

In the matter of the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System

AFFIDAVIT OF JENNIFER SULLIVAN

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

I, Jennifer Sullivan of the Town of Bay Bulls, in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, make oath and say as follows:

1. I have been employed with the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being (SSWB or the "Department") and/or its predecessor in regard to child protection functions, since 2007. I worked previously as a social worker with a frontline caseload in child protection, specifically in the Protective Intervention and In Care programs. I performed this work while child protection was done in the regional health authority system, particularly Eastern Health as it then was, and as of 2012, as part of the Department. Between 2013 and 2017 I acted as a Clinical Program Supervisor in both the Protective Intervention and In Care Programs. From 2017 to 2020, I was employed at the provincial office as a Senior Policy Analyst, acting as a liaison between the Department and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. In 2020, I returned to regional operations in the role of Zone Manager for approximately one year.
2. I am currently the Provincial Director for Adoptions, Youth Services and Community Youth Corrections. I was the Provincial Director for In Care and Adoptions from July of 2021 to October of 2023, and following organizational restructuring I became the Provincial Director for Adoptions, Youth Services and Community Youth Corrections from October 2023 to October 2024. In addition to this role, I temporarily held the role of Provincial Director of Protection and Support Services from October 2024 to November 2025 when I returned to my current permanent position.
3. Through these various roles I have knowledge of the Department's engagement with the Innu Round Table Secretariat and I have also participated in quarterly meetings of the Innu Round Table. I have also consulted with my Provincial Director colleagues - Dave McGrath, Director of In Care, and Lindsay Farrell, Director of Protection and Support Services - in preparing this affidavit.
4. Throughout my time in the above noted roles, I have had several interactions with the Prevention Agency team of the Innu Round Table Secretariat. For clarity, I will refer to this team as IRTS or Innu colleagues throughout this affidavit.

Implementation of the Children, Youth and Families Act (2019)

5. The Children, Youth and Families Act (CYFA) became law on June 28, 2019. The Act provides the legislative authority for the delivery of services to children and youth in need of protective intervention in Newfoundland and Labrador.

6. A significant focus of the CYFA was to strengthen service delivery to Indigenous children, youth and their families. The Innu were engaged in the review of the previous child welfare legislation and feedback received through these consultations contributed to the provisions included in the CYFA.
7. These provisions recognize the importance of preserving an Indigenous (Innu) child or youth's unique cultural identity; help Indigenous (Innu) children and youth in foster care maintain connections to their culture and community; require notification of court hearings be served to Indigenous (Innu) representatives; establish the ability for Indigenous (Innu) representatives to be heard in court; and enhance information sharing with Indigenous governments and organizations so that Indigenous (Innu) children are kept safe and where possible, at home with their families and communities. The CYFA also outlines placement considerations specifically for Indigenous children that prioritizes placement with kin within their community.
8. I am aware through my ongoing collaboration with IRTS that they prefer to engage in discussions focused specifically on needs or interests identified by Innu regarding their communities. While the provisions in the CYFA reference Indigenous children broadly, discussions with IRTS focus on Innu children and youth. I have therefore referenced Innu children and youth specifically in the statements above.
9. More specifically, the CYFA requires that a cultural connection plan (CCP) is developed and implemented for each Indigenous (Innu) child who is placed in care and Policy states that the plan must be designed in partnership with the In Care Planning Team, which includes the Indigenous Representative. A CCP is a description of the arrangements made or being made to foster an Indigenous child's or Indigenous youth's connection with their culture, heritage, traditions, community, language and spirituality to preserve the Indigenous child's or Indigenous youth's cultural identity.
10. SSWB social workers recognize the importance of Indigenous children and youth being connected to their communities and having experiences on the land, with family, community members and elders. SSWB also recognizes the importance of community celebrations and events and strives to plan cultural connection visits around such events for children who could not be placed in their community. Part of cultural connection planning is supporting Indigenous (Innu) children and youth to visit their communities. These visits are arranged in collaboration with Innu representatives.
11. In October 2021, a distinct Cultural Connection Plan for Innu children and youth was implemented in partnership with the IRTS.
12. The development of this form was initiated and led by the IRTS in an effort to address the specific needs of Innu children and their families in relation to cultural connection planning.

13. The implementation of the CCP for Innu was a positive step in our continued efforts to strengthen service delivery to Innu children, youth and families.
14. Innu colleagues have expressed that the introduction of the CYFA was a significant advancement in supporting the needs of Innu communities. While the IRTS report that the advancements in provincial child welfare legislation have contributed to improved service delivery for Innu children and families, Innu law development continues to be a priority. SSWB endeavors to support Innu colleagues in this goal through our ongoing collaborations.

Legislative Review of the CYFA

15. Since the implementation of the CYFA, additional opportunities for improvement were identified and were approved as amendments in 2021. For example, an increase in the number of designated Indigenous representatives and the definition of “foster parent” was revised to align with the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth and families (Canada).
16. As per section 102 of the CYFA, the minister shall, every 5 years, review the CYFA and conduct public consultations as part of the review. The goal of the legislative review is to further strengthen services to children, youth and their families.
17. The review of the CYFA is currently underway, the public engagement phase has been completed and SSWB is currently analyzing the feedback received through consultation sessions and written submissions. Overall, SSWB was pleased with the level of engagement on the review. The engagement process occurred between June 6, 2025, and September 12, 2025. Over 40 organizations participated through written submissions, virtual or in-person dialogue sessions, or audience-specific questionnaires. One hundred and thirty-three responses were received from surveys open to children, youth and families receiving services from the department, the general public, and community partners.
18. The five key areas of focus for the CYFA review include:
 - a. Indigenous Child Welfare Practice;
 - b. Permanency Planning for Children and Youth;
 - c. Outcomes for Children and Youth In Care;
 - d. Youth Transitioning to Adulthood; and
 - e. Information Sharing.
19. The IRTS actively engaged in the CYFA review through an engagement session, also providing a written submission and participating in follow up discussions with SSWB to provide feedback and clarification on their written submission.
20. SSWB continues to engage in ongoing dialogue with Innu colleagues regarding their proposed amendments to the legislation and policy. These discussions are aimed at

identifying priority areas of focus for the Innu and ensuring that any changes recommended by SSWB are reflective of the feedback provided by IRTS.

Policy Working Groups with Innu Round Table Secretariat Prevention Agency

21. SSWB aims to have monthly meetings with the IRTS to discuss policy barriers and practice issues impacting child welfare service delivery in their communities. These meetings include provincial office policy division Directors and Policy and Program Development Specialists as well as regional operations management, including the Regional Director and Zone Managers who are involved in direct service delivery.
22. Agendas for these meetings are co-developed between SSWB and IRTS. The Child and Family Services Agency team takes the lead in identifying priorities based on needs for both communities.
23. SSWB endeavors to address any issues identified through updates to policy or changes to practice approaches. For example, IRTS identified their wishes for Indigenous community members to be considered “kin” in policy for the purposes of completing “relative/significant other” assessments for placements of children in care. SSWB amended policy 4.3 in March 2023 as a result of this recommendation.

Relationship Building

24. IRTS has identified relationship building with SSWB as a significant priority for them. In an effort to foster relationship building and support SSWB in better understanding Innu culture, IRTS has led retreat style meetings with members of the joint policy working group. All members of the working group have acknowledged the value in participating in these engagements noting that they have been a catalyst in strengthening the relationship between the SSWB and IRTS teams, ultimately leading to improved service delivery.
25. I have personally attended many policy working group meetings as well as retreat style meetings and other in person experiences with the IRTS team. Through these interactions I have had many impactful experiences including the Innu timeline presentation, hearing Innu stories, participation in building an Innu tent, visiting the Shushepeshipan Ishpitentamun Mitshuap (SIM) Cabin and Gull Island where the Gathering is held to name a few. These humbling experiences have deepened my appreciation for Innu culture and the resilience of the Innu communities.
26. Most recently, discussions have occurred about creative opportunities to further support development of the relationship between SSWB regional staff and IRTS staff in the interest of improving service delivery. SSWB has committed to furthering these discussions and considering innovative ideas that support shared approaches to support Innu children, youth and families.

Collaborative work on the Innu Protocol

27. While development of the Innu-CSSD (Children, Seniors and Social Development) Protocol (Protocol) occurred prior to my time in the role of Provincial Director for In Care and Adoptions, I am aware through engagement with my colleagues upon commencing the role in July 2021 that the Protocol was developed collaboratively between SSWB (then CSSD) and the IRTS team.
28. SSWB and the Innu began to formalize collaborations in 2012 through the development of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). This work was expanded upon in 2015 with the signing of a Working Relationship Agreement (WRA). The WRA was intended to build on the relationship between SSWB and the Innu by facilitating better communication, promoting service coordination and enhanced service delivery and creating opportunities to have meaningful conversations about Innu children and youth.
29. In August 2021, SSWB (then CSSD), the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation (SIFN) and the Mushuau Innu First Nation (MIFN) implemented the Innu-CSSD Protocol, which guides the information sharing, collaboration and coordination of services between SSWB, Innu Prevention Services and Innu Representative Services. The Protocol strengthens elements of the WRA, outlining expectations for information sharing and clarifying roles and responsibilities of SSWB and Innu staff to ensure collaborative service delivery for Innu children and families.
30. The development of the Protocol represented SSWB's commitment to reconciliation. At the forefront of the work to develop the Protocol was a vision for development of an Innu agency operated under Innu Law. Innu staff and SSWB staff spent many months working together to design this Protocol in support of moving Innu closer to doing child welfare work in Innu communities. This included weekly sessions with the Innu stakeholders to ensure that the Protocol would not only be a positive change for the Innu, but that the changes would contribute to capacity development of the Innu agency. Throughout the process the Innu advised SSWB on continued development of the Prevention agency and their readiness to take on certain elements of the work. The Protocol was drafted in such a way that as Innu capacity increases, their role in child protection can likewise expand, until the ultimate goal of an Innu-led regime is reached.
31. The Protocol is used in conjunction with existing SSWB policies and reflects the legislative authority, priorities and responsibilities outlined in the CYFA and an Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families (Canada).
32. The implementation of the Protocol has contributed to a strengthened partnership between Innu Prevention Services and SSWB involving many ongoing collaborations to address barriers and identify solutions needed regarding service delivery to Innu children, youth and families.

33. Through ongoing engagement with IRTS the Protocol has been described as a door in the wall that once existed in the relationship between SSWB and the Innu.
34. IRTS and SSWB staff have agreed that the Protocol has greatly improved communication and information sharing practices and supported improved service delivery for Innu children and families. While feedback on the Protocol has been very positive overall, some areas of improvement have been identified over time. Members of the policy working group have mutually agreed that a review of the Protocol is timely. Discussions regarding the format of this review are ongoing and a collaborative process will be developed to undertake this review.

Engagement with the Innu Round Table

35. The Child and Family Services (CFS) committee is a subcommittee to the Innu Round Table. I have participated in this committee through my various policy director roles. Membership of this committee includes the Innu Prevention Agency team, representation from Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation (SIFN), Mushuau Innu First Nation (MIFN), the Innu Nation, SIM, Mushuau EPH and Group Home (MEGH), representatives from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), as well as SSWB Provincial Office and Regional office staff.
36. In my role as Director for Protection and Support Services, I was also a member of the CFS committee alongside the Director for the Innu Prevention Agency as well as the Regional Director for ISC- Atlantic region. Lindsay Farrell will hold this role in future meetings of the CFS committee.
37. The CFS committee collaborates to develop a Terms of Reference, work plan and agendas that guide committee meetings and ensure Innu priorities are reflected in the work of the committee.
38. As the lead for the CFS committee, the Director of the IRTS Prevention Agency presents to the IRT Main Table at quarterly meetings to provide updates on progress toward the agreed upon goals of the committee.
39. Over the last three years, I have regularly attended the quarterly IRT Main Table meetings as a representative of SSWB. These meetings have been an opportunity to learn more about the issues facing both Innu communities.
40. From my perspective, these quarterly IRT Main Table meetings highlight the importance of true collaboration, transparency in information sharing and building meaningful relationships with Innu colleagues in order to advance priorities.

Partnership with Innu Prevention Services

41. The IRTS and SSWB developed a formal partnership in April 2025 for SSWB policy staff to provide services to support policy and program development of the Post Majority Support Services (PMSS) program.
42. Through this partnership, a Policy and Program Development Specialist (PPDS) from SSWB worked directly with the Innu agency as they led the design of the PMSS for delivery in Innu communities. SSWB and IRTS have maintained regular communication since the program's inception in April 2025 and as the program continues to grow.
43. This structure was chosen in consultation with the Innu. When PMSS funding was announced by the Federal Government, SSWB approached IRTS to say that the Department felt this program would be best led by the Innu. The Innu agreed and indicated that they would hire staff to develop and implement PMSS. IRTS later approached SSWB to request the support of SSWB staff in the policy development phase for PMSS. SSWB entered into a contract with IRTS to provide a PPDS who would support this work. Although the PPDS is an employee of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, under the partnership the PPDS worked entirely separate from GNL and was fully directed by the Innu when working in that role.
44. In February 2026, SSWB and IRTS collaborated to develop an information session for SSWB staff regarding PMSS to support its implementation.
45. This collaboration is an example of how SSWB is committed to engaging with Innu colleagues to prioritize the needs of Innu communities.

Increase to foster care rate for Innu homes

46. Through engagement with the policy working group, IRTS identified concerns with the rates being provided to Innu Foster Homes. More specifically, IRTS highlighted that the majority of homes in Innu communities are Level 1 (relative/significant other) homes meaning that they received less financial support than Level 2 homes across the Island. SSWB policy requires Level 1 foster homes to complete PRIDE training in order to receive the Level fee making their financial compensation equivalent to Level 2 (regular) foster homes.
47. IRTS expressed that this approach did not acknowledge the importance of ensuring that Innu children and youth are cared for by Innu families with exposure to their language, culture and traditions. Innu colleagues advocated for an increase to the rates without the requirement for Innu foster parents to complete PRIDE training so that financial compensation for Innu foster parents would be equitable to the rates provided to Level 2 foster parents in recognition of Innu foster parents' skills.
48. SSWB acknowledged that Innu foster parents play a vital role in supporting cultural connections and providing culturally appropriate placements for Innu children and youth.

49. In recognition of the cultural knowledge and skills of Innu Foster Parents, on April 1, 2025, the Department implemented remuneration of the level fee rate received by level 2 foster homes to all Innu foster parents throughout the province. This was an increase of \$600 per child per month for Innu foster parents.

Advocating for Increased Resources from Federal Government

50. Innu communities face social, economic and health challenges to a greater degree than other communities. The Department has supported the Innu in their requests to receive federal funding. With additional federal funding, IRT could implement programs and services to advance healthy community development and contribute to the prevention of child maltreatment. Such programming could have a long-term impact on the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in care, and reduce demands on child protection services, regardless of whether they are delivered by SSWB or IRT, or under provincial or Innu laws.

SWORN TO or affirmed at St. John's,
in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador,
this 6 day of April, 2025, ~~2026~~
before me:



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JENNIFER SULLIVAN