniffing on the streets that stay out all, all night and don't have a place to go. These are the kids that we're going to have to quickly focus on and take. And the only organization that has the legislation and the power to do that is Social Services under Child Youth and Family Services.

ANN BUDGELL: Now I heard, Peter Penasius interviewed this morning and he said he thinks, the committee believes its as many as 20 or 30 children?

PAUL RICHE: Well there's probably about between 20 and 50.

ANN BUDGELL: 20 and 50?

PAUL RICHE: So you look at that number. That number, that number wasn't too bad there last year but it has gone up quickly and the kids that are sniffing now are younger kids, in the ages of 6, 7 and 8. And the thing that we have to put across is that you know the Band Council of Sheshahtshin doesn't have the legislation or the power to take these kids. The only organization that has the power is the Social Services under Child Welfare.

ANN BUDGELL: Now it's a very, very drastic measure. So you people obviously must have looked at other alternatives and felt that you had none?

PAUL RICHE: We send in a few proposals to the government of Canada. But then the response that we got was, we never did get a response on any of the proposals we sent in. Because we tried, we tried to deal with our situation in our community because there are kids in

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the, they're families of the, those kids in this community. We tried our best to deal with the situation but now, that was, that's been over a year when we sent those proposals in. We haven't got a response on any one of them. So it shows that we can't, we can't, we can't be dealing with problems when we don't have the resources to deal with those problems.

ANN BUDGELL: Who did the proposals go to? And what were they for?

PAUL RICH: The proposals went to Health Canada and Indian Affairs and the, today when we talked to the province on certain issues, they say you know, we can't do this today or something like, if we do this it will spin off into other communities. But this is a crisis in this community day after day when you see kids on the road sniffing gas in broad daylight and there is about 30, 40 of them together. And you know what can you do?

ANN BUDGELL: It's a bleak image. It's an awful image.

PAUL RICH: It's a very awful image and a very bleak image because there was a number of suicides that happened over the year and even that still didn't convince the governments to come up with solutions with us. We always wanted to work with the government, but the government always said that, you know it's a community problem so you deal with it. But, it's not only a community problem it's a government problem. The Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has a responsibility and the jurisdiction and the legislation to enact laws that we can't enact.

ANN BUDGELL: Now in the short term. You're expecting that the children might be taken out of the community, aren't you

PAUL RICH: We'll do whatever needs possible to get these kids to a safe environment. And that's what we said yesterday as a group.

ANN BUDGELL: Can they be looked after within your own community? Could they be placed with other families in your own community?

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PAUL RICH: There could be some, but we're limited to housing. As you know that, I've mentioned that this community is, lacks funds for housing.

ANN BUDGELL: People are already very crowded.

PAUL RICH: And we have no choice but to take these kids and send them outside to family treatment areas.

ANN BUDGELL: What about in the long term? I mean, a short-term solution obviously would be what you're suggesting in your letter here. Taking children to a safe place. What about long term?

PAUL RICH: That's where as an organization and all the different other organizations in our community, we have to come up with a plan and we do have a plan. In the proposal for progress that we sent to the Government of Canada and Health Canada, we said to them that the, we look at, we have to do something on the short term today. But then again this long-term plan we have in place, that's in the proposal and we're willing to look at that. But we have had no response on that yet.

ANN BUDGELL: Are the parents of these children going to react well, or react badly to this? What will their reaction be?

PAUL RICH: Well the reactions by some people probably will be negative because you know, these parents have some problems themselves, and that is with alcohol. So when you try and deal with the situation and the parent is also in a situation which he or she has problems, obviously you're going to get that reaction, that I don't have problems. Or if I have a problem I won't let it out. Or, if what will the community think of me if they, Social Services takes away my kids. That's where we have to deal, communications with the community.

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ANN BUDGELL: Alright. Thank you very much for explaining this to me and to our listeners and very good luck with dealing with the problem.

PAUL RICH: OK. Thank you.

ANN BUDGELL: Paul Rich is the Chief of the Sheehatakin Inn Band Council. Mary May Osmond also lives in the community and she works as a counselor in the Drug and Alcohol Counseling Center. I reached her there this morning. Mary May Osmond, good morning.

MARY MAY OSMOND: HI.

ANN BUDGELL: Could you tell me please what people see in the community that has caused this drastic action to be taken.

MARY MAY OSMOND: Well its every day and night you see kids walking in the community with bags of gas and sniffing all hours of the day. They're walking about and I guess we're saying that this is enough, something has to be done.

ANN BUDGELL: Now you know who the children are, don't you?

MARY MAY OSMOND: Yes I do.

ANN BUDGELL: And you would know their parents?

MARY MAY OSMOND: Yes I would.

ANN BUDGELL: What's going on in their homes?

MARY MAY OSMOND: Well, we've been suffering from alcohol from childhood I guess. And some of us haven't taken responsibility of our lives and of our children.

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ANN BUDGEELL: Are these the children then of parents who are alcoholic or who are having trouble with substance abuse?

MARY MAY OSMOND: Yes I would say that's true.

ANN BUDGEELL: And at the counseling center where you work, has there been an effort made to try to get those children to try to come or to get the parents to come in?

MARY MAY OSMOND: We have made both of those efforts. Some come, some don't. And that's the frustrating part of it. Like they come for a time and then they don't come anymore. And it makes me angry and frustrated when that happens because it really us as parents that are responsible for our children.

ANN BUDGEELL: Have you yourself, have you talked with any of the parents of the children that the group is now asking be taken out of the community?

MARY MAY OSMOND: Yes I have been involved with the agency to, the family treatment, to come with that decision we have to do something. We cannot loose anymore children. I lost my son to suicide last year. And I don't want to see any other mother loose their child again because of alcohol or other things that are happening have been happening in our community. The family violence, the abuse that's happened to our kids, it's all affected us. And some of us have struggled to do something about ourselves and help our children but then there's some of us who are, I guess at times, are not strong enough to stand up and say no. They'd rather take their drink and hide their pain or not to feel the pain.

ANN BUDGEELL: What will happen if the children are taken to a safe place as the group has requested? What do you think should happen with the parents of those children because, if the children go away for a little while and then come back and the parents are still as well doing the same things? It isn't going to make any difference is it?

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