

General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Tania Morey Paul

Date: October 30, 2014

Location: Presque Isle, Maine

Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: N/A

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

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Recording

RG: Alright it is October 30, 2014, we're here at the Aroostook Band of Micmacs in Presque Isle, Maine, my name is Rachel George, and I'm here today with...

TMP: Tania Paul.

RG: Fantastic. The file number is A-201410-00110. Yeah, that's right. Tania, have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

TMP: Yes.

RG: And I have to let you know, if at any point during this recording, you indicate that there is a child or an elder currently in need of protection, or that there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm, or death, to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information may not be protected as confidential.

(TMP nods.)

RG: Um, do you have anywhere in particular you'd like to start? Or would you like me to just go through the questions?

TMP: You can start.

RG: Can you tell me about your employment with child welfare and when that kind of started?

TMP: Yep, I started in March of 2009 for the Aroostook Band of Micmacs as the Indian Child Welfare worker/Domestic Violence worker amongst other things. [00:01:10.07] And I continued on until I became the director almost two years ago, and then went for a new position back in July and I got done on August 10th, 2014.

RG: What's your new position?

TMP: I'm the Youth Program Director for the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. [00:01:30.12]

RG: That's exciting.

TMP: Yeah.

RG: Can you tell me a little bit more about what your job entailed while you were... over that long period of time?

TMP: Yes. It started out when I first started I had, um, I wanted to follow in Rosella Silliboy's footsteps. She did a lot of home visits with the kids where she would bring a craft that was cultural for them to do like dream catchers, basket making. Anything like that. So when-- and also like smudging, teaching the youth about smudging and ceremonies in general. So it started out really nice. I would go to the homes and [00:02:12.07] you know I'd do-- I'd take them outside and we'd do smudging. We did basket making, dream catchers and what amazed me as I went on, I found out that youth that they would have a lot of issues with, say like with attention, they could only get maybe a few minutes with a child and then that child would do something else, I could get an hour or two out of these youth that were doing projects that had to do with their culture.

And so I found that was huge, and the problem being is that I was the only one. So as time went on I had three cases when I first started and then I'd say when I got done to, on average over twenty youth in state custody. So my position just got harder and more difficult as I went on. [00:03:12.28] I was met with a lot of-- sometimes some really good workers that wanted me involved, wanted to find ways to help get our kids to our functions, come to our Christmas party or Halloween parties, to our annual Mawiomis, which means gathering. They would, you know, they'd work with us and sometimes even come themselves. [00:03:38.05]

Where other places I went to I remember one time the first words out of the worker's mouth were, what can you do here? Why are you here? And being the person I am, I'm like well, I said, so we have emergency assistance that can actually help a family if they're having a hard time with this, this, or this. We have this program, we have that program. So then it just kind



of— you know, she was like oh. And then as time went on she was actually happy if I was on board. When she had a Native case she called me right away and she'd be like, Tania, I need help with this. [00:04:17.00] And so I was able to work with people where I'd see relationships change.

But some of the biggest problems I would see were when it came time-- because with the department there's a time frame. There's no time frame for Native people. That's not how we work. So it— where the clash came in was when they wanted to terminate parental rights. So a lot of tribes don't even agree at all to terminate parental rights. So and now the person that kind of superseded me— or not superseded but that came after me is now starting to come with friction when they are talking about this. [00:05:00.05] So they— then they— it seems like the, the phone calls— you're calling out and nobody's returning your calls. You're finding about— out about meetings that are taking place in regards to that youth, and you haven't even been notified, ah, your lawyer wasn't notified. So it, it seems like as long as we're going along with the way that they wanted to do things, they would have us involved, but law states that we're supposed to have maximum participation as if we were a parent. That's really important. [00:05:31.26]

So, I feel like maybe it wasn't intentional, and that the department now has been trained— they train their workers to focus on strengths, but then you have supervisors that have been there for a very long time. So I find that they still end up reverting back to the same— well look at all these things that you're not doing for us. This is what we want and we want you to do this, this, and this, all these things, before you can get your child back. [00:05:58.08] You know, those types of things.

So um, it was really difficult and painful because what I've seen in the time I was there, um, that we...a lot of our youth that get into the system, we end up losing contact with them because they end up in residential care. When they can't be assimilated or they don't fit into the homes that they keep getting moved to, they end up in residential care. [00:06:27.07] And then they get medicated. And then they get older. So basically their behaviors are just being controlled till they get to a certain point, and then they can't even survive in outside society when they age out. And they don't— if they haven't had that contact with us, if they haven't been brought to us or we haven't been able to get to them, because sometimes that was the issue, the children would get moved and we wouldn't get notified, and then we'd have to search for our kids. And by the time we get to see them, they don't even know who we are anymore. So, if they don't have that when they leave the state, they have this hole. It's like this emptiness. And they're just looking to fill it. So I, I guess that's a little more than what you asked for. [00:07:11.12]

RG: No that's, that's great. There's so many directions I want to take that. I don't know which one to go.

TMP: I know. I'm sorry—

RG: No, no that's ok. That's fantastic. [00:07:27.20] Where were the main residential facilities that kids were being sent to?

TMP: A couple times we had some that were sent to the Fort Kent area, but a lot of times Fort Kent doesn't want to— well, let's start with the lower level. So we have a crisis unit Fort Fairfield, but they can only handle certain situations. So a lot of times our children are very aggressive. So they would try to send them to Fort Kent. Sometimes they would get that approval. Sometimes they wouldn't. So then we ended up with children all the way down state in southern areas like Sweetser. Uh there's another one. There's a couple down there.

[00:08:08.16] But basically further than Augusta. I think there was a couple times that they used Acadia, but again the level of safety, those types of things that sometimes they found were too high to be able to deal with.

RG: Yeah. You mentioned that the state wasn't letting you know when kids were being moved. Was that something that happened frequently? [00:08:34.23] I guess if you had to, if you had to quantify it with the cases that you've worked on. Just a rough estimate.

TMP: I want to say that it happened every single time one of our youth was used to-- moved to a residential unit, we would find out after the fact. The only time that I was notified about one of my youth during the evening after hours— and I think partly because this person had done that before, had waited to notify me, so somebody must have said something to them including myself— called. But they waited until the end of the weekend. So this youth went missing on a Friday. So this wasn't even that they were getting sent to a residential unit. This is a youth that took off, didn't show up for counseling. And they-- this happened on a Friday. They waited until Sunday to call me, to let me know that they weren't sure where this youth was. And I was able to via Facebook, “Hey how are you doing, I'm just really worried. I heard that, you know, that you might not be ok, and I'm worried. It's cold out. Can you at least let me know that you're ok?” Not even five minutes. [00:09:56.27] I'm at my nana's. You know, it was that simple. And had they contacted me on Friday, I would have been able to go out there you know and yeah. So it just— little things— that's not little— I shouldn't say little. It's not a little thing at all. And it, it's huge. It's huge. And I don't feel like it's getting any better for the worker that's there now. [00:10:22.18]

And again the funding piece I think goes back to the whole— that goes right to the Bureau, that for some reason in the past at least nine years there's no funds. There's— we're not the same as other tribes that get funding for their ICWA program every year. Somehow we lost that title of funding, and we're hoping that that will get moved to the way it's supposed to cause it's not supposed to be consolidated into the big— bigger parts. Because it's not being properly funded. And it hasn't been getting properly funded for that long. And when I came on in '09, I had three cases. Whereas now I know that there's over twenty kids in care. So it doesn't make any sense that that, that funding has been ma— not even a quarter of what it should be. [00:11:16.00] And there's no way that one person can do that job.



RG: When you moved out of your position, were any of those kids– sorry, yeah– were any of those kids on, like did they stay within the tribe in tribal homes with kinship care like living with family members?

TMP: There's one case that has three children and the state tried to– how can I put this– it was a kinship, that failed because one of the children were in state custody and the other child was not. And they had said in a meeting that that wasn't being pursued because there was a different parent. But it never happened until the, the person that was related said, I can't take this anymore. I can't do it. I've had enough. [00:12:19.19] Cause they weren't getting any support. The tribe were the only ones supporting this, this-- this relative, and then we didn't have funding anymore to– cause we only have a tiny bit of funding. So we weren't really able to do a whole lot. You know like child care and that person wanted to work. Those types of things. So voluntarily had to hand over the kids. Yep. And then– and part of that being that there was something that wasn't followed according to how the department runs it. Not looking at our, the family picture of how we do things. [00:12:55.18]

But we fought it, and we were able to work with that person to a point now that sh– this person has one of them back home. And hopefully, you know, as time goes on and they're able to keep getting that support by being– a lot of the things they're offered to foster parents don't get offered to our foster parents. You know, they're not– they're not getting the, the information. And they have all that information. They should be able to contact them, and it's, it's not our job to contact them because they're the ones that are putting on that function. They should be reaching out. That's part of staying connected. Reach out to those foster parents. Call them. Let them know, hey we have this going on. Would you like to attend? [00:13:42.11] And yes it's ok– they could call us. But if we only have one person that's working in that program, how, how do we have time to sit down and, and call each family, and say this is what we have going on. Cause I know there's so many times that I wanted to do this with this family or do that. Or you know, there's all these things, but when you have over twenty cases, how do you as one person in a twenty eight days that are -- you know, moon cycle -- able to reach out to every single family at least twice a month. That's what I used to try to do is visit a youth twice a month, which pretty much went out the window as the cases grew. Yep, so. [00:14:22.03]

Yeah, I find now– still in the child and family team. So it was really discouraging to have one of those recently and find out that almost every case that was reviewed, besides that one where they're still, they're looking to TPR or there, there's no– nothing's happening. And it just sounded so negative and so heavy. And they're– it's being presented to a whole group of people. And if it's so heavy for us, how is that feeling for that one worker? I know for me, well from 2009 to 2– so about five and half years, I don't even know if that's right. Five years. [00:15:08.22] I'm making it longer. It was, it was really– it really was a personal– some of these parents I worked with as a youth worker when I was younger. So having to see them, you

know, losing their kids or succumbing to addiction. That's the biggest issue is addiction. So there's not enough resources for them. [00:15:34.24]

RG: What do you— what are you specifically referencing when you say resources? What kinds of resources?

TMP: One on one. Somebody that actually will, will stay with them— not stay with them, but I mean like be right on them. Be on task. Cause the ones that I was able to do that with, I was able to get those kids back in the home. But when my cases grew, I had to step back, and then guess what happened? When I had to step away from those parents, they ended up back in the same situation. And it's a lot harder to get your kids back once you-- when you lose them twice. [00:16:05.14] So it-- I would see a lot of progress that I had made with families just go down the drain because I wasn't able to reach those families as much once the cases started growing. [00:16:20.01]

RG: When did you first learn about Maine's policies related to Indian Child Welfare? The Indian Child Welfare Act?

TMP: I actually learned about this policy when I was a youth worker I believe at the age of nineteen, and I'm thirty-seven-- no! I'm thirty-eight. I'm thirty-eight now. Anyways, I was nineteen and I was in school? No, I was, I was working as the youth prevention coordinator. And I had a lot of experience as far as spiritualness and drumming and smudging, even, you know, growing up with hardships, trauma, all those types of things, and um, to— I had the youth— their oldest age group. And I was starting to have circles with them and drumming and smudging. And I had a lot of kids opening up. And one such that opened up in a way that I had to report. I had to refer to Rosella. And in that time I learned a little bit about Indian Child Welfare. Only because I was— you know I had to make that referral cause I didn't know where to turn. I didn't know what to do. You know I had somebody that was, you know, just pretty much you know losing them right in front of me. Crying and just not-- you know not know what to do for this person.

That's when I actually went back to school. [00:17:59.09] I started going back to school. And more recently in college. So between 2004 and 2008, I did a lot of research just in general on Native people when I was in school. I think I was trying to learn about myself. So I'd do a lot of papers on basket making or, you know, a lot of traditional things. And the Indian Child Welfare was one of those things that I went to Rosella. What do you do? What's your job? You know, so I sat there and didn't realize I was setting my self up in the future. But um, I, I had a lot of questions, and that's when I really learned more was in between 2004 and 2008. [00:18:37.06]

RG: That's great. Can you describe a situation in which you felt very positive about your work on behalf of a Wabanaki child and family that involved working with state child welfare? [00:19:04.06]

TMP: Positive? I'd have to say when I first started. That's when I felt the most positive. That's when I believed in them. [00:19:15.12] And I looked to them for help, and I talked to parents,



and I convinced parents that they were there to help, and I put it in our newsletter and put in that, you know like, if you are contacted by the department what your rights are. But when parents would call me or people would call me. You know this, this is happening, what should I do? This is happening. You know and try to talk to them. And basically letting them know that the department's there for you. So putting a lot of trust in them.

I can't say that's really positive, but in my brain— I guess when I first started, I had a really positive outlook on what to expect from the department. [00:19:55.13] And that— and thinking wow we're going to work together. I can't say that there's...there's one worker, there's more than one worker. But there's one specific worker that I felt had a— so much compassion and really cared, not just about the Native children— I think it has a lot to do with who they are as a person. When they can look behind that line.

Cause they're taught in school not to have dual relationships. They're taught it that almost for protection. And I've used this before. If I spent my entire time talking to you like this and you're only four or you're five or you're six and I'm telling you, I really care about you. How are you doing today? I only have an hour time but you know what can we do? You know, those types of things. Like, how would you feel? Cause that's pretty much what they do. And they're trained to do that. So I don't feel that it's really their— I mean they have to own some of it, but I feel like a lot of times you can come fresh out of college as a worker, and you've got-- you're like I'm gonna go change things. I'm gonna work with families and children, and I'm gonna help them. I'm gonna do all [00:21:08.18] these things for them, but yet I can't really give out who I am as a person. I have to stay reserved. I have to protect myself.

Well when you're working with Native people, that kind of goes out the door cause they-- we've already went through trauma. We went through genocide. We know who cares about us and who doesn't. We know if you-- when you come to our door, especially as a little child that's already been through trauma, has been through so many things themselves, they know if you care or not. [00:21:34.26]

You know, so it's really hard for me to— it was a— I'd have to say in five years there's only been maybe two or three people that I can think of that really were passionate about working with Native people. There were some that— and it's, I don't think it's because they didn't want to, I think that there's just, there's a lot of ignorance about who we are. Cause there was one worker in particular that, I tried to say, you really need to stop referring to us like we're Chinese or we're African. Or, you know stop talking in terms where it sounds like we're not even from here, because the soil that you walk on now is bathed in our blood. [00:22:25.01] And because of that blood, we're all here. Not just you and not just me. We're here on this ground together because of what they sacrificed. And she was appalled. You know, she's like, well I try to treat everybody the same. And I said, we're not the same. I said, I'm sorry but that's not— in a world that— where everything is perfect, I guess that's how we would want to do things, but that's not

the way it is for these Native children. [00:22:52.15] I said they're not the same. It's different because they've went through genocide.

Any group of people that have went through that type of hardship should not be treated the same as— and I don't know. It's all— it's hard. I think I just— as a worker I wanted her to recognize that I didn't feel like she was. She was, she was treating us like we were a minority so to speak. And so like you have people that really try in general to work with the whole population. We have a couple that are, are really want Natives to be more involved. But I think it's more like they want us to take control, which is really hard when we don't have the resources. Some of the tribes do. [00:23:43.14] Some of them have tribal courts. Some of them have case managers. Some of them have therapists. We don't have that opportunity at this time. So we have to rely on the department to, to make all that happen. They're the ones that are receiving the funding for that. You know? And we're hoping that they would look at us as a partner to be a part of that, but we can't help with decision making if we're not even being contacted. [00:24:09.04] I still wasn't positive. I'm sorry.

RG: No that's ok.

TMP: I don't think I can really... there were a handful in five years.

RG: Yeah. And if, if there isn't one that stands out to you, then there isn't one that stands out to you. [00:24:29.12] It's not ok for that situation, but it's experiences like yours that are important for the commission to hear.

TMP: There's a couple, but they were further down state. And then there was one out of state where we were able to— but it wasn't us, it was the, the, it was the ones-- it was the relatives that got involved. They just kept at it and they didn't give up till they had that little one home. [00:25:00.06] And then there was one in Portland. But they worked with us as-- but I think they were...it's really hard cause they were trying, and we weren't-- we couldn't-- it's not like we could be there all the time, but they tried to get us involved in meetings. So I mean I guess the ones that I've worked with that were further down-state, we've actually had a better relationship. [00:25:30.00] And the one I was telling you where, “what are you doing here?” That one was in Fort Kent. Yep.

RG: I know you've talked about this a little bit already, but is there a particular... or a number of— it can be one situation or multiple instances where you felt less positive about your work on behalf of a Micmac child and family that involved working with the state? [00:26:08.15]

TMP: Well I guess that what would sum that all up would be sitting in a meeting— and this might seem weird, but I'm sitting in a meeting where there's all these different programs and entities that are coming together to talk about the juvenile justice program and, and, you know Native children. And um, our chair that's running the meeting says, you know, “this person is head of Child and Family and this and that” and I'm like, “no, it's Martha Proulx!” [00:26:53.05] You know, and to us and the tribes like that— and yes that was our liaison, but she wasn't the person that was on top of that. So we were never given that equal. And somebody that hadn't even been working with the tribes, was able to get that information right



off. So I felt so— I don't know, like I'm sitting with all these groups, and I'm the Child Welfare Director, and I didn't know who that equal part was. You know so, um, I guess that, that kind of sums it up right there. The whole five years that I put into child welfare, and when it comes to looking at, as somebody who's on equal grounds with the department, and finding out that really we're not. Cause that person that's on top of Child and Family never wants— that I know of— reach out to us. [00:27:51.12] You know. Or I would assume that I would have heard that. You know, and I gue-- maybe they just felt that, well because we've appointed somebody, but still wouldn't it be nice to be involved in the whole picture. [00:28:09.01]

RG: So that next question is kind of a long one. And I'm going to ask you about a number of interactions with the actual act itself and different aspects of the act and working with the state for those. If you don't have experience in that specifically then just let me know, and we can move on to the next one. If you don't feel comfortable answering any— well again if you don't feel comfortable answering any of these questions, you can tell me you don't.

TMP: Can I add one more thing before end up— cause I, I mentioned Martha's name, and I just want to put out there that out of any change that ever happened that was in favor of working with Native families, it was because of Martha Proulx. It was because I would call Martha and say, Martha, this is happening. And then that's all it would take. And I tried to use that very sparingly. It's like you know, you know when you're reffing, you only have a certain amount of penalties that you can call. I didn't want to abuse that. Because I, I knew that she was going out of her way as well to make sure that certain things would happen. And it was because of her that we were able to get a young one out of a very abusive home that we had done permanency guardianship with. So she had a huge role in that. But a lot of respect for that person. [00:29:20.16] And a lot of love.

RG: That's great. Can you tell me about your experiences in or challenges that you found in working with the state in initial identification of a child who's Native American or of a child who's Micmac?

TMP: Oh, so yeah I, I can. Can you just repeat that one more time though? [00:29:48.22] I just want to make sure I—

RG: Yeah. Your experiences in or challenges you found in working with the state surrounding initial identification of a child who's Native American or Micmac in this case?

TMP: Ok. So one keeps coming to mind. I know there was more, but yes there-- one circumstance in general where this worker, I had a really good, um, rapport with, and I thought we were like working so well together, which we were. But then there was this case that came up. And it wasn't until the case was closing that I was involved. Because they didn't think that it was relevant. Yeah cause... I didn't understand why we wouldn't be contacted. And this has

happened more than one time. Like sometimes the— so the child would be with the non-Native mother and then you have a Native father and then that person has something come up and yet they haven't contacted the father, which would be the Native father. Or— and then sometimes they would, I think they weren't being as specific enough because that family would end up being from the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. Or we'd have a family that, that was tribal that we'd have to send— I think it happens— I'm trying to think of this particular family. It keeps coming back to mind. It's been a while, but I remember asking the parent, did anybody ask you if you, if your baby or your child was, was Native. And they're like, no. So when I go to the worker, did you— do you remember asking these parents if their, their— see what they would ask sometimes is are you Native? And what I would find is that they would say they did ask, but the parents would say, no they didn't. They didn't ask if my child was Native, they asked if I was Native. [00:31:53.00] So— or they would say that— the workers would say that they didn't, they didn't bring up the Native ancestry until the child was taken, until custody was taken.

So there's just— it's really hard sometimes to, to know. There has to be a better way I think. Because if there's any hint of— whereas from other tribes or other states, we're getting everything. You know we— excuse me. They're — they have to comply so they have specific paperwork that they use that you have to respond to before court takes place. And, um, sometimes they're not ev— they're, you know they'll send you something like there's Cherokee and a possibility of ancestry, you know, with a Micmac tribe, and you already know that one's probably not going to be. But you still have to research and do it the same way as you do everybody else. [00:32:55.15] So um, yeah. I hope that kind of answered your question.

RG: Yeah absolutely. How about in not— so your experiences in or challenges you've found in having the state notify you that they have a child that's — they received a report about that is Native American. So this one ties into the last. So the first is, you know, about whether the state is actually asking if people are-- if the child is Native American and then if the state is notifying you when they become aware of a child is Native American?

TMP: Well I can think of one in particular— I'd like to say that there's more, but there's always one that comes to mind, and this one, if it hadn't been for this person actually being an employee and having-- a lot of the employees will save-- have my number saved, and I've tried to keep that same number in case somebody did have to contact me. And literally is like, I have the state here, they're trying to take such and such— you know their relative. So, and I've tried to say this is a Native child and this person, they're, they're like, oh yes, we'll contact Tania. We, we know, we have her-- we'll get ahold of her and this child is gonna be put on— I think it's a six hour hold or something like that. And they're like, no there's no need to put the baby or the child through this because we— I'm trying to say, I will take this child, and there's no reason why this child shouldn't be able to come with me, and put me right on the phone with the state worker. And I'm like hello. [00:34:40.23] Yes, this is Tanya, hi what's going on? And then, of course, oh hi. You know so, and then we were able to keep that one with that person. And there was a, a positive— you know that fam-- that little one was reunified with their parents. [00:34:57.25]



Yeah, but it ha-- it took the, the person actually having to actually put them on the phone, saying here's Tanya. You know? Let me put you on the phone with her. They're like I'm not waiting six hours. Yep so that was one in particular that, that comes to mind. Or we're getting that call, kind of a last minute deal, you know. I'm sorry we didn't get ahold of you sooner. Or there's one where I'm on the phone with the supervisor, and there has been a request to move a child, and they were gonna move the child without telling us. And, um-- at the parents request I guess. And we're-- I notice they've changed it up a little bit. So the parents still have custody even though the state had to say, oh if it was ok or not for this child to be in this home. And which left us out as kind of having by law to really work with us unless they wanted to. So I'm trying to talk to the supervisor, and in the time that I'm talking to the supervisor, they went in and moved the child... [00:36:09.13] that the parents still had custody to that I didn't have a right to really-- like I could express my, express my concern, but I couldn't, I didn't really have a say in what happened there. So that to me was just kind of going around us as tribe. Cause if you as a department have enough, have that much right to say, you know, or approve of who's going to be around this child, but yet the state or the tribe doesn't have a right to say the same in return? You know, it doesn't seem very fair there.

I had another one. I'm just trying to think of. I kind of lost it. That was the-- that was one of them. [00:36:51.10] Or when they're getting moved in the middle of the night from a foster home that's failed, and we're not being notified. Cause we have that after-hour number. There's no reason why. Even a voicemail. If we don't answer, let us know. I don't care who's on duty. If you-- there should be something that says this is a tribal child. You know?

RG: And was that not happening? [00:37:15.26]

TMP: No. [00:37:15.26] Nope.

RG: What were your experiences in or challenges you found in working with the state around child custody hearings?

TMP: [00:37:40.06] I think it's hard once, once it gets to the child custody piece-- well oh the hearings? You're saying hearings?

RG: Mmhmm.

TMP: So in the time that I was there, in the five years, which I feel bad for the one who came after me because they've already had to do a hearing and I only had to participate in one and that was after I got done. [00:38:09.16] And then it ended. So I never really had-- like I always would get to that point where we'd work up to it, but I've never actually had to sit through a full hearing in that five years. We were always able to work with the parents to come to an agreement. So when those agreements are made, they end up not having to.

The only time we had the issue was when we had to do the— when we weren't properly notified. Sometimes that hurt us. Cause sometimes it was a case where the parent shouldn't have custody. So if things weren't done properly or we weren't notified properly, that could hurt us in court, you know, where the state would end up not being able to get custody of the, the children. So it's really weird with Indian Child Welfare because it's supposed to help us to keep our children home. To keep our children within the tribes, but sometimes it hurts us because it makes it harder when we're saying, this is what's going on, but there's no tangible proof, they need something to be able to take to court to say, this is what's going on. Meanwhile you ha-- and you have citizens that are tribal members that are distraught and really taking it up a higher notch that almost makes it seem like they're trying to get those children taken away when they're just scared for the, the kids' lives. [00:39:38.04] You know, so, um, in those situations I think I was even looked at— I was end up— I ended up in a situation where I think— and I have since purchased a house so I'm no longer in the base housing, but I had to run out in my own pretty much, you know, night attire to retrieve a child that was running out in below zero temperatures, [00:40:03.14] and bring them home and witness a home that was in disarray. And it was really bad. It was really, really bad. But I did the same thing that a worker would do. You know like finding out information, like where-- what can we do for the kids-- cause I, I didn't have my cell phone. So I was trying to not get the mom, you know, in a really hard shell and get the kids to safety. That was my biggest thought in my mind. So when I reported everything, the mom made that decision to put the children in a safe place and then this. So I felt like my word meant nothing. Cause here I'm trying to say this is what I came into, this is what I witnessed when I thought that would be enough. This is what I had to do. This is the plan that I worked out with the mom. And as soon as I could I called you guys. And literally that's as soon as I got home and I had to go into my bathroom so I could make that call. Again feeling like— not again not on equal grounds. [00:41:20.04]

RG: How about experiences or challenges in working with the state in arranging foster care placements?

TMP: I don't feel that there's a lot of friction there. If anything, they want us to have our own homes. They really do. [00:41:50.07] And I find working with —like the— working with certain people, that has been very positive. When it came to— at first, maybe it was a little friction— you know, trying to find out if they paid for the home study or the um, the background checks stuff like that. Cause when I first started, they said no. And then when we had one situation arise, we found out that yes they could pay for that. You know, so it was a move towards the positive I feel, with the people that are in charge of doing foster care. And I found that before I got done that they were very -- more than willing even -- to overlook certain things as long as the tribe as a whole— you know our child and family team— approved of that home, regardless of a Natives past because a lot of times the Native homes, there's history, there's past because we've grow up in trauma. So we-- our roads weren't always that straight.

So they were able to overlook that [00:42:53.20] as long as we were in agreement. So I'd have to say that hasn't been that bad. Getting the homes though is, is a struggle because there's so many of us that are basically just at that line of being able to get by ourselves. [00:43:10.13] And we just recently told my— the person that is working in my place— I don't know if it's ok to



say– that I'd be willing to do respite for a home [00:43:23.18] during the times like the Mawiomi that we have every year? So that kids have a chance to come to that. Cause a lot of times the argument is that, well we don't work on weekends. So we don't have anybody that can bring our children to participate. And we've reached out to the community almost every newsletter saying, if you have– even if you're just willing to do this, and we haven't had a lot of feedback. So I just recently said I would be willing to do that. It's har– I got five kids at home myself so. And even then just agreeing to do respite that still says I'm willing to open up all my nitty gritty to let you guys in, you know. [00:44:04.16]

RG: Absolutely. How about in family team meetings? Experiences, challenges you've found?

TMP: State family team meetings I think we run into the issue of not being notified properly because the way that I've been told is that really we're supposed to be in the planning process of that, but I also understand that other providers like community health services, and the lawyers, the foster care, you know, all those workers need to find a day every month that works for all of them. And I understand that that's hard. So, but still being notified properly. Sometimes we're not even notified at all. [00:44:51.10] I remember being with my co-worker– cause they did finally let us have somebody last year– well when I took on the, being director of the whole Child Welfare including Maine Families, they allowed me a part-time worker that we soon found we had to collect how often they were earning flex-time just to get them to fill time. [00:45:14.12] And then struggling for funding for that.

So we're going to Fort Fairfield to– I think we were bringing Christmas gifts to a youth? And then to find out they were doing a discharge meeting. They were doing a discharge meeting. So we hadn't even been involved in that. [00:45:34.29] And we tried to let people like Fort Fairfield or, you know, like the residential units, trying to let them know that we're supposed to have maximum participation so just like they notify the department, they should be notifying us too. But I think they're depending on the department to make those notifications, cause to them the department has custody of our children cause again we don't have our own court. So whoever has custody is the ones that they'll notify. They don't see us as being, having that opportunity. [00:46:16.24]

Oh and then with the Native Child Welfare teams I think that the issue's that there's only one worker -- even still. He's the director, but has nobody under him to help– you know to do things. So the time that he has to run a Child and Family team, which should be at least weekly or at least bi-weekly, runs into once a month or once every other month or when it's an emergency. And which isn't enough cause then you're going over like ten cases all in one, and those-- that's not even all the cases. That's just a piece of it. [00:46:53.20] So, yeah, I think a lot of work needs to be done there probably on both parts.

RG: How about in arranging family visitation or community visitation? That sounds really weird. [00:47:09.02]

TMP: No it doesn't. Not to me. So family visitation— I know in the past when I had more time on my hands like I said when I was able to do more one on one, I was able to partake in supervision of the parent with the children, and I found that my notes— it was helpful because I was able to pick up on things that maybe other workers wouldn't think were that big of a deal because in some of the old notes I would see, you know, something— that something might be going on that the parent wouldn't look me in the eye, those types of things. And I'm like, well we're taught not to look at our people that we consider higher than us— we're taught not to look them in the eye, at a very young age. And so I was able to take things into consideration like noticing right off that mom wanted to cut nails and groom— like grooming, you know, those te— those were very important to them. They didn't want dirt under their nails and they saw that as being, um, kind of stand-offish or impersonal, instead of saying I love you or holding them, you know they're, they're more worried about the tooth that's loose and it won't come out, and they want to get it out of there cause they wanted to be there to make sure that it happened right. And them seeing that as something that was negative, and me seeing it as something that shouldn't have been that big of a deal. Those types of [00:48:36.00] things I think they're really just way too heavy on parents. They take it to a level where it doesn't need to be taken cause if I was a mom coming for counseling, and I'm talking about those things, they wouldn't make that big of a deal bout it. [00:48:48.26] So I think it just made it harder for them to get their kids back. You know. I'm trying to think— we were talking about supervision? Oh family visitation.

RG: Family visitation. And you know having kids come back to the community for visiting.

TMP: Like again when I had more time I was able to get in there, and I was able to see both sides of the situation and see what was happening, but when I couldn't be there, then it became more one sided. I wasn't able to be an advocate for that parent, so that I could see what was happening during visits. So that I could see when they weren't being proper or they were doing things that they weren't supposed to and able to act on that right then and there. [00:49:34.04] I had to step away. I couldn't go to every single one.

And then the community visits, that would be like our, our gatherings. I always find that there's an outside agency that-- like Community Health and Counseling? They're the ones that step up. And they-- they're the ones as the workers that are bringing the kids instead of the department because they're not allowed to work weekends or whatnot. I think they could. I don't know. But it's, it's never happened in the time I was there. It was always the um, outside agency unless— oh yeah, AMHC because they would provide supervision and Community Health and Counseling would step up and, and do those community visits. Or the foster parents. So I think what we run into a lot of times is that foster parents are not always able to travel because they're not getting assistance for that travel, you know, or they're schedules or whatnot. [00:50:36.05]

And that's some of biggest issues is that we want our kids at our community gatherings. Or they wouldn't want— say you have two siblings that are in separate homes? Like they were



worried about this sibling that had been TPRed. And this is where we run into that issue. So you have a parent that we're trying to reunify with youth and then you have this other one that's been TPRed and adopted or whatnot then failed. Try-- we're trying to get that youth into the picture and they're like, well they might run into their biological parent. So what? At least let's -- let's set that up anyway. Why are we TPRing if we know that as a tribe all these people are going to be coming together anyways. It doesn't fit. [00:51:16.09] And as long as it's on paper for them, though, cause again they're just doing their jobs of what's on paper. It's, and it's-- they want to do it as right as they can, because that's what it says on paper. I think that was it. [00:51:38.27]

RG: How about in kinship care? Or that's the department term for that...

TMP: No that's fine. That ma-- you know, that's, um... when we do kinship or relative placement, I find that many times that those relatives are in the same situation, so then they try to take on responsibilities that they're having a hard time with themselves, and can end up in situations that the department doesn't approve of. [00:52:20.03] And ah... I think that what I've seen the most is that every time we have a relative that steps up and says, I'm willing to take these children and help their par-- the parents get both feet on the ground such and such and take these children back. Is that they always end up being the bad guy. [00:52:45.09] The parents end up being very resentful of them. So then we end up with almost like a battle between relatives that didn't have any issues before.

So sometimes it's hard to-- and I don't think that's the state's fault or the tribe's fault. I just saw that as something very-- like almost every single time, I saw that happen. Actually I'd have to say every single time we had a relative placement, it was always the relative that had the children that ended up looking like the bad guy to the parent, not the department, but to the parent. And that it was really hard to explain to them. Because you have the relative that's saying, well you need to do this, this, and this. Why aren't you doing this? I have your kids all the time. I'm doing this. I'm doing this for you. I'm doing this for the kids. [00:53:40.21]

And then you have the parents that start feeling like, well you have them all the time, I have a say in nothing. You know, I don't get to do this or I don't get to do that. So that is more I think of a overall something that needs to be worked on. So I didn't see that as tribal or the department being at fault. I just saw it as something that always seemed to come up. [00:54:07.29] And I don't think any of us really had a way of working on it.

RG: That, that kind of tension that arises, do you think that is-- this is a leading question and a really improper way for me to be asking-- but I'm gonna ask anyways cause I don't know how else to express it-- do you think that that tension is coming up because of an outside involvement? So for example, if my understanding is that-- and at least how I grew up-- kids, you know-- stories they hear. Kids would go and stay with relatives and it would be not a big

deal. Do you think that tension that's coming up and in families and between family members is becoming a— is happening because there's an outside entity that's involved that's saying your kids are getting placed with this—

TMP: Oh yeah. Yeah definitely. Definitely. I think that the department really likes it when they don't have to get involved. Like they don't want to be in your business if they don't have to be. And that they would at first— when they do the safety planning, like when we're all coming together, they, they try to stay as little involved as possible. Let the families work it out. If this, you know, if this grandparent says, I'm willing to take the kids so that the parent can go and do what they have to do, well then what happens though, even with the department staying— not taking custody, is that a lot of times the, the parents, instead of getting their act together, end up in a whole different situation. Because if they're on that road where the department's already involved, they're usually— you know, a lot of times it ends up worse. So then you have this person— so if there's a safety plan, I guess that's still an outside entity cause if they, they sign that safety plan, they're saying, yes I agree to contact such and such if this happens where the parent has put this child in an unsafe situation. So they in turn have to call one of us to let us know that that's happened, and then the parent's like, why'd you do that? I thought you were on my side. I thought you supported me. [00:56:23.03]

So then that's where it kind of starts right there. So any involvement from either one of us, I think, is hard. It's why we always try to push the spiritual part if they are saying, well I need to go to sweats more. I wish I had somebody to talk to that was spiritual that can help me with this. We'll say, well you can always contact, you know, Norman Bernard who's a sweat lodge keeper or this elder or that elder if you have questions. Cause they're not mandated.

[00:56:51.14] You know, and then the sweat lodge— it's not like they have to say, well I'm doing this, this, and this. It can be a way that they are able to get rid of the stuff that's causing all that nastiness. But a lot of times they don't have a means for getting there, or you know it's just again the one on one interaction I think with parents is not what it needs to be. Yeah.

[00:57:13.16] I think that we need our— we need case managers. But yeah definitely once that outside entity is involved I think that it, it almost always doesn't go well.

RG: Yeah. How about your experiences in, your challenges, perspectives on termination of parental rights and adoption? [00:57:39.28] I know we talked about it a little bit.

TMP: That was one of the first things that— one of the base obstacles I ran into because the first case that I came into, I remember my supervisor being like, I don't know if I want to throw you into this. And I'm like, oh just yeah, just give it to me. Well the state was ready to TPR because they had TPRed on this parent before and they also had adopted out, and they were ready. [00:58:12.05] And all this stuff was already in action, and I'm like, well wait a minute, have you done this, have you done that, has this been done? You know, and they're like well not with this case. And I'm like, yes, but doesn't— with each case aren't you supposed to do the same active efforts? [00:58:26.23] And they're like, well yeah. So right off the bat I was kind of a thorn, but that's what I thought my job was, to be that thorn. You know, to get myself in there and get involved to try— cause to me, the biggest thing for these kids is getting back home. Get them back home. Get them with their parents. Because what we're finding out across the board is that no matter how bad, not saying that any child deserves to be abused, but



a lot of our cases are neglect. Not saying that neglect is right either, but it's not like we're dealing with broken bones and— well some of them. There's, there's, there's levels. But a lot of time it's neglect, and I just don't see how parents are losing their children almost out of a hundred percent. You know that come into custody. There, there's not very much reunification going on. It's, it's not the majority of the children that are going back home. [00:59:37.16] I forgot what your question was.

RG: Experiences, challenges, perspectives around TPR and adoption. [00:59:48.09]

TMP: Ok. So one of the first things that I did when I went to the ICWA coalition meetings is, what are your perspectives on TPR? Cause I at first didn't even know what the acronym – I can never say that word, I didn't even know what that meant. So right off they're like, no we don't, we don't agree with it. We don't even accept it in our tribes. So, I tried to come back with that, and it didn't go very well. You know how the department and then their lawyers. And they're like well, we have to do at this certain time. This is what we need to do. And I'm like— and I've been trying to say that for over five years that it doesn't fit with Native people to TPR a child. And then what happens though is when you have children and nobody in the family or nobody in the tribe is willing to take those children, to be a part of— to stay with us, then what do we do? Is it, is it doing us any good to say, no we can't TPR? Because then they just end up in a permanency guardianship or they end up in state child welfare till they age out? That doesn't work either. You know? Cause we have, we have had cases like that where the parents were like, no, not until you have a suitable home for adoption am I willing to sign off on this. And then it never happens. [01:01:13.06] And then they end up in residential care, and then— you know and like it just, it's really hard. It's like only in those circumstances I think, I don't— it's not ok. It's not ok to let any of our children go. But when we don't have anybody stepping up to say, I'm willing to say those children are mine. If we don't have that, then do we have a right to not give them that chance at having a home? To having parents that they can call their own? [01:01:46.26]

It's so hard because we've had one failed permanency guardianship, and we've had two failed adoptions in the time that I was there. And when that happens, it's devastating. It's devastating for that child or children. And it's not ok. So to see those— their lives completely ruined because somebody that said, yes I'll take them as if they were my own, as if I had given birth to them, say, this isn't working, and I don't want them anymore because this is happening or that's happening. When they make that agreement and they say that they take them in as if they'd had them themselves. That means everything that comes with it. [01:02:43.04] And a lot of times I feel like people that take on that, that role to say, I want these children as my own are not thinking about everything that these children have went through. Even one of my daughters said, you know I don't know if I want to have kids. I think I'll just adopt or something. And I said, well just keep in mind when you adopt, make sure you get educated about and that— well I'll just take on a baby. I'll just adopt a baby. Even babies. I know babies that have been

adopted from very, very young, and they still— I can name off all the diagnoses that these— I said it starts from conception, when those babies are in our body to everything that we're doing to our body stress-wise. All the, you know, the sugar, extra sugar that we might be putting into our bodies because of our stress levels, we don't know what's coming with that child. So shouldn't we prepare ourselves for everything? And a lot of times I find that our foster parents don't have— or our parents that are looking to adopt, have not educated themselves, have not prepared themselves, and I don't think that they should be able to until they've done all those things. So if— if we were to agree, I would like to think that those parents that are willing to take on that role have prepared themselves for that child. So, I just find that that's not done enough. Or else we wouldn't [01:04:04.21] have had happen what has happened to some of our children. Does that help?

RG: Yes. So the next couple questions are less— I don't want to say experience based, but it's— it doesn't necessary require as, a reference to a specific instance. Does that make sense? Maybe I should just ask the question instead of babbling. [01:04:39.09] To the best of your knowledge, if your tribe declines to intervene in a child custody proceeding covered by ICWA, what are the reasons for that decision?

TMP: We have never declined.

RG: Ok. Excellent.

TMP: We've talked about it. And only because they're— I think actually there was one case where we felt that— and actually the other parent has notified us so we are involved again, but the parent would have nothing to do with us, and they still had custody of their kid, so it was really hard for us to be involved when they didn't want us there. So once custody was taken, we were able to get more involved because the Native parent was like waiting, trying to get more involved and it wasn't being allowed. So that's the only case where we kind of stepped back a little bit. But every case in those years, we've, we've never stepped back from. [01:05:38.20]

RG: That's really good to hear. To the best of your knowledge, when the state declines to transfer a child custody proceeding covered by ICWA to tribal court, what are the reasons for this decision? [01:05:56.25]

TMP: And we don't have tribal court.

RG: This question's not on here, but can you tell me about that situation and what that has been like navigating child welfare circumstances because you guys do not have a tribal court?

TMP: It's horrible. [01:06:18.24] Because we can't take ownership. We can't— we can say, yes this child is Native and I'm here as an advocate for them, but really that's all I can do is advocate for them. And yeah that's one of my own children that I hear in the other room there. As loud as I am. [01:06:38.20] But um, yeah that's— it feels very unequal. And we know that the Maliseets tried, and they said it was really difficult. So what I tried to do is pass on information and knowledge about different like Title A services for instance where we'd be able to help with doing TANF for our families, and also helping to enforce child support. You



don't need a tribal court for that, that amount of funding. So trying to find out other avenues, other ways that we can put intervention in there. Our Maine Families Program, the Early Intervention, those types of things. [01:07:24.25] Trying to get it to that point where that doesn't ever have to happen. You know, how do we do that? Because that's the only other avenue I can see when, you know, we didn't have the tribal court.

RG: Is there anything that stands out to you about— I mean aside from the fact that it's an unequal playing field so to speak— is there anything that stands out to you about having to go through the state system— state courts? [01:07:54.18] Either as positive or negative.

TMP: I think it's the struggle before we get to court. Because every judge that I've come in contact with has been for keeping our children with their tribe. One such judge in Ellsworth I think is, this past— right before I got done, I had to stand in and I think there was a few of us that had tears from what this judge had to say. And I can't remember his name. But he was amazing. And he healed a part of our hearts that day by speaking up for us. Not just for us, well, for that child, because you had somebody that had a really bad situation and were right in front of all of us in court, talking about Native people, and what that feels like. I've done that in meetings, when I've sat in child and family team meeting and you have a parent that's bashing the Native side and nobody says anything, except for myself, of course, because I felt like that was part of my job to, to not, of course, get mad at them or anything, but try to explain who we are, why we're there. We're there for the kids, we're there for you, we're a resource. Your child is Native. It's a gift. You should be ha— you know, any part of us that we are and our children, we should take that and love and nurture it. So that's what that judge did. He's like your child has a gift. Use those resources, teach them about who they are. That's who they are. It's their identity. [01:09:54.18]

And to have that parent come up to me after and say they were sorry. They didn't mean— and I said, that's fine. I said I completely understand where you were coming from, but that healing that took place from that person of power saying those things was— it was so instant that...Like when Denise talks, she talks about how there's no amount of money that can ever give us back what we've had taken from us. The things that we in turn have done to our own children because what was done to us. Those types of things, there's no money that can do that, but when you have somebody in that position of power that says those things and actually means it, it's almost like a instant healing. It was beautiful. [01:10:41.03] So never had that before from a judge. Like we've had them be nice and you know but nothing like that. So that was amazing. [01:10:55.06]

RG: It sounds amazing. To the best of your knowledge, does your tribe ever use it's own expert witness in child custody proceedings under ICWA that remain in state court?

TMP: There's only been one time that— so when we first— when I first started, we had Sarah LeClaire. And then my supervisor felt that taking on that role to be some— cause we're so intertwined into our communities? That they didn't want me to be the person that got up there and had to testify against a family. So there was only one time that we actually had our own expert witness that we called into the situation. *[01:11:41.19]*

What I have found is that when the expert witness— there's only— in my time here, there have only been two expert witnesses. One was Carolyn Maples who's now Morrison, and then Betsy Tannian. *[01:12:04.20]* And um, when Carolyn's report— when the department didn't agree with it, they refused to work with her. Which we found to be— cause she was very— I mean she's exceptional. But she liked to point out where the department was at fault. When they took her away— that's the way it feels like they took her away cause they didn't accept her anymore. And not saying that Betsy hasn't done a great job, she does, she does a great job, but neither of these people are from our tribe. But Carolyn I would say is closer in the fact that she's worked with us. She's worked with our people. She knows what we've been through.

So and we've— if we had more funding, I believe that we would try to have our own expert witness, but we don't feel that that person should be the person that's going in and working with the families, basically doing the case management with the families. So we only have one person that doesn't that and until we have funding to bring on more, we don't feel that it's right for— it's like playing that conflicting role that I started with being a Domestic Violence Advocate. So I come into your home and I advocate and you know I work with you, and we get you all these services, and we're able to help, you know, get you a new place. And you get in, and then, but you also told me, you know, that in such a time when you were with your partner, that they hit you when you were holding your child or something like that. So then in turn, maybe some months later, you go back to that person *[01:13:56.06]* or weeks later you go back to that person. And guess what I have to do? I have to report it. Or it's been reported and I have to go in as the Indian Child worker and I have to do that. So it takes away the advocacy part that I was there for you. You know, so, so we've tried to steer away from that as far as the Indian child expert goes because we didn't want to have that conflicting piece. *[01:14:24.06]*

RG: Yeah. Absolutely. That's hard when you have one person that is trying to run all these multiple positions. *[01:14:36.00]* When your tribe becomes aware of a state ICWA violation, does it have a policy for legally challenging the state's child welfare determination?

TMP: We've only always followed the policy that's in place through the state. They've talked about having our own tribal policies in place, cause we know that there is a clause in there for the Maliseets and I think the Passamaquoddys. *[01:15:08.11]* I want to say there's the Penobscots too, but I know the Micmacs have not put their own clause in there, and then that would be something that possibly they could work with through the whole child and family team to come up with that. But there's never been any such policies. *[01:15:32.04]*

RG: Could you describe how the state conducts active remedial efforts to prevent the breakup of a Native family before ordering an out of home placement? *[01:15:41.01]*



TMP: Well, I guess their first thing is when they contact us, if they contact us before. Like I said there are workers that would try to contact us right away, they— you know, and then we plan going out and conducting— that was another thing, being the person that also not only works with the families but you're, they have workers that go out and assess for thirty five days with that family and then if they open the case it goes to another worker. Well we're also the people that will go with them, do the assess with them, and then— but that didn't start out that way at first. They would go out and do all that and we weren't involved, but they did start to involve us towards the end of my time working with them. *[01:16:42.10]*

I'm covering myself with tissue dander. So I found that that, that did change for the positive. I was, you know, I really liked it when workers would call me, they worked with me before so they knew they could call me. Didn't matter what time. And they would work with me on what the time frames that they'd have to be able would go out and, and you know do those interviews in the school, go to this home or that home. And some homes I knew that they were— like if I was off doing another case, that I'd ask that family first. Or I'd tell them if they're comfortable talking with you then that's ok, but if they want me there let me know. That sort of thing. *[01:17:22.15]*

So a lot of times I felt like I couldn't even be completely involved, but it wasn't because the department didn't involve me, it was because we didn't have funding to provide another person to do that. So I guess that's something that has changed. Was, is-- has been involving the tribe more when they have an open case.

I still find though that their definition of active remedial efforts and our definition are completely two different things. To them, like I said before about time frames— they feel that once a child comes into custody that, ok, first off have they contacted the tribe? Did they fi--, did they find out if there was a Native home? And then from there on, I feel like, it's almost like, you know did they set up counseling, did they set up this and that for the parents? I never found that involved the traditional aspect or the community aspect enough. *[01:18:27.26]* You know are we, are we making sure that this child is making it to the annual gathering every year? You know things that are really important to our culture, our heritage. Um, is this child being exposed to who they are culturally. I feel that that piece is missing cause they're looking more at, you know, at counseling, setting up drug tests for the parents. Those types of things to them are active efforts. To us, that's just something you do as a job. You know, to us we feel that the culture piece is like the biggest part. If we can't get the parents involved, then we should be involving them more about who they are, their identity. And some foster parents will take that, that role on themselves. And we used to have a foster care agreement, but I think that falls under more, if that's a Native home, but to me I feel like it should be every-- any foster home that's willing to take in a Native child that they need to be completely aware that this is a Native child and are they willing to make sure that child is going to be educated in who they are.

I can think of one such [01:19:40.06] circumstance where I went to go do a visit and this little one had a musical thing that played something in regards to Noah's Ark. And the foster parent— amazing foster parent— but they were appalled that this child didn't know what the Noah's Ark was. They couldn't understand at all why— and they're like, aren't they taught about God?

[01:20:11.24] And I'm like not necessarily no. We have our own spiritual practices, and we— it's not the same. I didn't really know...I was like— I just assumed that they— cause I go there and I would drum and they were all for it and I had never thought that they— the way that they would see that situation. You know, they're like, how come this little one didn't know about the Noah's Ark, and I'm like well why would they? I know because I was baptized, but I only baptized one of my children. So a lot of my other kids might not know what the Noah's Ark is. And um, but they can tell you what a sweat lodge is. They can tell you who Glooscap is. You know, so, and that's what I tried to explain. That their upbringing might have been— their, their look on religion wasn't the same. [01:21:04.24] But again the education piece. A lot of misunderstanding.

RB: Can you tell me about the importance of having case workers learn about and understand Native family structure and culture? [01:21:22.25]

TMP: I feel like whatever they're getting is not enough. I know that when new workers are coming in to social work, that they're getting the, the small training or they're getting that little program that we, that we approved for who are— who are the Wabanaki people and that sort of thing. And there's like this little PowerPoint or slide that they can watch. [01:21:55.22] I know that that's happening down-state, but I feel like there should be something on a regular basis. And that our own workers should be able to provide that. Whether it be through additional funding or— they, I know that Ester and I'm not sure who else have been able to go and provide these trainings, but I think that it would work better if we had more people that were trained from them, because each tribe is different. We're not all the same. We don't all look— have the same even— you know I was brought up even a little bit differently because I was brought up in a Passamaquoddy, you know, community. So when I came here I was very different. My outlook was very different. [01:22:50.04] And it took me a little while to understand. And me and the cultural director would just butt heads all the time cause I was like wait, no, no. Um, that, that piece. Even if it was possibly from our cultural director, somebody that can go in and work with the social workers or even with them so that they can give that, that historical piece.

When I was in college, I did a PowerPoint and a presentation on if psycho— I didn't even know that this was going on, because I talked about psychologists and therapists going in to work with Native communities. And that they should have a training that goes along with getting their degree. Like for me I had to get my mental health rehabilitation certification, community cert— I can't even do it— MHRTC. [01:23:40.24] It's like ten extra classes that go along with your psychology degree from social work perspective. So I needed that to graduate. I think that, as a piece of it. So if we know that we're going in to work with a Native community, that we have somehow have type of training or protocol that I think even across the board, for our administrations, there's no orientation that helps our workers that are coming in to, to work in our, um, community. Cause there's certain things that many of us will get as members— like say the gift card. There's a Christmas gift card, maybe twenty-five dollars a person. It's not the



amount of money, but then when they see other people getting it, and they think that it's a all around thing, they're like hey where's mine? Or we're able to get health services and they, well where's mine?

So I think it goes along with when people go in to work with communities, they're still giving their own perspective. They're still-- and then I think there's some resentment there too. I've-- when I was in college the way that we look at things-- you know cause one girl was like, well, I don't see why you guys get free education. You get free schooling and then why aren't more of you guys going to school? Or you people-- going to school to get educated? And I'm like whoa. So then, but I don't get mad. [01:25:11.19] I'm like, do you have a minute? Cause I'll sit down, and we'll talk. And I talk to them about the historical piece. And I've tried to do that with some workers, thinking that I got somewheres. You know, I started right from here, like when Denise sits down with people she'll give you a whole-- she's got it down pat. She's, she's got her years and everything that happened down pat, and I would like to be more like that.

But um, you know thinking, wow, I think I really reached this person. I really felt it. You know we hugged after. It's still not enough. So how many times to we need to meet with people to, to create that bond of understanding, I think is a lot. Because our ICWA coalition, when I came on board, there was still the tension piece. Like they had alr-- they had been meeting for some time, but I could still feel that tension when I came in. But I could also feel the love. I could feel the, the connection. [01:26:06.23] Cause that's what we're about. We're about connections. And we're, we're so spiritual. Not all of us, but it's there. Like it's there in every single person, that part of you that says, hey you're human just like I am. This is what we have that's, that's a common ground, a common, you know, way of thinking. It takes time. It takes time of meeting, getting together, dishing through the cr-- well, excuse me, but crap. Getting through that. Let's, you know, let's just get it out. Let's, let's put it all right here, and let's dig through it. Let's go through it little-- you can't do that in one sitting, you can't do it in one training. So, um, I know there's been some effort to help workers that are going to work with Native communities, but what about putting funding into the Native community to provide that piece? People that already have that knowledge and already have that understanding. It's here. [01:27:08.14] So I think that, that's it.

RG: Pardon me...What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses in State Child Welfare for ensuring ICWA compliance?

TMP: Some of the strengths come from-- well all the strengths, really come from anybody, a worker or a supervisor, that's willing to get to know us. Because a lot of times my first-- and, and because of me being very vocal, very strong believer in involving, you know, Indian Child Welfare at first. Like I said, I created fiction. And I don't always have the calmest way of doing things. I always think of one of my coworkers saying, you could catch more bees with honey than you can with vinegar. Because I started out with vinegar. I was already in that place of, of

um, when I came on board, where things were kind of seemed very unfair, un-tilted. The balance was un-tilted. So I had to come in strong. And um, it's only the workers and the supervisors, that even after our, our clashing were able to realize that I was gonna come in like that, almost every time, because I felt like it was the rights of our children as Native American children, that they-- that was my voice. It was their voice. And that the unjust was going to come through me because that was my job. To, to hear this, this side that-- the rights that they had.

And when they were willing to see that and start working with me, and start working with the families, and start working to ensure that these things were gonna take place for our, our children, it helped. Because then I knew I could call them, I could depend on them. When I had a situation with a family, like I could call Vickie Brown for instance-- I think that's her name. But, in the beginning I don't remember us having [01:29:50.28] like that type of communication with each other. I didn't-- you know I, I felt like I didn't have that relationship with her, and then towards-- before I got done, I could call her, and be like Vickie, I have this thing going on. Cause I didn't have anybody I could talk to that was higher than me that really understood. And she'd be like, why don't we do this? And this, this, this and this. And then, you know, so she, she always gave me positive feedback on things, and I always tried to involve her. But it didn't start like that. And then like the other worker I told you, the Fort Kent one, didn't start out like that. So I've found that when they realize that I wasn't just trying to push anybody's buttons, I wasn't there just trying to say, this is awesome and it just should be this way because. You know they like realized that I was really passionate about working for our children and making sure they had a voice that we, we found a common ground.

[01:31:03.03] I forgot the question.

RG: Ah, strengths and weaknesses that the state has in ensuring ICWA compliance and working with the tribe to ensure ICWA compliance.

TMP: And then again the weaknesses are, are, I think not having enough training or enough experience. I shouldn't say training. It's experience. The ex-- the willingness to open yourself up to something other than what is your norm. You know that-- it's all about experience. And that many of us can't feel it until we've sat in that circle and we've listened to everybody's story. We've listened to the songs, we've heard that spiritual part, we see-- we felt the spirit from the fire, and we've been in that circle holding hands at the end. We've come out of that sweat lodge and we're all giving each other that hug at the end. It's-- those are the parts that make a difference in who-- the way we feel. Because then it's not just us anymore. We're starting to feel that collectiveness. I mean we couldn't call a collective community a collective community if we didn't have that understanding somewhere that it's so different from the nuclear family. [01:32:20.24] You know what I mean?

And even myself the experience when I was growing up on the reservation, having friends that I didn't even have to finish what I was saying, they would just be able to finish it for me. Not understanding that that was a part of that collectiveness, and I'm not saying we're reading minds, but you-- it's-- there's something there. There's an essence that in that circle, that's there, and then when you come outside of that and it's gone, it's almost like you've lost a sense. [01:32:55.20] You've lost being able to see or to hear or to smell or taste. There's something

gone. So you have people that are making decisions for your children, for your families that don't have the essence. They don't have that, that connectedness. So I guess that working on that bridge of understanding takes experience, and getting experience takes more than one training or one session. So I guess that's the weakness part. [01:33:29.26]

RG: What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses that the Micmac tribe possesses in working with the state for ICWA compliance -- or in ensuring ICWA compliance at all?

TMP: The strengths? I'd say the strengths come from love and compassion. That all the previous workers that we've had in Indian Child Welfare for the Aroostook Band of Micmacs since recognition, have either been a member or have been part of the-- like a tribe themselves, and um, so there's that inner knowledge. The willingness to, to keep going, to keep-- and it's a strength and a weakness, but the willingness to understand that your life is not your own anymore. [01:34:34.11] When you're Indian Child Welfare, everything that you do, the way that you think, the way that you speak, is part of the whole community. You don't really have a life anymore that's just your own.

And part of the reasons why I felt like I had to move out of my community is because I would have people coming to my doors. Because somebody-- I didn't agree with somebody or I said something that they didn't, um like. So somebody would in turn go to somebody else and say that-- something that I would never say. I would never call somebody a junkie. You know like that just broke my heart. But I had somebody coming up and like look, look, I'm not using. And I'm like, I don't know what you're talking about, you want to-- and I'd have to like-- can we go-- do you have a minute? We could go for a walk. [01:35:23.15] Can we not be in my living space? You know that part was really hard because my chil-- and my children were so, like they were so meshed up with themselves that they didn't have their own lives either. [01:35:33.27]

So that I guess a strength and a, and a weakness because when you're Indian Child Welfare worker and you're part of the tribe yourself, it's like it has it's positives and it's negatives. You have to be willing to, to...to give up a big piece of yourself and you can only do that for so long. It's heartbreaking. I forgot what they call it. I always hear Nancy Soctomah's voice. [01:36:10.26] I forgot what it's-- vicarious trauma. You know like when something happens and because you're a tribal member yourself and you hear about or something happens, you feel like as if it was you yourself that it was happening to. And um, so I guess you have to be willing and ready to, to take all that on. [01:36:33.19] I don't know if we finished-- did we finish it?

RG: Yeah. What are your concerns about Micmac children that are in the State Child Welfare system?

TMP: I'm getting emotional. My concerns, um, are them never being able to survive in outside society because they feel different, because they feel unaccepted, they feel like nobody wanted them. Or not being able to find their way back home because nobody told them who they are, nobody taught them that it's a good thing to be Native American. [01:37:49.09] There was nothing for them after they reached the age of eighteen that they felt like they could be part of. Like that we should have some type of group or something that's there for them when they're aging out. I wish we had a group home that would— that people could be there. I think we need to listen to the parents more, because I can think of circumstances when the parents have tried to say, I think this is what's going on. Even though they didn't have custody, and the department not listening, not finding out what's really going on with those children and they're just going through residential care and they're getting medicated up. [01:38:58.09] I forgot what the question was.

RG: What are your concerns about Micmac kids who stay or who are in the State Child Welfare system?

TMP: My concerns are that they're not gonna make it. That they're gonna not make it. They're going to die somehow through self-harm or not being able to make safe decisions. I mean really it's that serious. Not just in like our tribe, the Micmacs, I-- even I think of times growing up where there's so many people that end up doing things that where they, they don't make it. And to live a full life, to have children of their own, to become grandparents, and, and to be able to be there for their families. [01:40:01.03]

My concerns are that nothing will change. But I don't believe that nothing's gonna change. I don't believe that. Because this is happening. Our youth are getting more engaged, and we're starting to listen to them more. I only just realized how old I was this past weekend. Cause I'm like yes, we're youth and we can do it! Oh, I'm now old. Oh. I mean my children can do it!

So it's all about them now, you know. I guess concerns that our, that our council— our chief and council, need to listen more as well, about the concerns, and then really take that on. Take that responsibility to, to be more a part of what's going on with the Bureau. The BIA. I mean we're taking money from the Bureau that pretty much... I mean they've been making decisions for us for a long time. They're receiving money for us. [01:41:26.08] Why? Why aren't we receiving that money? Why are they still receiving the money to say what's right and what's wrong, what goes and what doesn't? Cause really that's what it all goes back to is who's on top. And, and being able to keep that compassion alive as you move up that ladder so that you, when you get up there, you still remember where you came from. Never letting that go. [01:41:51.05] So, I guess that's a big part: never getting disconnected.

RG: I just have two more questions for you.

TMP: I know. I'm like oh my gosh, we've been in here for a long time. It doesn't feel like it. [01:42:06.29]

RG: I know. Do you think that the Indian Child Welfare Act is enough to protect the rights of Native kids and families?



TMP: [01:42:21.10] I think it's obvious that it doesn't. It's just like a protection order. It's only as good as its— what's on paper if it's, if it's used. I think that it shouldn't be done in a manner that we say, you're not doing this right and you need to do it differently. I watched a, a video this weekend where it showed this young man going up to this young woman and being like— he knocks the pack of cigarettes out of the girl's hand and he's like, I want you to join my movement, and she's like, no what the heck, picks her cigarettes back up. So it was, how do you get people to join your movement. So then you, it showed him going to people, talking to them, showing them information, and, would you like to join our movement? I think that anything by force— it's like things that were done by force to us didn't have a very positive impact. So if we're forcing people to work with us, it's not going to have a positive impact. It has to be done in a manner that's respectful. So I guess that's my view. [01:43:46.11]

RG: The last question is if there's anything else that you would like to share with the TRC? In this moment, also knowing that you can add at any time, it's not now or never.

TMP: I guess right now I'm just feeling really emotional. I'm feeling super emotional. My husband always tells me I can't be the hero. [01:44:18.16] And even I had a comment today, cause of the, I know-- you should have never left. The position I was in, basically is what they were saying cause now there's other issues. But I had to be there more for my children too. I didn't want them to— I, I've seen it too many times where traditional people or, you know, we get so caught up in our jobs. I mean there's movies about it, right? Where we get so caught up in our jobs that our children end up going in a direction that we don't want them to. And um, I was fearful that that was happening. I was having— I had issues where one of my children almost took their own life and started cutting to a point where I had to call the ambulance. Or having problems in school. You know just seeing things that they were going through that our foster children were going through, and I'm like why is that happening? Well nobody's getting called out at this time in the morning or mommy's coming home so drained that she's just laying there, not doing anything. There are times when I would sit outside my driveway just looking at the grass cause I couldn't go inside cause it had been a hard day, and there was nothing that I could do. [01:45:52.10]

Then again like I was saying how I had to run out in my PJs to go retrieve a little one that, you know, was... So I knew, that's when I knew. I was like, you gotta move on from this somehow. And I feel like I did find a really good way. Cause I've been working since August 11th with being the Youth Program Director, and had to jump through some hurdles there, and we can finally start working with the youth. So now I have kids that are able to come, and we're able to do these— like actually do these workshops with them, and it's a Behavioral Health Grant that incorporates culture. So, wow, you know I'm like, that's all I wanted to do. Right from the start that's what I wanted to do. [01:46:39.16]

So I feel like my road is moving in a positive direction, but when I sat in that Child and Family team, and I heard all the stories about all these children that are still not getting returned home, and how can they when we have a parent that won't stop drinking or won't stop using the bath salts? How do we combat that? How do— you know, and if, and again I think it just goes along with trying to come together. Because the parent that usually is drinking and drugging is gonna be that Native parent that needs help. And unless we're willing to get vigorous— and we can't do that without funding— we're not going to have a difference. *[01:47:32.23]*

Ah, so, I'll just end with that, every day I keep praying for our kids. For our parents. And one of my biggest things I've always tried to do is not judge. Don't judge them. And I hear it a lot, I'd hear it a lot that, why can't they change, why can't they do this, if that was my child. But we don't really know until we're there, right? So, I think my heart will always be in child welfare and trying to figure out, you know, what more can we do to ensure their future, to help them become positive role models, and help them to just, just survive, just to live. *[01:48:40.08]* Yeah, I just want them to survive. Ok. I'm done.

RG: Thank you so much for your time. You have done and continue to do very amazing work, and you are incredibly strong for doing that work. So I hope you never lose sight of that cause you do a lot for your community. *[01:49:19.22]*

TMP: I think with the help of the tribes, like when we, when we would come together for the ICWA coalition, that's what kept me going. And times I wasn't even able to make it, they'd try to you know speaker phone me in. So you know that, it just being involved with them, and, and I think our tribes coming together. Yeah.

RG: Thank you so much, Tania.

TMP: Thanks. Are we all done recording?

RG: Yes I will press stop right now. *[01:49:53.03]*

[END OF RECORDING.]