

Personal submission
Viens provincial inquiry on systemic racism
against Indigenous people in Québec

This replaces testimony in a focus group at Centre Walgwan Center in July 2018

Cynthia Dow

[REDACTED]

Cascapedia – St-Jules, QC

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My profile: I was raised beside the Gesgapegiag community and went to school with members of the community. I wrote my thesis for my BA in Anthropology on pre-Contact Mi'gmaq history and culture. For nine years as a journalist I reported on events in Listuguj, Gesgapegiag and Gespeg and for the last 18 years have worked in Gesgapegiag in a variety of roles. I spend a lot of time with Indigenous people.

Health care system:

Quebec needs to **make clear to institutions their responsibility** to First Nations patients. When I was working for the Gesgapegiag Health and Community Services, many of the health care providers we worked with believed that Indigenous people had no right to Quebec health care, that their needs were taken care of by the federal government. They resented it when Indigenous people presented themselves for primary care at the local hospital. Based on a survey conducted in 2015, the people of Gesgapegiag indicated that the hospital was the number one location of discriminatory behaviour towards them, in particular the Emergency Ward. Despite offering to make cultural safety training available to them free of charge, Emergency room personnel **never made themselves available for cultural competency training.**

Personal experiences: I myself have seen things in the waiting room at the hospital: a nurse yelling at an elder who did not understand French, a young woman experiencing a suicidal crisis left in the waiting room for more than an hour, a client suicidal from Walgwan being denied service because he was from Nova Scotia, a community member who was refused a replacement colostomy bag: she was told «Get that in your own community»

Complication of language: Language is a complicating factor with the health system, as most Mi'gmaq people in the Gaspé are more comfortable in English than in French,

but as an anglophone with experience with Indigenous people, I have never been treated as badly for being anglophone as Indigenous people have been for being native.

Correctional services:

I have work on projects with the New Carlisle detention centre to improve service for English-speaking and Indigenous inmates. When giving a cultural competency training about five years ago, I became aware of **very poor negative attitudes of some staff members** towards Indigenous people.

At the detention centre, there is a marked lack of mental health resources in English, resources which would be of great benefit to the Indigenous people incarcerated there.

I was shocked to discover that addictions sometimes **actually begin in jail**: prescription medications are handed out liberally as an alternative to mental health care. AS well, many kinds of drugs are smuggled in by guards.

I am however very pleased with efforts made to provide **spiritual support by an Elder from the Gesgapegiag community.**

1. Education system:

Misinformation about Indigenous people, largely spread through the school system, is the biggest problem in creating the public perception of Indigenous peoples. We need to **change the history taught in schools** and make it more respectful of the true history of Indigenous peoples and our relationship with them.

The government should ensure that teachers and school management get **cultural competency training when working with Indigenous students.**

2. Final words:

It is not up to Indigenous communities to fix the inequities and discrimination in our society: it is up to white people who have benefited the most from these inequities.

For example, the Gesgapegiag Band had a project to develop a pourvoirie in the centre of the Gaspé Peninsula, in Baldwin Township. The Liberal government gave in to the pressure of white hunters to abandon the project. The discriminatory things said and done during the public consultations process were not dealt with properly by the government leadership. The provincial government should have taken action to counteract the negative public opinions that were shared in public meetings and in the regional media.

The provincial government should undertake a **public education campaign** as part of a Reconciliation initiative to create a more positive attitude to Indigenous people and their resilience in the face of so much racism.