

Poisson, Jacinthe

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Envoyé: 3 décembre 2018 19:58
À: Poisson, Jacinthe
Objet: testimony

I, David Chapman, am the director of Open Door, a homeless day center in Montreal near Cabot Square.

I agree that this e-mail be filed at the hearings of the Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Quebec.

I want to bring to the CERP's attention how the situation has evolved since I testified last February.

The day following my testimony with other workers from Open Door, the head investigator of the city of Montreal came to visit and talk to us at Open Door. We have also had a visit from two independent investigators from Quebec city to look into police malpractice. Unfortunately, when we told them about different cases, they told us these cases did not apply to their mandate. However, two other independent investigators have met an Inuit woman twice at the Open door, following up on testimony from the Commission.

Generally, less complaints of sexual assault have been brought to our attention by Inuit women since last spring. I would say that in the last two years, we have had 18 women tell us they had suffered sexual assault. When we testified at the Commission last February, we were up to 11 cases.

The situation has improved, there is a sense that the neighbourhood is safer for Inuit women. I think it has improved mainly because a person who was suspected of raping many indigenous homeless women was caught and jailed last spring. He was arrested because he drugged and sexually assaulted an underage tourist. He has never been caught for the alleged sexual assaults towards Inuit women, though. He was also known to be

violent towards Inuit women who worked for him, going as far as burning their arms with crack pipes to mark them as his "property." Two women who worked for him have been able to leave to go back to their communities up North and are doing better.

Only one case out of the 18 cases that were brought to our attention at Open Door has resulted in charges being laid by the court.

An Inuit woman was kept captive for one month, repeatedly brutalized, humiliated and sexually assaulted. The case has been postponed to be heard in January. In most of the other 17 other cases, the victim has chosen not to complain or go forward in the process. In a few other cases, the investigations have not resulted in anything.

Since our testimony last February, there has also been a more flexible approach taken by some police investigators. More investigators, but not all of them, have agreed to come on site, at Open Door, to take the complaints of sexual assault victims. Women feel much safer if they can meet the police officers in a safe location (for the woman). Many homeless Inuit women are afraid to enter a police station for fear that they will be held for a minor offence they might have committed in the past. They might not trust the police, or be afraid to be arrested if they go to the police station. It's important that they feel safe where investigators come to get their testimonies. Investigators need to meet women where they feel safe.

The individual cases that we brought to the attention of the Commission have not moved forward significantly since then. In the case of the sexual assault that was witnessed by our workers on the front yard of Open Door, we have not been aware of any development.

I can see a pattern repeating: once we bring up issues in the media, then police services pay more attention and reach out. This is also what happened after our testimony at the Commission. But as soon as the media attention drops, it is back to usual. I do not feel that police services are proactive enough.

I have noticed a more sensitive manner taken by police towards homeless people near our center. I have been encouraged by some initiatives from the local Commander at Station 12 as well.

I want to underline the difficulty for women to complain and bring to justice the perpetrators. The complex police and justice process ensures that no cases will move forward. A victim needs to explain in details the abuse they suffered on four different occasions: to the police agent on the scene, at the hospital, then with the appointed investigator many weeks later and finally in court. I think the investigators need to meet victims from the start, where they feel safe, and quickly. They need to have the story first hand and stay until the end. They also need to be highly trained, preferably speak Inuktitut or be Inuit themselves.

Also, over-ticketing homeless people around Cabot Square and Open Door remains a problem. It might have decreased a little bit, but that is hard to tell. The PDQ 12 has acknowledged in a recent research that over-ticketing is a problem. But I have seen an improvement from the BEP (brigade des espaces publics). On a few occasions, I have observed BEP officers have acting in a compassionate way towards some Inuit people at the center.