

## **Amelia Reimer**

Here in Newfoundland and Labrador we have some very unique obstacles to work with. Under federation in 1949, Ottawa was informed that there were no Indigenous people here in the province and so any of other Indigenous groups here locally who have government recognition have had to fight very hard for that recognition and there are groups who are still fighting for recognition. And in that many of our Indigenous cases that happen missing, murdered or other sorts of crimes are not properly tracked as Indigenous cases and then we also look at the idea that we are rural – 50 per cent of the province's population is here in the city and there's a very large lack of services elsewhere but it's very important for people to not feel as alone as someone might feel to not feel alone to make sure you are reaching out for help. I think it's really important to make sure that families reach out for help from places such as your own Aboriginal government or friendship centre to be there and walk with you on this journey and that you don't go it alone.

It's highly contested so right now we are looking at you know thousands of Inuit from Nunasiut government. We're looking at over 125 000 people who have applied for status with Qalipu Mi'kmaq on the west coast of the island and we've got Connie River Mi'kmaq we've got the Sheshatshiu and Natuashish Innu nations and also Nunavik Inuit in Labrador who were formally known as the Labrador Metis and the majority of these groups are still fighting for recognition and the numbers are all over the place as to whose status whose applying for status and whose self-identifying.

Lets take for instance if 125 thousand people are applying for status through west Qalipu Mi'kmaq alone that's one quarter of the entire province that's 25 per cent of the people here – it's huge.

The numbers of Indigenous people here in Newfoundland/Labrador is highly contested. It ranges any where from 4 or 5 per cent of the population for official numbers up to people who are self identifying and applying for status we are looking at more like 25 per cent of the population or higher.

Here in Newfoundland, on the island, especially we are dealing with mainstream thought processes of it being the extinction myth saying that the provincial government here in 1949, when asked if there was anyone here applicable under the Indian Act, said no we killed them all. And that is still popular conception here and that's something we work against every single day to try and re-educate and try to reinform people as to the reality that there is a very high population of Indigenous people in the province whether it's seen or not.

The murder of Loretta Saunders had a huge impact on this province and the idea that she came from Labrador. She spent time here on the island in Newfoundland, she was in Nova Scotia where the actual crime occurred, her body was found in New

Brunswick and then her attackers were found in Ontario. This is all of eastern Canada this covers and it's been very interesting to see how people have really connected to Loretta Saunders and her case and her family and it's brought people out of the wood work and brought awareness to this situation.

So the murder of Loretta Saunders has brought awareness and public interest of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples throughout all of the Atlantic provinces.

As far as the database goes it's been very difficult to track as to who is Indigenous who is not because even people's Indigenous background has not been properly documented and properly acknowledged. Loretta Saunders case, herself, the first three days that she was missing, the newspapers were reporting her as being white and it was only the third day that a newspaper article mentioned in the first paragraph that she was white and then in the last that she was an Inuk which tells me that reporter doesn't know what an Inuk is which is singular for Inuit and then it came out on the fourth day that she was actually Indigenous and by then there was already interest in what happened to her. People trying to find her. The family themselves have reported that they saw it significant difference in the response from people and the response from media between when they thought that Loretta was white and when they found out that she was actually Inuit that the level of support, the level of concern actually declined.

When Loretta's mother found out that she was actually being reported as white and missing she said "good, that means someone is going to look for her". We see with the database that we keep here at the Native friendship for the entire province we see Bernice Rich we see her case in Sheshatshiu only a few months after Loretta Saunders about the same age also a student also a few months pregnant some very similar circumstances and no one has heard of Bernice Rich and that happened here in the province in Labrador but Bernice Rich was visibly native and Loretta's not.

Supports that families are receiving here. The supports that families receive here seems to be very inconsistent and it depends on which community which family how visibly Aboriginal someone is or not and so with that once again I'd really engage the Native friendship to help - we can help we can even that playing field and make sure that all the resources are tapped into.

Here in St. Johns we have the Newfoundland/Labrador sexual assault crisis prevention centre. We have coalition against violence Avalon East, the women's centre here at the Native Friendship and also we have contacts with law enforcement and other agencies both provincially, regionally and across the country.

So here at the Native friendship centre and throughout the province we are doing quite a bit of work to support families and educate the public. We are working with universities to help indigenize some of the course being offered, future teachers coming out into the system. We just helped co-teach the first Indigenous subject grad class ever at memorial university we work with public events at the university throughout the community here at the friendship centre to talk about the issues and to talk about things that no one else is and to make it a safe place to have the conversation and to find if there are gaps in the system what can be done to bridge those gaps what can be done to create new programs or new services to provide for people. We also have here at the Native Friendship Centre an all Aboriginal mental health team so we've got Inuit, First Nations, Metis members on the mental health team and we are here and available to talk with people and to listen and care and give an Aboriginal lens to the issues in listening.

So here at the Native friendship centre we've been involved with the faceless dolls project since 2013 which is through the Native Women's Association of Canada NWAC. We started out with making dolls as we were also compiling the database. We started off with a poster board of the dolls and the next year we put them on a quilt that the community came together to make. For many of the community members it was there very first time sewing anything so we learned how to sew and have the conversation about how many victims there really are here in Newfoundland and Labrador and the following year 2015 we received funding from OCM cares to actually frame the quilt and there's hope that in the near future we'll be able to take the quilt to display it in the federation building or the provincial museum.

Please don't go through this alone. Going through something as losing a family member either gone missing or has been murdered is already so isolating make sure you reach out to places such as the Native friendship centre. There is absolutely no reason that Bernice Rich's case or Loretta Saunders should have been treated any differently by the media by the courts by the police there should be no difference. Be sure you come to people such as myself at the friendship centre here in St. John's we're available throughout the province to talk and we'll help to make sure that your family member is treated fairly and your family member's memory is treated just as equally as anyone else's.

I think it's a sense of community belonging, the culture and loyalty to make sure because we are so often betrayed by systems we're so often betrayed by lateral violence where we betrayed in so many different ways to reach out to someone who will listen and trust and believe I think makes a very large difference.

So in working with family members which has been very, very special to me I've seen what's helps people get through is to reach out and have people you can talk to that understand and will listen and will believe and the idea that are not alone and you don't have to go through this alone please don't go through this alone please contact people such as myself and other here at the native friendship centre in St.

John's we are available to contact people through out the province and also Newfoundland Labradorians who are out of the province but who are falling into these same circumstances

You know we talk a lot about residential schools and missing and murdered Indigenous women, child apprehension with the foster care system, the pass system, the lack of recognition through the government of Indigenous status and Indigenous background and heritage. We talk about those things but we don't really always even ourselves remember the intergenerational trauma and systemic trauma abuses that keep happening again and again and these patterns keep happening again and again but we can work together to stop these patterns to work together to create healthier lives and communities for ourselves and those that we love.

When I talk with families and I see how much of a difference it makes when someone is finally arrested or finally pleads guilty in these cases the families have such a sense of relief such a sigh to know that something's been done the cases where I see nothing has been done and especially the cases where people know who the murderer was and nothing has been done. The murderer is still walking around free I see that's the hardest. And when there's justice it doesn't bring your family member back but it does bring a sense of relief.