

Introduction

I will be speaking of events that took place in Nunavik in 2009-2010. I had just finished my Master's in Social Work and I was hired as an HR by Youth Protection. The people that were there are not likely to be there now, but I want to report what, in my estimation, might be best described as harassment, discrimination and racism.

When one is new to a job, it is probable that we listen more, trying to get a handle on what we are supposed to be doing, especially when it is the first time you do this work.

When I first went North, I was told two important actions I should not forget: 1- to observe and 2- to write down everything I did to back myself up. I took this work seriously. I remember from time to time telling myself I must be missing something. Even when I went South, I was full of doubt. It was only after I read "**Failure to protect: moving beyond gendered responses**" from Cathy Richardson and other researchers that I understood why I was so upset about what I had witnessed in Nunavik.

It was a childhood dream to work with the Inuit: I wanted to work with and for the Inuit. Secondly, I recognized that I was out of my comfort zone, both with this work and the fact that I would be a decision-maker in what amounted to a brand new country for me.

To be more integrated and immersed in the community I meant to serve, I went to Anglican church services on Sunday and joined the women's workshop on Saturdays. It was an eye opener on a culture I knew nothing about or so little. I have educated myself in the last 8 years and I know more now. If I were to work in Nunavik again, my new knowledge would certainly be helpful.

I wrote down what I want to talk about so that there would be less editorial on my part. Also, I was asked to come "from solution" as opposed to blame. In my opinion, it is about accountability, but I must say it is easy to come from blame because of the way workers are treated, as if at the beginning of their stint in Nunavik, **they have no judgment** and cannot transfer their previous experience of some 30 some years in sociology, teaching and psychotherapy.

Following APTN's advice, I decided to contact CERP. A few weeks after contacting CERP, someone reached out to me and upon accepting to talk about my experience to someone who met me in my town, I was contacted by Me Donald Bourget. This is how I come to be here.

Before I start to testify, I want to declare that I had been told that a judge had worked very hard on having the children stay on their territory. My experience did not confirm this.

Another thing I want to add: What seems to elude many Canadians in my project is that it is acceptable to feel both compassion for those in need and to oppose violent, destructive behavior which is repeatedly minimized, rationalized and ignored by media.

EVENTS that brought me to this court

The first event I will talk about concerns the **police in a larger community**. One evening in August 2010, I was asked to be at nursing following the arrest and detention of a young girl of 16 years for drinking outdoors in the community. She was brought by a young policeman to the hospital cell. When he pushed her into the cell asking that she take her clothes off, she refused. He went in, kicked her and tore the clothes off her and handed her a hospital gown. Then he left, and my responsibility was to watch her for the night. In the morning, her father was called to bring new clothes and we found out he had been pulled in for driving in the community under influence. He was at the county cell.

When the young policeman released her, he asked her if she ever went to a Montreal bar that he named, flirting with her. She was a bit awkward and reluctant as she answered "maybe" to which he said "I'll see you there". At the time I wrote a report about this, I was thinking someone would reach out to talk about it, but no one ever did.

In another instance, I was walking home from the women's workshop on a Saturday and noticed a police car driving beside this tipsy mother. This happened in one of the larger communities. I didn't write anything about this event thinking at the time that the police had done their job. It was only when I came back South that I had another perception of the event which involved an inebriated woman with her child in her amautis. The policemen on the passenger side got out of the police car and with his torso, backed the woman into a house, meanwhile calling out to me to come and get **the endangered child**. In my opinion, this could have had a different outcome. The child could have been accompanied to the woman's crowded home and delivered to the grandmother or other people. On the other hand, I don't know that she hadn't gotten a warning before.

In yet another event which came back to me when I re-read these notes, a woman was threatened of being killed in my office. It was my worker who translated. When we called police, their answer was: « We have to wait until something happens ». How can women feel protected!

In the case of domestic violence, I was always surprised that **when a woman had been subjected to violence**, police would talk to the man, ask the woman if she brought charges and when she later dropped the charges, that was the end of that. It was the women who went to court when they were about to lose their children because they had not protected them when they were assaulted. In the time I was up North, I never saw a man taken to court for not keeping their children safe.

The thing I came to understand is that, when a woman is asked if she will bring a charge on her partner, she will have to continue living in the same house or in the same community. If she is lucky enough to have a friend who welcomes her until it is taken to court, it does not mean she can take her children. **The same is true if she is flown to one of the existing shelters far from her community**. There are now only three shelters in a territory as large as France. There used

to be 5, but this is a case of taking from Jane to give to Peter. Most communities don't have a women's shelter.

No judge resides in the Nunavik region. Any case might take **months before a judge** is available to hear a woman's testimony about a violent act. Her other choice is to leave to go south but this is costly, and she might be able to pull this off right away.

Just imagine this: the communities are very small, and everyone knows what everyone is about. She cannot avoid meeting her aggressor at the unique food store or on streets where there are just skidoos or VTT.

It wasn't until I read this book "**Failure to protect: moving beyond gendered responses**" by Cathy Richardson and others that I understood my feelings about the work I had engaged in in the North. Sad to say but when a mother is assaulted, and her children's safety is compromised, youth protection authorities devote more time to the non-offending parent than to the behavior of the perpetrator. So, it is **not a surprise that women don't seek police protection.**

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At some point, in one community on the Hudson Bay, I was sent to another community on the Ungava coast to search for a young **15-year old girl**. My task was to bring her back to the community where she had run from. In the other community, I was told to search for her. So, my DYP supervisor insisted that I go into people's homes to look for her. I remember how uneasy I was at going into homes to look for her. It not only felt disrespectful, but it reminded me of methods used in the 1950's by welfare workers when they suspected something was going on in a home.

Inuit seldom lock their doors, but it still felt invasive and wrong. First, it should not be my role as DYP agent. Why not let a member of that community find her and invite her to get in touch with us? I did not find the girl, but I hoped she would find her way to her brother in the community she had run to and seek refuge with him. This could have been handled with a committee of elders like I had seen it done in Kuujuarapik, my first drop-off point.

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Youth protection uses very intrusive methods (**put some intensity on that family**); we are punishing women for not being able to protect their children a context of violence. In my time in one community, **children were hustled in an office**, so that a DYP agent could ask them questions about their parents. I remember only one girl who had an attitude, all the other kids were scared, and they might answer to please us or to not displease us.

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Another story is about this little **girl's fate**. **She was diagnosed as FASD** and to my way of thinking, justice was not served when we went to court after she had ben abused by a man who stayed at her grandmother's house. The defense lawyer on the case convinced the judge that the

girl had severe learning disabilities due to her FASD. She was painted as an unreliable and non-credible victim and her disclosure was rejected. So, I don't know what happened to her after I left. **This child clearly needed an advocate.**

This case which seems to me an injustice, besides being infuriating and all-too common, points to a much greater and deeper problem: **the lack of value placed on the lives of Inuit women and children**, and as a result, the lack of true protection they receive from the protective agencies supposed to protect them.

If Inuit mothers were given the level of protection they require from abuse, exploitation and discrimination, they would in turn be better able to protect their children, in their own communities, with the support they need.

For many of the women who find themselves and their children caught up in the child welfare system, it is a source of harm, a source of stigma, a source of trauma. **Child welfare** is a provincial jurisdiction. Legislation in all provinces and territories allows for the removal of a child who has been sexually exploited, abused, neglected or is at risk from their home into provincial care. Why is it the child who is removed from his family, his friends, his school and community?

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Among the Inuit, the environment presents a challenge due to extreme weather conditions that make **invisible homelessness** more dangerous. With few homeless shelters available, Inuit are more likely to stay with friends in already crowded dwellings. As a result, half of the homes in Nunavik are crowded (48%) and proximity with long-fingered uncles and relatives brings its own dangers: **sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.**

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Now, I want to talk about this **woman who had her children removed ten years prior**. And she now had a child who was three months old. On the **notion of risk**, I was ordered by my supervisor. to go and get the child with police. I told my supervisor that I would like to interview this woman to find out what she had done in the meantime to give her a chance to keep the child. I had seen this woman at the airport and at COOP and she was taking good care of the child and she always had people around her and her young son. So, I thought she had a chance to have matured and might prove to be a good mother now. When told a meeting with her was not going to happen, I said I would not go get the child and I was told to go back south.

While the protection agency intervenes in situations of abuse or gross neglect, it also intervenes in more everyday sorts of situations in which women and their families are having a hard time and need some support. When we heard about situations indicating a family was having a hard time, we were told to **put pressure on the family**. This was done by looking for the children and bringing them in our office where they were subjected to questioning. From what I hear from Inuit acquaintances, this is an ongoing problem in the child care system. No wonder

family breakdown is a reality for many Inuit families. Inuit children are over-represented in the foster care system across Canada.

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Although DYP is the last resort, our team has seen Inuit children moved thousands of kilometres away from their families with their clothes in a garbage bag. Shockingly, we have seen children being moved around different care centres (Batshaw Youth and Family Homes) and foster families **19 times and more. In one heart-wrenching case, a child age 2 was moved 56 times by the age of 6.** She is the one I am doing the 8000 km trek for.

My particular trigger was the story of this **little girl who was moved 56 times between age 2 and 6** taken away from her current family in her class at school. I was informed of this after it happened when another HR phoned from a neighboring community to ask the healthcare card number for this little girl. When I reacted to this news, my supervisor attempted to correct the information by saying, "In fact, she was moved only 37 times". And me, in answer: And what is the difference? Later, I would learn the substitute mother had omitted to say her son was schizophrenic.

Or this other time when I had a discussion with my supervisor about the high number of placements and she tells me that we are doing this out of love for them. I was upset and asked: **"What would it be like if we did not love them"**? I ask you this: *How can a (children) grow up and lead a healthy, happy and dignified life with this type of history?* I saw another child heading for the same future (July 2010).

Rather than providing support, many women experience the child welfare system as intervening in ways that make everything worse. My feeling is that the **women are set up to fail.** They are asked by a judge who has not ever lived with 20 other persons to correct situations in their homes to get their children back. I doubt I would be able to correct any situation if 20 other people lived with me.

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Practices that regularly and unnecessarily separate families and removing children from their families create trauma and lead to broken bonds, later attachment issues as well as severe behavioural and adaptive problems.

Stronger relationships to build a foundation for families to stay together in a more supportive environment would encourage programs that would provide family programs that include parenting, financial, self care, self management, life training skills such as legal education for their defense in family and criminal law as well as nutrition.

I envision a child welfare system that is accountable to families and communities, transparent and family-and child-centred. At the time I worked in Nunavik, DYP had too much discretionary power without equal amounts of checks and balances and accountability to the communities whose children it was working to support.

Child welfare workers do not get enough training in building collaboration with parents or working to support the family to stay together and reunite in a healthy way. Child welfare workers are often put in a position where they work to build a case against, rather than help, parents. The then mayor told us in no uncertain terms how damaging our work was. Whole families are broken and distressed by the actions of DYP.

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Education, prevention, and the building of strong, autonomous communities free of violence and other forms of community harm are needed.

Action must be taken to work in collaboration with the Inuit to build a bridge of hope for families who need more support. Safe houses or respite houses must be provided to keep the children free of harm and have 24-hour support to help families and keep the children in their community.

This action would provide new employment opportunities, reduce workload for the DYP workers and build healthier, stronger relationships between the families and DYP workers.

Prison does not work for Inuit. They are given their sentence, serve it and go back home. Might we not think of having programs that involve monitoring the progress of offenders and supporting that person, as well as the victim and their loved ones with the justice committee, throughout recovery? When I was in Alberta, I met with an organization which serves Inuit and they suggested this.

Organizations working in the community with ongoing support are so important. This would truly be a collaborative and more holistic approach to dealing with family violence.

As I said before, there is no judge residing in Nunavik. The law travels to Nunavik. A traveling court is set up in a community for one day. It could be in Puvurnituq or in Val d'Or, sometimes in Salluit. The judge and the lawyers meet to hear as many of the cases on the judge's docket in one day. Each person hopes to be heard that day; otherwise, there will be several months' wait for the next traveling court and parents will often not be able to see their child for more and more months.

My point is that when I worked at DYP, I saw and heard things I questioned. So, to try to understand the reasoning behind such sentences as "Put some intensity on that family" once we had a signalment, I started collecting data on events, situations and people. Also, when we went to court, the standard phrase was: "**Get ready for the circus**".

It just seemed like everything about court was a circus. It often coincided with the visit from another social worker from Montreal who made calls to families who were fostering and then closed the files. Prior to that, one community worker would go through the files and take out pages from them. I never what the truth was about either the visit of the social worker or the

removed pages though I suspect that we had too many children on our roster and he was supposed to close the files for the DYP authorities.

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My concern was always the children, but behind the children, I was often aware of the **housing** situation, also the fact that women are often victimized; often the husband does some browbeating, then DYP gets involved, then the Judge who says she had better protect her children, when we all know that many of the women do not have the means, nor the financial resources, nor the network to help her sort it all out.

In the next house, it is the same situation. Not even in my world would I like to be confronted to such demands, fearing to be set up for failure, especially given the housing situation (**48% of homes are overcrowded**) that prevails in the North.

Children moved 19 to 56 times are bound to have major problems of identity, of attachment, of codependency.

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Prejudices, racism and discrimination I will now talk about something that is more general but that happens every day in the North. It has to do with perceptions and what is attributed to the Inuit, very often about the women and girls. It may be surprising that from people who don't even know one Inuit, there are comments, such as "those little girls are hot", "the Inuit are like adolescents", they never show up in the morning". Stereotypes abound: they are lazy, undependable, suicidal, directionless, purposeless.

Racism exists when ideas and assumptions about a racial category is used to justify and reproduce a racial hierarchy that unjustly limits access to services. (I gave an example on p.8: Youth protection of the time illustrated this when we went to Court and the judge decreed that the girl would live in a youth center).

Racism can create feelings of powerlessness and low self-esteem which impact health, happiness and life chances. Many of these women do not know their rights. Factors that support racism and sexism influence the behavior of persons by expressing our expectations of that person (such as example of policeman who flirts with young Inuk woman).

Social problems created by racist & sexist behavior occur when we assume that because someone is from a minority, they can't achieve the same level of competence as the majority. So, this means that is exactly what happens, and it results in more poverty, less health and **sexual harassment which might lead to sexual exploitation and even trafficking.**

As an example of how we perceive them as undependable by white workers: we went to get them at their homes for their meetings scheduled with us. Negative reinforcement is self-actualizing.

Racism or stereotypes show up in **nursing** when nurses joke about the lack of curiosity Inuit give to diagnostic.

A stereotype is a fixed, over-generalized belief about a particular group of people. No matter how they act, this stereotype acts as something that gives us **meaning** so we can make a decision that seems coherent with our own values.

A nurse shared that her client went to see her grandmother to find out how to treat her child's earache after receiving a prescription from the doctor and using her grandmother's recipe instead of using her doctor's prescription to heal her child. **To the nurse, this showed poor parental skills.** Although I doubt the consequences would really have happened, the nurse was angry and said if the patient came back, she would not treat her. Others have suggested that the Inuit may be passively resistant to us so if you ask them to paint a wall, they will do it piecemeal and it will take forever to be completed.

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I was once at **Court with a mother and daughter.** When the judge told the young daughter that she was going to live at a youth center, the girl ran out of court. The mother stayed seated on her chair. Once Court adjourned, the director of our department said: "you see, she is not a good mother, she didn't run after her daughter". That point of view, with which we judge other nations including Inuit, is tied to our own dominant view and not to the Inuit reality (Example of small children's freedom in church)

Another time, on an air stop, I met a white woman who said she would like to have an Inuk child, so she could put her to her hand. Personally, I cringe when I hear comments like that. That shows how we are bigoted. Before I walked someone referred me to a woman who had an Inuk child. Very candidly, this woman said that when this girl was the right age, she would pressure her to make a choice of parent in her favor.

I was coming back home by plane and a mother with her baby who knew my job turned to me and asked if she could lay her crying child down. I asked why she was asking me such a question and she replied, "You don't let your children cry". I perceived her fear of consequences from this DYP agent.

When a young woman is curious and approachable, the young Inuk woman is considered to be sexually easy. In the North, young girls are easily targeted by white workers although we are told not to. What we learned in school still defines what we think of those OTHERS. (I am thinking of Jimmy)

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Inuit women are socially marginalized and undervalued. Their vulnerability and **our societal disinterest** places **Inuit women at higher risk for violence** of all forms. I tend to think that

acts of violence may be motivated by racism or carried out in the expectation that societal indifference to their welfare and safety will allow the perpetrators to escape justice. What saddens me is that they are very aware of this.

(<http://www.saturviit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Chapter-4-Social-Services-and-the-Justice-System-in-Nunavik.pdf>)

Their general socio-economic status results in crushing poverty, family dysfunction and addiction, both on their land and in urban settings.

In the North, issues of poverty, violence and the mental and physical health of Inuit women, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable: women who are homeless, addicted, suffering mental health issues, fleeing violence, are involved in survival sex work: sometimes, that is how women pay their rent or stay as homeless.

Being Inuit is one risk factor for vulnerability. Other risk factors include addiction, homelessness, poverty, mental and physical disabilities, involvement in the child protection system through adoption, fostering, residential schools or group homes, sexual or physical abuse or neglect as a child.

Media constructions of young Inuit women in conflict with the law, who are violent or involved in sex work, shape the public's view of women and the dangers posed by such women.

Many Canadians assume that **the violence toward the women is inevitable**, a result of the choices they have made and the "lifestyle" led by the victim of sexual assault, violence and murder. The use of the term lifestyle "implies a behavior choice. These are not 'lifestyles' but simply lives – lives that are continuously subjected to violence and discrimination.

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Me: I married at 19. I am a woman who had a child at age 20. I never engaged in sex work, but I made many wrong choices to be loved by a man. I struggled with family issues and the violence in my family and although I have many siblings, was close to only two persons in my family, my mother and a sister who died at age 42. Had it not been the help from the child welfare system (called mother's allowance) and university grants, and strong ties and support from friends, I might never have left an abusive relationship at age 21. At 22 (1972), I began university as the single mother of an 18-month-old child.

Ten years later, I remarried, my son was adopted by my husband, I had two other children, and obtained first a BA degree in Sociology, then another BA in Special Education before entering the public service as a teacher in 1978. Before the laws changed, I was able to use my education to be a psychotherapist for some 23 years. Later, in 2006, I would obtain a Masters' degree in Social Work.

When my son was a teenager, he spent time at my ex-husband's insistence at the Centre Jeunesse du Mont St-Antoine where he had a really tough time and experiences he should not have had during his short time on voluntary measures issued by DYP.

Lorraine Loranger - BA in Sociology, Brock University; BA in Specialized Education, University of Toronto; Master of Social Work, University of Sherbrooke, Quebec. I worked at the **Department of Youth Protection** in four Inuit communities (Kuujuarapik, Quaqtaq, Puvirnituk, Salluit) with the longest stay in Salluit where I made long-lasting ties with the community there. I worked closely with Inuit women and children in Northern communities and had numerous documented cases pointing to major problems in the child care system of Inuit communities.

I retired from a private practice in 2015 knowing I would be walking for the project **NO CHILD SHOULD TAKE THE LONG WAY HOME**.

When I was working as a DYP intervention agent for the application of measures, I became aware that there were no **SAFE HOUSES** (transition homes) that could welcome mothers and children in for a long-term stay to avoid the violence in their home.

For sure, if a child was in danger, a family would take him in temporarily, but often, the child was redirected to another community and on those occasions, he would not visit with his family for months and more, at least not until the time of the traveling court and DYP authorities had to agree to the visit. **No Child Should Take the Long Way Home** was born out of my frustrations to **do better by the Inuit mothers and their children**.

As can be expected, this project "**No Child Should Have to Take the Long Way Home**" has a long-term goal. Each new step counts towards the realization of a project of a safe house/respice home for the children so as to reduce the number of foster care placements. I am entering a full second year into this trek. As of April 2018, I am finishing the 2418 kilometers left to achieve 8000 kilometers. May I ask for your support and fidelity toward the **CAUSE**?

Children, mothers, families, and communities are the object of this project **No Child Should Take the Long Way Home**. After all, every child is born with the right to have a better chance at a life free from abuse and violence.

The project of an 8000-kilometer trek started in between Prince Rupert, British Columbia and I am headed for Ingonish, Nova Scotia. The project evolved since I worked among the Inuit people. It is about promoting family strengths and unity, it hopes to help the Inuit mothers build back parental skills needed to protect their children. **A safe house/respice home for the children would ensure their security and protection in their own community.** Five organizations support my project through various actions: Saturviit Inuit Women Organization, SOS Children Village in Surrey, BC, Aura Freedom International who teach women's rights in Vaughn, Ontario, Centre des femmes de Saint-Laurent à Montréal and Amnistie Internationale (Groupe 42) de Saint-Lambert.

The end result of the project is to have families be stronger and for social workers to work in collaboration with all the families in each community to keep Inuit children who need protection in their community.

My personal history is not intended to be a confessional, but I know it is important for me to provide this audience with my personal starting point.

Facts about the Inuit

Fewer Inuit women are legally married, in comparison to non-Inuit women (30% versus 47%). However, more Inuit women live in common-law relationships (17% versus 10%).

Inuit women are also more likely to be lone parents, with 18% of Inuit women versus 10% of non-Inuit women.

Teen parenthood is also significantly higher for Inuit girls aged 15 to 19, with 8% being mothers compared to their non-Inuit counterparts at 1.8%.

Inuit people fare worse socio-economically than their non-Inuit counterparts. The unemployment rate for both Inuit men and women is higher.

Inuit women face several barriers in securing sustainable employment, through entrepreneurship or in the workplace.

Only 46 per cent of Inuit women aged 18-44 years old had completed the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalent in 2012.

Inuit people with low levels of education have lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than those with the same education levels who are not Inuit.

Average Inuit income is 64 percent of average total income. All Inuit identity groups have substantially lower incomes than the general population.

The average income for Inuit women over 15 in 2005 was \$15,654, approximately \$5,000 less than non-Inuit women.

Education improves employment rates and income levels, but Inuit people do not have the same levels of education as other Canadians.

In 2006, 33% of adult Inuit people (25 to 54 years of age) had less than a high school education. 18% of Inuit people have college certificates.

University education at the bachelor's level or above shows the greatest disparity between Inuit and non-Inuit attainment rates. Among non-Inuit adults, one quarter have a university degree, but only 4% of Inuit have university degrees.

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Saturvit is my partner on my walk. I have support from 5 organizations. On the road I walk alone; in winter, winter, I get groups to walk with me.

Take the Long Way Home. After all, every child is born with the right to have a better chance at a life free from abuse and violence.

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Rampart to DH and