Summary of Themes Identified in Confidential Hearing Transcripts

Submitted by Melody Morton Ninomiya
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Introduction

This short report summarizes key themes and sub-themes identified in a set of confidential private hearing transcripts from individuals who requested that their transcripts not be included in any public space, including a forthcoming online database. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of themes related to the experiences, concerns, strengths, and recommendations shared by individuals, while protecting their identities and maintaining confidentiality. The content is based on the coding of the transcripts and reflect only the experiences and topics that individuals chose to share in their testimony.

The frequency counts presented in this report indicate the number of unique individuals[i] who spoke about particular themes and sub-themes. *Frequencies should **not** be interpreted as measures of prevalence. Individuals were not asked a set of questions and were not systematically probed on each topic or theme. As a result, many themes may be relevant to a larger number of individuals than is reflected in the counts reported here.*

Narrative Summary

Across the 12 transcripts, individuals described experiences with the child welfare system, abuse, trauma, cultural disconnection, and healing. The most frequently identified themes were:

1. suicide, suicide ideation and self-harm (6 individuals);
2. lack of transparency and mistrust in child welfare services (5 individuals);
3. long-term health impacts of being in care (5 individuals)**;** and
4. ongoing or intergenerational trauma (5 individuals).

These themes were often interconnected, with individuals describing how experiences in care, family separation, abuse, and cultural dislocation had lasting impacts across generations.

A prominent theme was related to **child welfare practices**, particularly individuals' experiences of being excluded from decisions, misled, or inadequately informed. Several individuals described children being removed without clear explanations, parents receiving incomplete information about placements, and families being unaware of significant events affecting children in care. One individual recounted being told their children were being sent to a treatment program when they later discovered they had been placed in foster care homes far from Labrador. Others described learning important information only through third parties rather than directly from child welfare workers. These experiences contributed to profound mistrust of the system.

Individuals also spoke extensively about **abuse and mistreatment**, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. Examples included accounts of severe corporal punishment, being moved repeatedly between foster homes, and experiences of sexual abuse that were not believed or investigated. Some individuals described feeling unsafe in placements or being told that reporting abuse could result in even worse living situations. Related themes included abuse by family members, peers, teachers, clergy, and other authority figures. Experiences of racism and stereotyping were also described, including being called derogatory names, feeling devalued because

of their Innu/Indigenous identity, and encountering people in systems that were dismissive of Innu realities.

The theme of **mental and emotional impacts** permeated nearly every transcript. Individuals described lifelong feelings of abandonment, shame, anger, grief, and difficulties forming healthy relationships. The most frequent sub-theme in this category was suicide and self-harm, which appeared in six of the twelve transcripts. Individuals spoke about suicide attempts of their own or of family members, family members who died by suicide, self-harming behaviours, and ongoing fears for loved ones. Several linked these struggles directly to childhood experiences in care, abuse, cultural loss, or unresolved trauma. Ongoing intergenerational trauma was frequently discussed, with individuals describing cycles of addiction, violence, family disruption, and emotional pain that extended across generations.

Another prominent theme was the **loss of culture, language, and community connection**. Individuals described placements in non-Innu homes and communities, often far from family and Innu supports. Several recalled being discouraged or prohibited from speaking Innu-aimun. Others spoke about returning home after years away and feeling they no longer belonged, struggled to reconnect with family, or felt disconnected from community life. Individuals emphasized that Innu identity and belonging were essential to wellbeing and that separation from culture compounded other harms associated with child welfare involvement.

Despite these challenges, individuals also highlighted important **strengths, resilience, and sources of healing**. Themes of faith, perseverance, recovery, and personal growth were common. Many described efforts to break cycles of trauma through treatment, sobriety, counselling, education, and community service. Four individuals discussed sobriety and treatment, while four individuals highlighted educational achievements, often overcoming significant adversity to complete schooling or professional training. Others spoke about taking leadership roles in their communities, helping families affected by child welfare involvement, or advocating for children and relatives.

Individuals consistently identified **Innu culture, family, and Nutshimit** as protective and healing influences. For people who spoke of their memories of being on the land with parents or grandparents, they were often described as some of the happiest and safest periods of childhood. Traditional Innu teachings, hunting, fishing, language, and time with Elders were viewed as important foundations for identity, resilience, and wellbeing. Individuals also stressed the importance of kinship care, family reunification, and Innu-led approaches to child and family services. Recommendations frequently focused on keeping children connected to family, culture, and community, increasing family supports, and ensuring greater Innu self-determination and control over child welfare services.

Overall, the testimonies reveal a pattern of harm associated with family separation, cultural disconnection, lack of transparency, and abuse, alongside a powerful narrative of resilience, healing, cultural continuity, and the ongoing desire for Innu-led solutions that strengthen families and communities.

Brief Demographic Summary of Eleven People

The findings presented in this report are drawn from 12 confidential transcripts representing the experiences and perspectives of 11 individuals, including one individual who provided testimony across two separate sessions. Individuals included five Sheshatshiu Innu and six Mushuau Innu

individuals, representing a balance of perspectives from the two communities. The group included seven women and four men, reflecting a broad range of life experiences and relationships to the child welfare system. Six individuals spoke primarily about their own childhood experiences within child welfare, education, and other systems. Five discussed their experiences as parents, grandparents, foster parents, or family caregivers involved with child welfare services. Several individuals also reflected on their experiences working within community organizations or public systems and the impacts they observed on Innu children, families, and communities. Together, the individuals provided perspectives spanning multiple generations and different points of interaction with child welfare and related systems.

At-a-Glance (Sub)Themes Frequencies

The themes and sub-themes below reflect only topics that individuals shared. Because individuals were not explicitly asked about any of the themes, it is most probably that many themes are relevant to more individuals represented in the frequency counts. *Accordingly, the frequency count should be interpreted as the number of individuals who raised a topic, rather than the number of individuals affected by the (sub)theme.*

Summary Table

Sub-Themes Present in Transcripts	**Frequency (Unique People)**
Thematic Area: Child Welfare	
Impact on health of youth in care (across lifespan)	5
Lack of transparency & mistrust	5
Abuse/mistreatment in care	4
Kinship care or adoption	3
Loss of Innu-aimun/culture/community connection	3
Non-Innu homes	3
Lack of cultural understanding/appreciation	2
Resistance/failure to support family placement or reunification	2
Unresponsiveness/being ignored	2
Comparisons to residential school	1
Court time & legal services	1
Family hopes for help (with regret afterwards)	1
Impact on community/collective	1
Lack of transition-out-of-care/back-to-community planning and support	1
Negative impact on family of origin	1
Thematic Area: Experiences of Abuse and Racism	
Abuse – family members	4
Abuse – peers	4
Abuse – religious leaders, teachers, police	4
Experiences of racism & stereotyping	4
Unmet basic needs	1
Thematic Area: Innu Community Perspectives, Strengths & Rights	
Education/training	4
Faith, hope, perseverance, forgiveness	4
Asserting rights & self-determination	3
Innu values	3

Nutshimit (hunting, ceremony, way of life)	3
Responsibility to community	3
Intergenerational cultural continuity	2
Recommendations	2
Examples of Innu-led services and supports	1
Family/kin (including healing relationships)	1
Speaking Innu-aimun	1
Thematic Area: Mental and Emotional Impacts	
Suicide, suicide ideation, self-harm	6
Ongoing & intergenerational trauma	5
Resentments/anger toward systems	3
Thematic Area: Other System Involvement	
Working in non-Innu systems	3
Health system access	1
Justice/corrections (incarceration)	1
Police involvement (without incarceration)	1
Thematic Area: Substance Use and Treatment	
Sobriety/treatment	4
Alcohol/substance use as an adult	3
Medication	3
Alcohol & other substances as a child/youth	1

Conclusion

Taken together, testimonies describe significant and interconnected impacts associated with child welfare involvement, abuse, trauma, racism, family separation, and cultural disconnection. At the same time, individuals demonstrated resilience and emphasized the importance of family, culture, language, healing, community responsibility, and self-determination. The testimonies point toward a strong desire for approaches that keep children connected to family and community, strengthen cultural continuity, expand family supports, and support greater Innu control over services affecting Innu children and families.

[i] The following table lists the files associated with the 12 transcripts.

2023 04 19 (N) - Mushuau Innu A - Private	2023 11 30 (N) - Mushuau Innu I - Private
2023 04 21 (N) - Mushuau Innu G - Private	2024 06 25 (N) - Mushuau Innu K - Private
2023 06 06 (S) - Sheshatshiu Innu C - Private	2024 06 26 (N) - Mushuau Innu L - Private
2023 06 06 (S) - Sheshatshiu Innu D - Private	2025 04 10 (S) - Sheshatshiu Innu G - Private
2023 10 25 (S) - Sheshatshiu Innu C - Private	2025 06 18 (S) - Sheshatshiu Innu I - Private
2023 11 29 (N) - Mushuau Innu H - Private	2025 06 26 (S) - Sheshatshiu Innu J - Private

Summary of Confidential Transcript Themes submitted by Melody Morton Ninomiya

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

AFFIDAVIT OF MELODY MORTON NINOMIYA

I, Melody Morton Ninomiya, of Kitchener-Waterloo, in the Province of Ontario, solemnly affirm and say:

1. I am an Associate Professor and hold a Canada Research Chair at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

2. I was engaged by the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System (the "**Inquiry**") to code and analyse statements made to the Commissioners in the course of Community and Private Meetings held by the Inquiry, as well as written statements.

3. In the course of this review, I reviewed twelve transcripts of private meetings with eleven speakers who asked that their name and statement not be shared publicly. The Commissioners have asked me to summarize those statements while preserving the speakers' confidentiality.

4. I have prepared a true summary of these statements and of the key themes and sub-themes from these transcripts, a copy of which is attached as Exhibit A.

AFFIRMED before me at Kitchener in the Province of Ontario, this 14 day of Oct, 2026.

Commissioner for Oaths

Melody Morton Ninomiya

Angela Rose Brown
Barrister & Solicitor
Notary Public and Commissioner of Oaths
in and for the province of Ontario.
My commission is of unlimited duration.
No legal advice given.

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Summary of Confidential Transcript Themes submitted by Melody Morton Ninomiya

This is EXHIBIT A of
the affidavit of Melody Morton Ninomiya
affirmed before me this 14 day of Oct, 2026.

Commissioner for Oaths

Angela Rose Brown
Barrister & Solicitor
Notary Public and Commissioner of Oaths
in and for the province of Ontario.
My commission is of unlimited duration.
No legal advice given.

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