

Dawnland (86) Transcript
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- Senator Abourez: These hearings on Indian children's welfare is now in session. Would you, uh, uh, pull that microphone up as closely as you can?
- Female: [00:00:30] They went into my home and, uh, picked up my children and placed them in a foster home. And, uh, I think that they were abused in a foster home.
- Anna: Well, my brother, he was, he was mistreated by Mr. Kelly. And he, and he slapped him and he smoked right in his face, and puffed right in the face. And he, (crying) he would [crosstalk 00:00:55] ...
- Senator Abourez: Well, Anna, just a mi- just a minute, Anna. If you, you know, if that's too hard for you to talk about it, now you [00:01:00] don't have to. Cheryl, I'll leave it up to you, uh, about your children coming up with you. Perhaps, it's better that they don't.
- Cheryl Spider D: When I was pregnant with Bobby and the Welfare kept coming over and asking me if I'd give him up for adoption.
- Senator Abourez: You mean while you were pregnant with him?
- Cheryl Spider D: Yeah.
- Senator Abourez: Before you ...
- Cheryl Spider D: A social worker did.
- Senator Abourez: Before he was even born?
- Cheryl Spider D: Yeah.
- Senator Abourez: [00:01:30] The federal government for its part has been conspicuous by its lack of action. It has chosen to allow the child welfare agencies to strike at the heart of Indian communities by literally stealing Indian children, and on the premise that most Indian [00:02:00] children would really be better off growing up non-Indian.
- Gkisedtanamoogk: [00:02:30] The question about indigenous peoples and North Americans is the fundamental question of this land. Maybe all the fractiles in creation since the arrival of, of Columbus, that finally accumulated enough power to create the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

[00:03:30] This is the first time that any government in the United States is seriously engaging with indigenous peoples over crucial matters, of, uh, what this relationship is supposed to be about. [00:04:00] And we are mandated to investigate Indian child welfare practices. We were speaking with state officials, um, state agencies, people who are experienced in, uh, in the child welfare system, as well as Maine's five Wabanaki communities.

Joseph Socobasi: [00:04:30] That's [00:05:00] nice to actually meet you in person and I'm very, very satisfied with, with the process and who's been selected, so.

Gkisedtanamoogk: You know, this Commission is here for the community.

Joseph Socobasi: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gkisedtanamoogk: You know, and that whatever it takes for this Commission to be of service to the community is where we're ...

Joseph Socobasi: Yeah.

Gkisedtanamoogk: We're here for that.

Joseph Socobasi: And I, I truly believe that.

Gkisedtanamoogk: I'm Gkisedtanamoogk. [00:05:30] I'm a Wampanoag by birth. I come from a community called Mashpee, located on what's now Cape Cod, and I'm one of five Commissioners.

Gkisedtanamoogk: One of two who are Native American.

Male: [crosstalk 00:05:49]

Female: Double Whammy. (laughs) Come over.

Carol Wishcampe: Did you think the community is ready to come forward and tell their stories or there's still hesitancy and suspicion and wariness?

Joseph Socobasi: [00:06:00] I still think there are some who feel that shame who may never come forward, but, um, if they could see others, you know, start to go through this process, you know, they may choose a different way, but it, it, at the very least, it, it gets them moving in the right direction.

Matt Dunlap: As a leader, what do you want my community to understand about your community and this process?

Joseph Socobasi: Mm-hmm (affirmative). We have customs and ceremonies, [00:06:30] a language, a way of life that is very different. And to pull us away from that I

think is what's most concerning to me. But this is a great opportunity for our community to move forward and to recognize what happened and ensure that it never happens again. Scary. Scary to hear some of the stories though.

- Gail Werrbach: [00:07:00] Thank you very much for inviting us to your community and, um, for, um, sharing this, sharing this evening with you.
- Female: Feel free if anyone would like to introduce themselves, or anything you would like to ask them.
- Georgana: Some of the wounds are so deep, how do you propose that we're supposed to be [00:07:30] healing?
- Sandy W. H.: When we bring, uh, that out and open that wound, it is a wound, we have to put something back in it that very same time. And that's our medicines. I see that you do use sage. I know that cedar is used out here. The most incredible thing though for that healing is each other, because when we went through that experience, we experienced that alone. We experienced it in isolation. And we've kept it that [00:08:00] way. And then when we open it, if we open it and we're with each other, healing does come.
- Georgana: I can't get over the, the nightmares. What do they want to do? They want to give you a pill, and another pill, and another pill, and another pill, where you can't even think sometimes because of the medicine, just to try and get that out of your head. You can't heal someone that's going through hell. [00:08:30] And I used to say to myself, "God, what did we ever do to get this punishment? What did we ever do?" Number one, we cursed him because he made us brown.
- My baby sister and I sat in a tub of bleach one time, tried to convince each other that we're getting white. And then we knew they would accept us. The boys in our school, [00:09:00] they said we were dirt and we were used for one thing. Where was the state? Where was the state that was suppo- they were supposed to have been our guardians, but where were they? They weren't there for us.
- We didn't know. We knew nothing else, but foster people. And how come it took so long for you all to get a group together to see if they can help us?
- Sandy W. H.: [00:09:30] What's your first name again?
- Georgana: They didn't ask for all this crap that's going on.
- Stephanie: Georgana.
- Sandy W. H.: Georgana.
- Georgana: And I still suffer and I'll, oh, god bless you there, Stephanie. God bless you.

Sandy W. H.: You told your story among your relatives, and they heard you. [00:10:00] They heard you. Let that love and acceptance come into you. And remember that whenever we're gathered in that way, our ancestors are present with us at that time.

Kids: One little two little three little Indians, four little five little six little Indians, seven little eight little nine little Indians, ten little Indian boys. Ten little nine little eight little Indians, four little five little six little Indians, seven little eight little nine little Indians, one little Indian boy.

Aupueblo: [00:10:30] Do I start now? I am Aupueblo, and a graduate of the Albuquerque Indian school.

C.L. Walker: Here we are on the Western Navajo Indian Reservation in Northern [00:11:00] Arizona among our friends, the Navajo Indians. Through the agencies of the government, they are being rapidly brought from their state of comparative savagery and barbarism to one of civilization.

Esther Anne: In the last 1800s, federal government gives money to start boarding schools, [00:11:30] to forcibly remove Native children as young as four or five years old from their homes and their communities, bring them thousands of miles away to an institution. They're forbidden to speak their language, forbidden to communicate with each other, cut [00:12:00] their hair, take away their clothes, don't let them go home.

C.L. Walker: [00:12:30] Here on the one hand, we have the children as we find them before we bring them to the government schools. Few of these boys and girls have ever seen a white man. We bring them in, clean them up and start them on their way to civilization.

Esther Anne: [00:13:00] It was seen as very progressive and had a lot of support. And that filtered its way into the child welfare system. You know, Native children are better off raised in white homes. You know, let's save those poor Indian kids.

Gkisedtanamoogk: [00:13:30] Everything that state policy and federal policy is doing is about the eradication [00:14:00] of us from the Earth. Now probably the softest examples of eradication is social integration. But the results are the same. No more treaties. No more Indian rights. No more lands. No more Indians.

Heather Martin: [00:14:30] Usually, [00:15:00] when a truth commission happens, there's a great deal of unrest in the society that's surrounding it. Everyone is aware and everyone is trying to figure out how to solve this moment of crisis. And here, the dominant culture is largely unaware that there's conversation that needs to happen.

[00:15:30] And now we have the chance to go back and say, "This is what went wrong. We own it. We see it. We acknowledge it. We're going to pay homage to it, and we're going to start something fresh that's not based upon that wrong. We're going to start a new foundation and we're going to try something different." I genuinely believe this is the most important thing the state has ever done. [00:16:00] We're a truth and fact finding commission, and we're set out with a really specific task that we have to accomplish.

Rachel George: I know this isn't the first time that we've heard parts of your story over the past two days. And I really appreciate that you took this extra step to make it official so that the commissioners can look over it. [00:16:30] Once your statement is in TRC possession, we're going to use it to make our final report and make recommendations. It might be used for research.

All right. You have six different consent options for accessibility. So, the first is public accessibility, non-anonymous. So that means your name, face, voice will be attached to your statement. This TRC is a statement- [00:17:00] gathering process. It provides a forum where someone can be really heard and have their experiences acknowledged, and that's a very empowering thing to a group of people that have largely been marginalized.

I'm going to start the recording, and I will open up the floor to you to begin your statement wherever you want. Okay?

Female: I was two and a half when I was taken from my mother.

Female: I was taken away.

Joshua Gagnon: I got taken away.

Female: [00:17:30] All of my brothers and sisters were taken from her.

Female: The state had taken my children and put them in foster care. And they separated them and put each one with a white family.

Joshua Gagnon: Between five and 18 years old, it's been group home, group home, foster parent, hospital, crisis unit, group home, group home, foster parents, hospital, group home, group home. I counted 26 just by memory, but I'm sure like there's [00:18:00] gaps in my memory.

Female: Right from the minute, my GHS worker left, they looked at me and was like, "So, this is how it's going to work." She comes back, "You're going say everything is fine." And from that moment, I knew. I was just like, "Am I even going to be able to live through this?"

Georgana: I know one thing that's scarred me bad was our foster father taking us out to the shed. Back then we had a shed attached to the house, [00:18:30] and he would tell us to strip. I could see him now, that filthy, rotten, dirty man.

Female: I don't know why I'm weepy over it.

Rachel George: That's okay.

Female: I don't know how lo- it was over 50 years ago, 55 years ago. And I never, [00:19:00] it's just something I put behind me.

Esther Anne: [00:19:30] All the tears are collected on the tissues throughout the day, and those tears are sacred. And we wanted to, um, they wanted to burn them in the sacred fire at the end of every day to make sure those tears, um, reach the ancestors. And, uh, so we honor them that way.

Gkisedtanamoogk: [foreign language 00:19:59]

Esther Anne: The [00:21:00] Wabanaki are the people who are there to greet the light; so are the people of the dawn. [00:21:30] 13,000 years, Wabanaki here in this territory. At one time we had over 20 tribes in our confederacy. Now, in Maine, there are four tribes left. My tribe, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, has two locations. Then there is the Penobscot Nation, the Aroostook Band of Micmacs and the Houlton Band of Maliseet.

8, [00:22:00] 000 Wabanaki people left in the United States. But we're still here. We know that silence, and keeping these stories in, is not working for us. And we have faith that this is the only way to heal our communities.

[00:22:30] Hey, I just found some cool things about dioxin and the Penobscot River from '97. Holy mitchkin, I haven't seen this in a long time. We were kind of crazy. Look. (laughs) That's back in 1999-2000.

Female: Oh my god, when you guys first started.

Esther Anne: [00:23:00] That must have been, uh, look at my glasses. That must have been freaking (laughing) long time ago (laughs). I'm the co-director of Maine Wabanaki REACH. That stands for Reconciliation Engagement Advocacy Change and Healing. In 2008, this idea came to our attention about a truth and reconciliation commission process.

News Anchor : [00:23:30] One country is trying a bold experiment, to kill off the ancient hatreds, by yanking them into the light.

Male: I now declare that the hearing of the truth and reconciliation commission is now in session. Do you solemnly swear ...

Esther Anne: In South Africa there was this process after apartheid that helped bring some healing and some justice.

News Anchor : The commission is part church service, part court hearing, part group therapy. Victims [00:24:00] get a chance to tell their stories, and perpetrators get a chance to avoid prosecution.

Arch Desmond T.: There is something called restorative justice. And this is the option that we have chosen.

News Anchor : Truth and Reconciliation, you're going to be hearing those words a lot in the coming weeks. This month, a commission begins the job of hearing what happened at Canada's residential schools.

Esther Anne: The TRC in Canada was focused on the forced removal [00:24:30] of indigenous children to state and church-run boarding schools.

Justin Trudeau: The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

Esther Anne: In my role as REACH co-director, we were able to visit with the Canadian TRC and learn from their experiences. [00:25:00] We decided to go for it.

Female: All right. Happiness. One more.

Esther Anne: Maine Wabanaki REACH conceptualized the TRC, established the TRC, saw them through to the selection process. Our role was to advise the TRC and connect them to people who [00:25:30] want to provide statements and provide healing opportunities and education around this.

Female: Okay. Smile back.

Esther Anne: The reconciliation is the first in our name and that's really what we're striving for, the big step-back, long-term picture, you know, way beyond me, because the TRC process is just, uh, one of the tools that reach, you know, one of the things we've done in, um, and plan to do [00:26:00] toward, uh, you know, truth, healing and change, toward this, hopefully, this decolonization or this, you know, we really need to bring people together.

Female: Aw, thank you.

Female: Okay.

Female: Hey, video dudes.

Female: All right. (laughing)

Carol Wishcampe: So, we are coming up in two weeks to the year anniversary of [00:26:30] our being seated. And we have two and a half years to put the report together.

Heather Martin: Um, so the proposed work plan going forward involves, um, statement gathering within the community, with the team of statement gatherers, and Rachel going up for times that are set and established that we work through with REACH, much like a community health worker might go to a community with days and times and people sign up for a [00:27:00] time to be there. So, I had planned to block for us to make time available for each community for one visit.

Matt Dunlap: The unvarnished truth is that we may not be able to go back a second time. We have to count in getting our work done as much as we can. You know, here we are. It's been a year in two weeks, and we've been to one community.

Heather Martin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matt Dunlap: And we have a lot more to do.

Female: Right.

Matt Dunlap: I guess we get going on the report. [00:27:30] Go down to the very bottom first. I'm sure I'll cause some alarm by being down here. There we go. The door weighs about a thousand pounds. So, this is the vault. [00:28:00] 1776 Constitution, a certified copy of ... Oh, pea- the Treaty of Peace. To negotiate and settle any misunderstandings or differences with the Passamaquoddy Indians. February 10, 1795. The enclosed is turned over this department January 21st, 1942 by Joseph C. Wilson, caretaker of the museum who found the papers in an old shoe. [00:28:30] How's that for legal document, huh? That's where we thought a Peace for Passamaquoddy was being stored in a shoe.

The governor was very concerned about me being on the commission. He was concerned that someone could use the findings of the commission to demand reparations for past wrongs. And they can dismiss it, you know, as one of those new aged talking circles, but with the secretary of state on there, [00:29:00] it's going to gain some currency with folks that probably wouldn't otherwise care. And it's not right. It's not the way it ought to be, but I think that's what they, a lot people are very afraid of. You know, that, uh, we may say too much. We may use the G word. You know? And that's, that's a dangerous word to reflect on genocide.

Senator Abourez: Would you like to come up to the witness stand?

Cheryl Spider D: [00:29:30] I'll start with my oldest boy, John. Um, I had a babysitter watching him and I went to get him, but they wouldn't give him back to me. So, I went to my social worker and I asked him if he'd come with me up there. (laughs)

Senator Abourez: Now, uh, your tal- that's great. You're doing very good. Now, I have to ask you a couple questions. Uh, when, when did this take place? Can you tell us the month and the year?

Cheryl Spider D: [00:30:00] That was, um, in December 1970. And, uh, I asked him if he'd meet me at the store.

Senator Abourez: You asked the social worker?

Cheryl Spider D: Yes.

Senator Abourez: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Cheryl Spider D: And, um, he didn't come. So, I went up and I called him from that store there and he says that they already went and they took John. And they took him to a foster home and that I couldn't get him back.

Senator Abourez: Did the welfare department, um, ever prove [00:30:30] that, uh, you weren't, uh, being the best mother for that child at all? Did they ...

Cheryl Spider D: Well, they always come to me and said that I wasn't, I wasn't a very good mother and everything, and that my children would be better off if they were in a white home or if they were adopted out. And that this home, wherever they were, that would buy them all this stuff that I couldn't give them, and give them all the love that I could never give them.

Senator Abourez: Did, were they ever able to prove that in court or did they give anybody a specific example of why you weren't a good mother?

Cheryl Spider D: You answer that one.

Attorney: [00:31:00] The answer, Senator Abourezk, is no. It was never proven in court that she was unfit.

Senator Abourez: It appears that for decades, Indian parents and their children have been at the mercy of arbitrary or abusive action of local, state, federal and private agency officials. It is the responsibility of the Congress to take whatever action is within [00:31:30] its power to see that the American Indian communities and the families contained within those communities are not destroyed.

News Anchor : Several hundred Indians and they supporters walk form the Lincoln Memorial past the Washington Monument up to Capitol Hill today. Their destination after a cross country walk all the way from California. The Indians held a rally this afternoon to protest a number of bills now pending in the Congress, but they [00:32:00] are also here to support certain legislations, including one proposed law that will affect their right to decide what can happen to Indian children.

Esther Anne: In 1978, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act. The premise of ICWA is that it's in the best interest of children who can't live with their parents to be placed with Native families.

News Anchor : The issue is not whether some Indians are unfit parents, [00:32:30] but who decides their fitness? Many Indians are upset because those decisions are made by social workers and judges who are applying white middle class standards to what is in effect a foreign culture.

Female: Why? Why'd you peel it for me?

Esther Anne: So, when a native child is in state child welfare custody, there's a set of preferences of placement. So, number one is with the child's extended family. Number two is another family [00:33:00] in the tribe. Number three is family of another tribe. And then, four is any foster family.

Congress recognized that the child has a birth right to their tribe, and that the tribe's continued existence depended on children being able to be who they are and know who they are. And that transfer of knowledge for generations, cultural knowledge, spiritual knowledge, those things that make us who we [00:33:30] are.

After the passage of ICWA, Maine still had one of the highest rates of removal. In 1999, the state Child Welfare Department was found to be out of compliance with ICWA, the Indian Child Welfare Act. [00:34:00] That was really the impetus for the TRC.

Gkisedtanamoogk: I never would have thought that the state of Maine would ever engage with the Wabanaki on this level. They might see it as, uh, as a superficial gesture, um, but we see it as something very deep, a necessary transition from being an occupier [00:34:30] to being a neighbor with legitimacy.

Rachel George: It is November 19, 2014. We're here in Augusta, Maine. Is there anything you want to say starting off or do you just want me to jump into the questions.

Male: Nope, just jump in.

Heather Martin: Could you please tell me about your current and/or past [00:35:00] employment in state child welfare?

Welfare 1: In 1960 I began as a child welfare worker at Northern Penobscot County.

Welfare 2: I'm presently a supervisor with the Department of Health and Human Services.

Welfare 3: We all got advised about ICWA, but at least the judges didn't figure this was anything we had to do much about, that if ICWA applied, one of these other players was going to tell us about it.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Welfare 3: And so, [00:35:30] you know, we didn't ask, and actually, they never told. And everybody just kind of went on our merry way.

Welfare 4: And I've certainly have had staff, you know, say to me, "Oh, it's going to be challenging to have the tribe involved. So, we're going to do this." And I'm like, "No, no, no, no. No, we're not. We're going to contact them right now."

Peter: The foster care system is not, and it's not any one fault. It's a large system. Uh, it's always, and I've worked [00:36:00] in it for 20 years and it, it always is a struggle.

Welfare 1: The basic notion in child welfare among the child protective people, as I understood it, was, quote, "The apple doesn't fall from the tree." And therefore it's a good idea to get them away from their family.

Esther Anne: Not just in connection with Native American families, but with all families, kind of on the theory that, "Well, this mom clearly didn't get good parenting, and so it would be equally risky to place [00:36:30] with grandmother."

Welfare 2: Such a different concept than American family, or, or, uh, uh, the basic culture here. And sort of the tribe is the family, as opposed to this nuclear family. So, it's a very different concept for someone who's been raised, you know, American.

Welfare 5: Uh, and I think there are cultural activities available and I think, uh, the fam- the foster families, if they want to accept one of this children have a [00:37:00] responsibility to follow through on that. Again, I think it's a resource issue.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Welfare 5: Two sneakers for the feet sometimes is more important than ...

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Female: I guess to the restoration ...

Welfare 5: Learning an Indian dance. Yeah.

Cindy: It seems like a myth that there is this culture happening, you know, up North. And what does that look like in 2014? We're [00:37:30] not really sure.

Gkisedtanamoogk: [00:38:00] Everything above our heads and below our feet, we're all connected, too. Whether it's human beings or whether it's animals, whether it's stone or water, everything is connected to that light. [00:38:30] How we apply our relationship to creation, to one another, we call that culture. Every people on the earth has a culture; a way for us to understand how we are, where we are, why we are. It, it's what [00:39:00] causes me to be who I am to even the way I look.

I don't consider earrings jewelry. I consider them part of my, my being, the essence of who I am. I've been molded and shaped by culture since at least my sophomore year at Boston University, where young people in American-Indian movement had really changed my life. [00:39:30] Everything that I've learned in the process about culture is what I bring everywhere.

So, right in the center, as we sit in a circle like this, right in the center is where all things sacred. And the [hopisoon 00:39:44], our children are right in the center, right, of our community. It takes a whole community to care for them. We may not be related to those little ones, but we consider them our children. You know, [00:40:00] they look at us, they look at you and they reflect. This is the way I'm supposed to be.

Donna May Adams: My adopted name is Donna May Adams. Uh, my friends [00:40:30] call me Dawn. And before I was adopted, my name was Neptune. I have a hard time speaking, uh, unless I'm behind, uh, a computer screen. And I think some of that stems from, uh, one of my earliest memories. I had my mouth washed out with soap for speaking Penobscot. We were, [00:41:00] um, we were put in a very racist home, a home where, um, the foster mother was very much part of that whole '50s push to, uh, kill the Indian to save the man.

I think she thought that what she was doing was what was best for us. And, uh, [00:41:30] you know, after, after being in my foster home for so long, and not being able to even admit to being a Penobscot or talk about it, or, or be curious about it, or anything, uh, I was like, "Yes, I'm finally Penobscot again." And I was going to my first pow-wow and, uh, I did nothing but hide, because I didn't know how to dance.

[00:42:00] So, I think that's the biggest thing for me, is the loss of identity. How, um, people going from one world to another, they don't belong in either. They don't feel like they belong in either. My foster mother told me that I was at her house because nobody on [00:42:30] the reservation wanted me, and that I was there out of the goodness of her heart. Um, and that she would, she would save me from being Penobscot.

So, uh, I think the only who is going to save me is myself. I think that's all I have to say. Tahoe!

Female: [00:43:00] Thank you.

Donna May Adams: Yes. (laughs)

Female: [Maquin Azelis 00:43:43] 7 years [00:43:30] old, her name means Sweet Angel. She's from Sipayik and her [agalia 00:43:51], her fancy shoal, made by Ivy Rose Tony. [00:44:00] All right. Thank you. Everybody give her a round of applause.

Kid: Wow. She's good, mom.

Gkisedtanamoogk: You take away the people's [00:44:30] understanding of who they are, their self-sufficiency and you replace it with nothing. And it's only been the research into the culture that's really helped restore us, to really enable us to remember.

Rapper: I got this aboriginal soul. I got this aboriginal flow. I got this [00:45:00] pain that I can't shake. Attached to my people I can't break. Got this history in my blood. Got my tribe that shows me love. So when I rise, you rise. Yeah, come on let's rise. Get it.

Chief Charlie P: [00:46:30] So, you haven't had anybody come here yet? I offered a ride out, but nobody was, uh, willing to come with me. [00:47:00] You guys need more people here, right?

Female: We'd like more people here.

Chief Charlie P: You'd like more people.

Female: We would like more people here.

Chief Charlie P: Let me call the office. We'll, we'll ...

Female: Great. Thank you.

Chief Charlie P: ... see if we can get some people out here. I just was talking with a gentleman and he was in one of the re- residential schools. And I know it. I said, you know, "Do you want to come out?" He says, "Well," he says, "No, not really."

Male: Yeah.

Chief Charlie P: (laughs) And it's like, he was right, I [00:47:30] was offering him a ride.

Male: [crosstalk 00:47:32]

Sandy W. H.: It's not something people find easy to talk about. Being raised institutionally, if you, you know, we know that aside from all the abuse, um, and the neglect, uh,

the, no one really learned how to nurture or have a family. You just ha- don't have any of, any of that. Uh, uh ...

Chief Charlie P: But how long does that last? How long will that last?

Sandy W. H.: Until, I believe it'll, it will last until we come forward and heal that in us. So, [00:48:00] for a, here's a, I guess I look at it this way. I was adopted out and went through a terrible, really horrible time of not knowing who I was. It's really devastating to not have a sense of where you belong ...

Chief Charlie P: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sandy W. H.: ... who you are. So, then you add the fact that I grew up in a very abusive environment. So, I became an addict and when I had children, I wasn't able to connect to my bo- daughter when she was born. I didn't hold her and go, "[00:48:30] Oh, my baby."

Chief Charlie P: Yeah.

Sandy W. H.: I held her and was like, "Oh." Uh, uh, I only held her as long as I had to. And I felt really guilty and felt really bad about that. So, it took years, it took many years for me to heal, because I ended up getting sober.

Chief Charlie P: Yeah.

Sandy W. H.: Um, and then it took years, even five years of my sobriety to still undo, repeating everything that had been done to me.

Chief Charlie P: And now that we're talking, I could see certain things in my dad.

Sandy W. H.: Sure.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chief Charlie P: You know? [00:49:00] You know, even though he was a good dad and he raised me well, but there was still, you know, there's just, there was something missing.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Female: Exactly.

Chief Charlie P: Let's sit down.

Female: (laughs) Okay.

Female: Sure.

Chief Charlie P: (laughs) Instead of ... And we, maybe we could all slide in. You guys ...

Female: [crosstalk 00:49:18] All right.

Female: Good.

Female: [crosstalk 00:49:22]

Tania: I think a lot of our parents and grandparents went to the residential schools in this area, and we're kind of [00:49:30] the product.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tania: And, um, you know, they're still waiting to heal.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tania: And even though there's not a lot of physical faces that we're looking at, I think that spiritually we, I think that they're here and, and they're, they're waiting to, they're, they're here listening.

Sandy W. H.: I understand the hesitancy. Why would they come and tell their history to five people they've never [00:50:00] met before. And these people are part of, um, an agreement with the government. And so, how is that going to help me today meet my, the needs of my family? So, there's a very good example of, um, not many show up. We have to indigenize this process [00:50:30] and not go at it the way, um, you would typically go at, observing and reporting.

Female: Yeah, [00:51:00] that would be a great place right there.

Female: So, right here?

Female: Right here.

Female: Right here.

Female: Oh, okay.

Female: Wait. Where this is?

Female: Yeah.

Female: Probably it'll be over there and the [inaudible 00:51:25].

Molly Newell: Yeah. But you get you, you guys watch out for those trees. It depends on how big your fire keeper [00:51:30] is keeping your fire.

Holly Cleaves: Many of you have come here to protect the future, to protect your families. Heal and connect in some way. [00:52:00] I'm just hoping that today will bring strength, wisdom, and energy.

Denise: I remember [00:52:30] they took us to Old Town. There's a great big house. There were other state foster kids there. And they left us there. And, um, I remember we all slept in one big room, we had bunk beds. If you wet the bed, you had to stay in that bed for 24 hours, and you couldn't get up. And if you had to pee, you had to pee in the bed. And, um, [00:53:00] if you stole food, you couldn't eat for 24 hours. I never cried like this. I never cried. I don't know what's the matter with me.

I think it was only one time we told the state worker what happened, [00:53:30] because after she left, we got the worst beating we've ever had. And we never told again. And we spent four years [00:54:00] there. Every, every single day was torture. I think I need to do this in two parts. Can we, can we stop now? I don't know what's wrong with me.

Esther Anne: [00:54:30] When Denise gave her statement and I was her support person in front of the commission and the statement gatherers were there, I remember the volunteer statement gatherers, a lot of them were crying and having a really hard time. There wasn't a lot of, um, a lot of tribal people that showed up and we were real cognizant of not making there be more, more people from the outside than people from the community. And I saw a couple people from the community come open the door, boof, you [00:55:00] know, "Oh my god, it's too many people, you know, that I don't know," and leave.

And so, at lunch, we had a conversation and was decided that for the afternoon circle, the only people that would be there were members of REACH, people from the community, and the commissioners. The rest of the folks that weren't going to be in that circle went downstairs in another room to have their own gathering.

Carol Wishcamper: I'd [00:55:30] like to start and I don't know what I'm going to say except that I feel like the decision to have all of REACH day and not TRC staff felt unresolved in terms of what was the rationale behind it. I think that if we are going to reconcile, if [00:56:00] we can't be a community ourselves, then it's really hard to be, um, in the business of reconciliation.

Esther Anne: The dynamics that I saw happening in the room when tribal people came and left ...

Female: Yeah.

Esther Anne: ... because they saw too many people that that's not acceptable to me.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Anne: And if we even had that five extra staff, that would have been two to one.

Lisa S: We can say it wasn't white and Native or non-Native than native. The reality is, the majority of the people that went downstairs [00:56:30] were non-Native and non- or white. All I could think about was, you're isolating half of who I am in this room.

Maureen Harris: I, I'm sitting here thinking, "Wow, I'm not sure we're, we're going to be able to gain your trust."

Margot M: I recognize that, like, we're not your top priority and we should have to be, but if you want allies, then I would say from where I sit, [00:57:00] then there does need to be some different kind of communication.

Esther Anne: It's not about making white people feel welcome. It's not about making you guys feel, um, it's not about you. It's about Sipayik, Sipayik [foreign language 00:57:19]. It's about my people, and that's where I'm from. It's about my people feeling safe and honored and listened to and validated. So, there's that moment where you choose [00:57:30] to have your voice.

My, my thinking was, you know, who are we serving, what are we here to do. And I'm here to serve my people. That's first and foremost. And I knew all along in this process, just as there are competing interest with truth, healing and change, sometimes they compete with each other; so does truth and reconciliation.

Female: Yeah.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Anne: Because we knew from the beginning that non-Native people wanted to jump right into the reconciliation. Why can't we just all, you know ... And the Native [00:58:00] people, you know, t- want the truth, but it's hard to get there. It's hard to get the Native people to get there. And sometimes, you know, all, all through this process since 2008, I have thought, we should just call it a truth commission.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Anne: Because reconciliation is not, it's not my goal.

Female: Yeah.

Esther Anne: Really. I mean, that the healing of my people is my goal.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Anne: And I don't think that we can get to the place where we can reconcile that stuff with non-Natives until we've healed ourselves.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Esther Anne: [00:58:30] And to do that, we need to be by ourselves at a, a lot. A lot of times, we need to be alone. And I think that being a true ally to Native people, you have to know when you need to step back and when you need to go downstairs. You know, you, by all intents and purposes, you represent the perpetrator.

Gkisedtanamoogk: [00:59:00] Uh, I want to remind us and we've come, we've come in to this experience for the purpose of beginning a process that's historic.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gkisedtanamoogk: Um, I'm of the opinion that there is no place for the United States, but there's a place for you. And that, in the future, this, this, this, this space that we [00:59:30] call the United States may not be the United States anymore.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gkisedtanamoogk: But it will be human beings. It will be a process that we have regained our humanity, and this is the first, first step towards that.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gkisedtanamoogk: You know, um, that's, that's, that's what brings me to this table.

Female: [01:00:00] Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matt Dunlap: Okay. All right. Sounds good. All right. You too. Bye. I think what we're starting to realize now is that you don't take 500 years of mistrust and wash it away with one commission, you know. Uh, reality is, I mean, three of us [01:00:30] are white, um, you know, they don't know who we are. There's, we, and, and, and I guess looking back on it, we weren't surprised that the turnout at some of the early visits was relatively light. That's not a surprise.

You know, we've heard from a number of people that it would be great to have a Native executive director. That would help build trust with the communities, which I don't disagree with, except the, there's more than just the five

communities. [01:01:00] There's the white community. And there, having the Native executive director may not as well, you know. Um, I don't think we, we can win by trying to negotiate people's prejudices on either side, you know.

Um, we've already heard it a number of times, at least, at least second hand, when we try to shape something that we're doing, it's like, "You're not Native. You don't understand. You can't do it that way." Well, that's entirely the point. [01:01:30] We're trying to understand.

Female: Did you want to meet with me first?

Matt Dunlap: I, yeah.

Female: Yeah.

Matt Dunlap: I mean, whatever you want to do.

Heather Martin: REACH has been really clear that reconciliation [01:02:00] is not their goal, that they're there for healing, which is great. And I think that that should be the mission of REACH and that should be what REACH does.

Matt Dunlap: But that's not our mission.

Heather Martin: But that's not our mission.

Matt Dunlap: I think REACH interpreted its role as changing from being advisory to being more directory. So, now, you have to speak for the mission.

Heather Martin: Right.

Matt Dunlap: It's about the work of this commission.

Heather Martin: Right.

Matt Dunlap: Because frankly, REACH has no busi- business telling us what staff we can bring to a community.

Heather Martin: Right.

Matt Dunlap: They can't do that.

Heather Martin: [01:02:30] So, one thing that I want to prepare you guys for as we go into this call is that when we push the issue and say we go up as a group, I think it's highly likely that the response is going to be really negative.

Esther Anne: As the [01:03:00] conversation started unfolding and, and white privilege just kept coming in my head, it's like, "This is what I'm seeing. This is what I'm hearing." What do you mean I can't have access to this? I can, I can't be in that circle? I can't hear those stories? I can't be at the Sacred Fire? What do you mean? I want to be there. I mean, that, that's not what they were saying, but that, that's what was happening. That's the dynamic.

Heather Martin: I've heard so much feedback [01:03:30] that my own white privilege is keeping me from seeing the needs of the community, and I am, I'm not saying that's not true. I'm saying that I'm trying.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heather Martin: And I don't think that my obligation with it is to apologize for having it. I think my obligation is to harness it, to try and bring change. And I also, wow, I heard the raw emotion in why they don't want the whole group there. [01:04:00] Mm.

Esther Anne: That moment on the phone with all the, you know, there's white women and there's Indian women, and we're confront in white privilege, and having that, starting to speak up and then us all speaking up and, and feeling ... I felt close to my ancestors in that time. And I, it sounds corny, oh, whatever, but, um, it was a necessary interaction that need to happen and a necessary conversation, and, uh, grieving and healing [01:04:30] and coming back together.

Jim Sappier: Grandfather, thank you so very much [01:05:00] for all that is, and let it be the way you want it. [foreign language 01:05:04]

Gail Werrbach: First of all, I want to thank you all very much for welcoming the commission to your community. I'm here really for, um, for one reason, and that is to apologize for my profession. I'm a social worker. Um, I'm [01:05:30] a white social worker. Um, I'm the director of the School of Social Work at the University of Maine. So, I educate social workers. I'm really honored to be able to represent my profession and to learn as much as I can so that the harm that has happened in the past and that I think also continues to this day won't continue.

What we're trying to do at this point is to hear from as many people as [01:06:00] we can within the Native communities in whatever vehicle is going to be the most comfortable for them. We're learning that we need to go with the expertise of REACH and the community organizers for the best way to enter their community.

Matt Dunlap: [01:06:30] I wanted to say thank you, uh, for inviting us into the community. Thank you for letting us be a part of your lives.

Dominic: The [01:07:00] truth and reconciliation, the truth hurts. The truth is very painful, very painful for us. And a lot of times we resist that because we don't want to

deal with it. It doesn't feel good to stand up here because I learned very early [01:07:30] that I had to hide my feelings, that I had to be tough, not knowing that this pain was actually destroying me as a human being. And today, I'm dealing with the pain that caused me to be a monster in my life, because without me dealing with this, I can never be the grandfather that I need to be to my grandchildren. So, I have a responsibility to my family [01:08:00] and I have a responsibility to my people.

Terri: As a result of all those learnings, all those messages, you're not worthy, you're not lovable. You have Indian blood. So, therefore, the abuse is justified. You learned to grow up believing the lies.

Male: I mean, it's just still a nightmare. I still dream about it. And I'm not the only who suffered either, because that's my brother over there.

Tyneshia: [01:08:30] When she was five months old, she was taken from me because I went through post-partum depression and they said I was a danger to my child.

Maria: That internalized depression, you know, that seems it was always there. And for the longest time, I was really afraid to even say that I was Indian.

Joshua Gagnon: Hearing everyone, it's, uh, it's kind of overwhelming because I always thought I was alone, you know. But I'm, I'm not alone now and it's, "Whoa." (laughs)

Sandy W. H.: The solution is, is this energy [01:09:00] that we have when we're connected, because it's not just you or just you or just you. It's your ancestors who are behind you who brought you here. And whenever we sit in that circle, that's what we have, that power and that strength.

Carol W: [01:09:30] As we were sitting in the circle this morning, I began thinking about that's what exactly needs to happen.

Female: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Carol W: And it needs to happen [01:10:00] in its own pace. I would rather be less obsessing about the report than to really doing ...

Female: The community.

Female: Community work.

Female: Yeah.

Matt Dunlap: If we're modifying our approach to reflect the needs of these communities and the organic flow of the narrative, I think we'll find some success.

Janet Lola: [01:10:30] When you're ripped from your family and your community and your grandparents, and you're separated by hours and miles, of course you're going to have problems, you know.

Tania: Children will get moved and we wouldn't get notified. And then, we'd have to search for our kids. And by time we get to see them, they don't even know who we are anymore.

Bert Polchies: I had gone to the Bureau of Indian Affairs [01:11:00] looking for help. They would come back each time telling me that Penobscot Nation no longer exists.

Esther Anne: I'm seeing [01:11:30] that people are far more willing to provide statements after the commission has been in the community. So, they have been collecting more statement, but it's after that initial visit into the community.

Rachel George: To date, we have taken 153 individual statements.

Female: Wow.

Male: Wow.

Female: Nice.

Peggy Pottle: [01:12:00] I found early on that when I got high and I drink, I feel, those bad feelings went away. Anything is quite, I didn't have to feel that hurt. And the guilt, oh my god, I felt so guilty, because I didn't know what I've done.

Blue: No self-esteem at all, which leads you to get into abusive relationships, which leads you to not be [01:12:30] the proper parent, to food you should have put, but you didn't have the tools.

Molly: I think you guys are the first ones I ever told.

Esther Anne: People have been afraid [01:13:00] to share, and I think that, that report in June, you know, when we have, you know, this over a hundred statements from people saying this is my truth and this is my story, I think that is like the can opener, (laughs) because people will see the value and the power of the circle. [01:13:30] Those interactions and those conversations have an impact on the commissioner and has an impact on the report.

Keith Shortall: [01:14:00] From the MPBN Studios, I'm Keith Shortall, and this is Maine Calling. [01:14:30] Last weekend, the Maine Wabanaki State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its report on what happened to tribal children placed in the state welfare system. Today, we'll learn about the commission's findings and what steps it recommends for improving relations between the state and Maine's Indian tribes.

Matt Dunlap: [01:15:00] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has just concluded its work. We've issued our report. Some of the feedback on this report, people are saying, "No, no, no. No, this is not genocide. You know, genocide is what happened at Auschwitz. Genocide is what happened in El Salvador or in Sierra Leone or Rwanda. This is not genocide."

Sandy W. H.: [01:15:30] This is nothing new to REACH or any of us, right? But what we now have, which is what white people love, is we have documentation [01:16:00] and we've got research.

Gail: [01:16:30] The piece that I keep thinking about that's so hard to translate is the piece of our findings that have to do with that self-reflection, that have to do with dealing with institutional racism and dealing with white privilege.

Female: [01:17:00] So, what is going to be done for the policies to change?

Carol: Hopefully, everybody here will find their place and look at their responsibility.

Esther Anne: [01:17:30] We've been meeting a lot to try to figure out where we want to go after the TRC. And that led us to create a training where non-Native people learn about history. They learn about their privilege and they reflect about how to be an ally.

Peggy Pottle: I can't tell you how it feels to, to tell somebody this stuff. You know what I mean? It hurts but at the same time, I feel like, "Haah." It's just like a breath of fresh air. It is.

Georgana: [01:18:00] It takes a little bit of a load off us and makes us realize that, yes, there are people, they have, yeah, that really care.

Matt Dunlap: When you forbid people from speaking their language, do you take their children away and put them in totally different cultural settings, what are you really doing? [01:18:30] What else do you call it besides cultural genocide?

Sandy W. H.: We've witnessed over the last 27 months the incredible strength of the Wabanaki people. Of course it starts in Maine; the People of the Dawn, the People of the First Light. [01:19:00] That is where everything begins.

Male: You [01:19:30] know, it's interesting talking about reconciliation. I, I think we still have to get our hands around what that's going to mean. And I don't think it's, it's going to mean what they thought it meant when they put the word in the title. Um ...

Gkisedtanamoogk: Well, that's the long road. It's something that we can't predict. But what we do right now has to lead to the much longer, probably much [01:20:00] more difficult work.

Male:

It's going to be a nice morning. Sunrise is in less than an hour.