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12-13-2013

Statement by Melody Paul collected by Rachel George on December 13, 2013

Melody Paul

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General Information

Private or Public Statement? - Private

Statement Provider: Melody Paul

Date: December 13, 2013

Location: Wabanaki Health and Wellness, Bangor, Maine

Consent Option: Public Accessibility (Non-Anonymous); Transfer to Archiving Body

Previous Statement? No

Statement Gatherer: Rachel George

Support Person: Juanita Grant

Additional Individuals Present: N/A

Recording Format: Video

Length of Recording: 01:09:18

Recording

RG: Okay. So, um, I'm here with Juanita Grant, my name is Rachel George. Would you mind stating your name?

MP: My name is Melody Paul.

RG: Um, today is, uh, December 13th, 2013 (*distant laughter in background*), and we are at Wabanaki Health and Wellness (*background laughter and talking continue*) in Bangor, Maine. The file number is: W-201312-00013. Melody, have you been informed, understood, and signed the consent form?

MP: Yes, I um signed the consent form and I understand everything that was explained.

RG: Perfect. And so, I have to let you know that, um, if you say anything in your statement today that indicates that a child or an elder is in danger of being hurt or in need of protection, or if there is eminent risk...so, ah...if there is any risk of serious bodily harm to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information might not be protected as confidential.

MP: Okay.

RG: Do you understand?

MP: Yeah, I understand (*smiling*).

RG: Okay. And, I want you to know again that you have full control over this statement. So, if you want to stop at any time to take a break, that's a hundred percent okay, you just have to let me know. If you want to remove your statement at any time, that's also okay. It's totally whatever is going to make you feel most comfortable.

MP: Okay.

RG: Okay? So, we can start whenever you're ready.

MP: I'm ready (*laughs*).

RG: (*In a whisper*) Okay. So, can you tell me, um, how old you were when you moved to Maine? And, where you moved from?

MP: Um, well, um—I moved from—I left my reserve when I was seventeen and I moved here. And so, I had a lotta like, struggles when I first came here with the whole language barrier and getting, um, used to how Mainers are, and their traditions and how, you know, how different it was here for me. It was really challenging. I um, I ended up staying at a couple shelters. Um, and I experienced a lot of negativity towards me because I was from a different country. And, so, they didn't, there was a lot of um, this—just a lot of...

I wasn't that relatable I guess 'cause I was from a different, different country, like fifteen hours away from here. And, you know, every time I tried to explain where I was, like, where I'm from, it's like, "Where is that?" So, I had to go through all that, and the whole explanation of why I moved here and everything is to like, try to start a new life here and look for work, and maybe just adopt it?

RG: Can you tell me a bit little more about the difficulties with the language barrier?

MP: Um, the language barrier was difficult because, you know, out there, there's....there's a lot of people that could be judgmental towards, um, Natives. And, that really bothered me a lot. You know, staying at the shelters when I was young but they would be like...you know, well, Natives a lot of times are drinking and passing out on the street, and all this negative. That really bothered me a lot because I was always trying to defend that. Like, you know.... well, where I'm from they go to school. You know, a lot of Natives go to school, they get educated. A lot of them, you know, go to college, get regular jobs, and they don't do that. So, a lot of time I was having to defend my culture and my ways. And explain to the people a lot that, you know, it's—it's um—it's different, but it's really not that different. There is a cultural difference. You just, kinda have to adopt it. You have to just adjust a little bit. Like, how when I moved here I had to adjust to Maine ways (*smiling*). So, you know you just make it a little bit of changes and being open to different people.

RG: (In a whisper) That's fantastic. Can you, um...I just want to make sure that this gets onto the recording. What is your first language?

MP: My first language is Mi'qmaq. And then English is my, um, everywhere language (*laughing*).

RG: Everywhere language.

MP: Yeah. And then I (*laughter in background*), I picked up a bit of Spanish because, you know, they kind of have... they're really family oriented. So, kind of where, you know, I didn't have family there was times when they took me in, you know. And they treated me like, "Hey, you know, she's Native." You know, I was—if I didn't have work, or hadn't, you know, they'd help me. I made some friends that really helped me a lot. So, that's... that's about it.

RG: Can you tell me a bit more about your experiences when you moved to Maine?

MP: Um... I, like I said, I had a lot of difficulties. You know, I had to start fresh...like, with no place to live, nobody to—certain people would guide—because I went raking blueberries when I was seventeen and I brought my backpack basically, with like, I had a whole bunch of like...I brought a tent and all those stuff to go raking and my plan was like, "I'm gonna go work, save all the money and then I'm gonna rent a place. Save it all up and then stay here. I'm gonna to experience this life and see how it goes."

So, I did that but a year later you know I ended up at a homeless shelter. Um... and it's um, it was. You know it was... it was a big shock. Because, you know, it's tough out there like when you're...you don't have a place to go, and you don't have like a family to call an hour away, and you know they'll offer you a place to stay 'til you get on your feet.

I didn't have that. I kinda had to adopt - I had to adopt um non-Native people into my life. And they kind of adopted me a little bit. And to this day, I know people where I can go and they will take me in tonight if I needed a place to stay. And, you know, I would just offer them work around their place. Or, I would help out in their home with laundry, or, whatever. It's just kinda like I—I'll offer my help you know, and then they'll give me shelter. It's like that (*laughs*).

So, to this day, I have strong ties with that still. I could call them this hour and they, they'd come pick me up from Bangor. So, it's been good.

RG: (*In a whisper*) That's good. Can you tell me about your involvement with the State-Child welfare system?

MP: Um... my involvement with them started in, um, when my son was seven. And I was drinking and abusing my prescriptions. And, um, I wasn't taking care of myself. And, um, I really needed help. I really needed the help. And then I um... it's been...

They were involved in my life twice. That's the unfortunate part. Um, the first time around, you know, with my alcoholism and my drug abuse, um... I didn't seek help. I didn't go to counseling. I didn't go to AA. I didn't go to any. I didn't take it seriously. It was like, "Well, you know, I can get through this." But I didn't.

I didn't surrender is what it is. I didn't surrender myself to be like, you know, "That's it, no more, you have to stop." I didn't hit my rock bottom. And, the second time it was like a real...like (*hand gestures towards head/face, while making wave sound*), "Phew." A real wave hit. Like, "That's it Melody. If you don't do this it's all done. You're gonna be done. You can't go back. This is it, open up!"

I went to rehab and I stayed at the...um, Wellsprings, for five and a half months. And, I, you know, it was an intense program. And, um, they taught me a lot of coping skills. I went to AA meetings. I reached out to, you know, Spruce Run, because of my experiences with the domestic violence. And, just... just the meanness in everyday life with people. It can be hard out there. You know there's people out there that can be like, really, not nice.

And, just that, with the domestic violence piece, and my, um, struggles with the addictions. It was all kind of like, you know, everything I had to deal with. It all, you know. There was nothing there to numb me. I just went for it, like, jumped in. It was—left it all behind, you know. It's now, um, when I was at Wellsprings, I just... it was really good for me. I honest to God, believe it saved my life. I still go to meetings today. Um... I been clean and sober for a year and one week. And um, I go to meetings regularly. I go to support groups, self-help stuff, as much as I can. Um, try to help people as much as I can. People that might be struggling with alcohol and drug addiction. Or, maybe there's somebody out there, you know, having a hard time with domestic violence issues. Or, any type of issues.

You know, if I could notice it a little bit I would like to help, you know, that fellow struggler, I'll call them. You know, help them, guide them a little bit to help. 'Cause there is help. Instead of resorting yourself to like, you know, being too down and out and going down the wrong path, you know. There is light. You just have to find it. And, it is out there. Help's out there. You just gotta find the...find the people that will guide you to it. So.

RG: What happened when the state first became involved in your life?

MP: Um... the first time when the state became involved in my life—like I said, I was, um, in denial one hundred percent. I was not, um, in—I was having a rough time with my dependency on the prescriptions. And, I was not focused at all on helping myself try to be a better person. It was like...I was in um... addiction mode. You know? So I neglected my son. I neglected my health. And, you know, the state took my son. And you know, I um—they placed him with um a non-Native family for five months.



And, so, in the five months that they had him I um... I didn't, I didn't go to meetings. I was still on prescriptions. I still didn't quit. I still wanted a refill on those prescriptions. And if days would get bad, I would go drinking. You know, I would still drink. That's, that's the unfortunate part. It's like...if I went to court, there was one day I went to court and, you know the DHS worker gave me attitude. And what did I do? I just, you know, trying to manipulate the system - like I did. It...I was doing it but it really was I was lying to myself. I was lying to myself because I didn't. I was still using. I was still in the addiction mode, trying to get my son back. It was like... not good, you know? That's one thing that I wish the first time. Because I have involvement twice, unfortunately. I didn't surrender myself the first time. I basically lied to myself, and my addiction just kept growing, and growing.

And then, you know, it... it wasn't to the extent that it was the second time. This first time...I wasn't...I did quit drinking but I was still on the prescriptions. But, the...the thing with the first time around is...um...I wasn't involved with AA. I didn't go to meetings and that's the, that's the sad part. That's, that's the real sad part. You know, I didn't... I didn't... I didn't really get the help that I coulda got, you know?

So, Anthony got—my son got placed back with me. And then, my relationship with his Dad just got more unhealthy. And, you know...it, it just...both of us, it was, it was not good. It was just like—drugs, alcohol, and being in a unhealthy relationship. And, he...um. So there was a incident with the domestic violence part of it. And then I thought, “Well, you know I can do this by myself.” But I couldn't do it by myself. I, um, I didn't know who to reach out to. I didn't know, you know... I knew that there were services out there, but I just didn't, um... I didn't, I didn't, like, make that phone call is what it is. I—instead, I stayed home feeling sorry for myself, and secretly still drinking. And secretly still abusing my medications. So the state took my son again.

And... when they took him a second time I was really, really—I—devastated. It was like, “Now they really won't give him back to you Melody, 'cause you're still in your addiction. You're still doing horrible. You're not gonna ever get him back. Because this is the second time—they will probably not give him back to you.” So... I drank like a lot. And, I had a rough time. Everybody was away. Like, I didn't have contact with the, my son's father, my family in Canada was fifteen hours away. Doing their... you know, they had their own lives. I didn't want to reach out to them because I was afraid. I was afraid that, you know, they would just, not be there for me. And, you know?

So, I ended up drinking and hanging out with the wrong people. People that were negative, and didn't really wanna be friends with me for the right reason. They wanted to basically be friends with somebody that can provide their... provide for their addiction. So, it was a sick combination altogether. I was um... there was one time I even didn't show up for court. 'Cause I believed that I wasn't gonna get my son back. Because it's the second time, “They're not

even gonna, they're not—you won't even have a chance." You know?

So, um, my caseworker, um, suggested, you know, "Go to... you need to go to rehab. You, you need to—the state wants you to go three months to a program." And then, so, there was Wellsprings and it was a four, it's a four to six month program. Like, and, the other ones are—there's one that's ninety days, there's one for thirty days. But, the state wanted me to do um, ninety day program. And the other one I think might be in Southern Maine because I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to go down there... because I didn't know anybody.

So...when Wellsprings called me, I um... I was happy. I was so tired. I was homeless. I had lost my apartment. I had lost my son, my family. It was like, "Wow, you're gonna have to... this is it. You gotta—you gotta get this together." And, I went to rehab and my first week in rehab I still wanted to fill those prescriptions. I even called the pharmacy and told them to, "Fill my prescription. I'm at Wellsprings."

I made the call, and then my counselor told me, "You know, you can't do that." I didn't know. Because all these years I would call and say, "My prescription's due. Fill it." You know, to numb that pain inside. That thing you don't want to feel. So, you're going to take a prescription to kinda try to numb it. That's what the addiction part of me kept saying. "Come on, fill it." So you don't have to deal with living with... in this program."

RG: Uh, hmm.

MP: So, um, I... a couple weeks into rehab I decide—well, two weeks into it I decided, "No, this is it! You're not gonna go back to the prescription route. Not gonna happen. It's not gonna ever happen again. This is it! You can deal with this. Yeah, you're gonna be uncomfortable." So, the first thirty days was like the thawing out period, like where, you know—I didn't have a visit with my son. They didn't allow the visit for at least thirty days. And, so, that was difficult in itself.

Um... and then dealing with, um... dealing and living with thirteen other, twelve other women... you know, with other addictions. So... it was a kind of whole... like, "This is intense," like. So... I had to....adjust quick. But I, I can adjust pretty quick... within any situ—a lot of situations. So, I was already kinda programmed to that. So, I adjusted quick. And, um, it was like my understanding that, if I went to rehab, and I, you know, for three months that—that would be enough. So, at my three month mark I was doing good. You know, I'm still doing good. Um, doing what I have to do. Going to meetings, doing service work... helping. You know, just doing the next good thing. It's like...um. So...the fourth month in it was kinda getting where the girls that were there already had graduated or left. So, now the new group would come in and it would be—I had to explain myself over...was getting to know more people, them getting to know you, and it was exhausting and I just...um.

I didn't want to graduate that program... because I didn't. I don't....the first day I was there I had to participate in a graduation. And, I'm not trying to knock the program there but it's like... it was uncomfortable for me to participate in something where I didn't know the person. It was a complete stranger that first day. I had to participate in a graduation and it was like, "Wow,



you know, this is uncomfortable. This must be uncomfortable for that person, because here I am sitting, I just walked through the door and they don't even know me, and I have to say something about them -nice? But I don't really know them?"

So, that's kinda like where I was on that. So... when it came to me graduating I already decided all the months I was there like first month in, second month, third month, do you want a graduation? Do you want just a complete? And I was like, "You're gonna complete. 'Cause you're not gonna, you don't—you already know that you don't want this." And I was like, "Yeah, I don't." Because I don't want these new girls, that I don't get along with, to say stuff about me that's not real.

I want it to be real. I don't wanna leave here lying, where these people are gonna be saying stuff about me but they really don't know me because they haven't taken the—they haven't—they're not at that stage. They're not in that good stage of their recovery where they can say, "Hey, you know... this is." There was—it was, they're too focused right now on themselves. So, it was kinda like... anyways. It's—I did complete the program. I was there five—five months and two, two weeks and, um... I got a completion.

I, um—and the state? That wasn't good enough for the state. Instead, they, they twisted everything around and it was like. I had a visit. I wasn't getting along with the counselor that I was seeing. Um, at the end of it, it was uncomfortable for me. It was uncomfortable in every way because I wasn't getting along with the girls. They didn't understand me, and I really wasn't sure if I wanted to understand them at that stage of their game. So, I just kinda removed myself already that last week. You know, I was already wanting to leave.

A month before I had completed the program there, I asked for a completion for like a week straight, 'cause I felt that I wasn't being treated fairly. I did everything that they wanted me to do. I followed all rules. I didn't relapse. I would pass a urine screen no problem. I was hanging out with sober people. People, places, and things... I did all that. So, it was like I, you know, I was—there was one day that—when I was there that I um, I couldn't go to a specific meeting because there was a—the whole house was on lockdown because somebody had brought something illegal in there. And, so, all of us had to get punished for—basically, we all had to do drug screenings. It was like, that intense. And, I was like, that close to graduating but I still got treated like... bad. Well, not good (*laughs*).

So, um, I just wanted out. I just wanted to start over. Even... they wanted me to do the transitional house and I was thinking to myself, "Well, why do I—why do you, why do you wanna go jump into living with more—more roommates? Why do you want that? Why don't you just try to start, why don't you get your own place like you planned, in Old Town, to reunify with Anth - my son?" And that's what I was aiming at.

So, um, I ended up, um, asking for the completion, had a miscommunication with my counselor, and then, you know, they gave me the completion. No relapse still. Still doing the same thing. I just wanted outta there, like. So hey, DHS, made a big deal outta that saying that I was going, I was doing old habits. It, it came about where all of a sudden I was... I was this... I felt like I, it felt like I had had a—I was being treated like I had a relapse. Like I did something like... you know? It was, I—that was a tough time for me.

I was still going to meetings. I think I was going five a week. And I was getting treated like... you know, DHS worker immediately stopped—I started, I got supervised visits again. When I was in the program they gave me unsupervised, and, you know, when I got the completion and not the graduation I um, they—they, I—I had no phone calls with Anthony. And, I had supervised again... on the Island. Um, and, I was getting treated like I relapsed. I was getting treated like, you know, like I was a piece of shit. And I was like, that was a challenge in itself to keep on going, keep on doing good. Even though they're trying to knock you down and make you go insane, keep going... 'cause you know you can do it (*laughs*). So, I just kept going. And, it's like—I have, like, difficulties. I been having difficulties with the state since I left there in May. And, so...that's...that's about it with that. I mean, I just don't know.

RG: How long was Anthony with you before, uh, DHS got involved the second time?

MP: From June 27th... Anthony got brought back, and we went to court. And then, exactly, almost exactly a year to the date, he got taken again. Like, it was two days after they closed it. And, they got involved right off the bat. It was like two days. It was—it was like—it was just weird. It's like...

RG: Can you tell me a bit more about, um, your experiences with the state from the time that you left rehab?

MP: Um, I've got... I've had difficulties with communicating with the DHS worker. She's um... pretty much, you know, talked down to me. How—what I, well, you know. And she didn't before when I was in the program, it was like an angel. As soon as I left there, and just changed that address it was like—she started treating me like... like I never went for five and a half months. I put all that work in, for almost six months, and she still treated... it was...she didn't even. It—she acted, she acted like that didn't, didn't even matter at this point. That old behaviors...my old behaviors were... my old behaviors would have been relapsing. Um. Feeling sorry for myself, and drinking and hanging out with the wrong people, not going to meetings, lying...um, you know, not wanting to work, not trying to better my life. It would've been horrible... probably doing a lot more harm to myself. That would've been...you know...it could've been...it.

So...it's just, it's been—she's, she's been really difficult. Like, all the time, you know? And my son's Mi'qmaq, and, you know, he's—he's registered in Eskasoni. I registered him when he was six months old at my tribe, so that, you know, when he gets older he has that option to go there... and go back to school. My family will take him in, 'cause it's his family too. And, so I figured, you know, his Dad is a Penobscot, so, register him here too.



And, so, I did that. And, the—I was hoping that by having him be a member of this Tribe that they would step in and help a little bit more. And that—that hasn't happened. And that's been really, really disappointing because we're all supposed to help each other and that's not the, what they're doing. It's almost like they've been working with the state in Bangor office here, to kinda... make it convenient for them to move forward with their lives. And, instead, they just wanna kinda like leave me in the dust here.

Um, and I've complied with, you know, everything that they want me to do. And, you know, I did the completion of the program. I go to meetings. I, um... offered to drug screen. I, I could probably—I offered to do one every day. I could pass, you know? I'm not... I'm still sober. Um. But I just, I wish that the Indian Island, or, the Maine reserves would be more protecting towards me. Because I feel like, if I was in Canada, the Canadian—my Tribes and other nations there would be helping me to kick in and be like, "Hey, she's one of us. This is the way it is. We're gonna help her. She's helping herself. That's the way it is." Not... not let, you know—how it's happening now—it's this Bangor office and that reserve is kinda working together to keep my son away from me. And, um...you know, trying to have his aunt raise him.

She's not a Mi'qmaq. You know? She can't teach him the language. You know? She—there's a lotta things that I could teach him. And you know, I could see if I was still drinking. I could still see if I was using and not trying to do good things. And working. And doing all this other stuff. And, it's like... it's like they're—like... like, I'm a...I feel like they treat me like I'm a piece of shit because I didn't graduate. Well, I'm not gonna participate in a ceremony because of, you know, credit. I'm not like that. I never have been like that. It's not me. So, you know, the certificate that I completed is good enough for me. And it, you know... so, that's not good enough for them and they put down on the paperwork that, you know, "She didn't participate in Spruce Run. She doesn't... she didn't do that," you know, all this other stuff - parenting class, or whatever.

Well, I go to therapy once a week still. I go to see a co-occurring therapist on a weekly basis. And, I been going steady to, um, Spruce Run. And, I just recently, this coming week I'll have completed uh, a twelve-week, two-hour a week self-education group. Like a self-help group, there. And, you know, I've reached out to them, they're a good support. I reached out to, um, Indian Island Domestic Violence Sexual Assault, um, supports. Um... so, it's like... they, they just treat me like I'm this—like, like I don't know how to do anything right.

So, it's like—it's the total opposite, because, you know, I can pretty—survive pretty good. I can—I know what to do. I, you know, I'm capable of taking care of myself. It's—it's been a struggle finding employment at this time, but I'm still doing it. I was able to get apartment, and I didn't have state assistance. I saved up, working at a temporary agency, to save up for my security deposit. And, um, I got an apartment in Old Town so my son wouldn't have to change schools. That's still not good enough for them. I go to three meetings now, a week, when I'm

not trying to work. Um, I go to, um, Wabanaki and their supports, their support group on Wednesdays. And, you know, that's a good agency for me. And, you know, all these—all these things I'm doing still it's just like. Even yesterday, so it's just this, that close, you know, when she talks to me, she doesn't, she doesn't—she doesn't talk to me respectfully, which is really irritating. You know?

If she only knew, if she had, if she—if she only understood the trauma that I been through, you know, a little bit. Talk to me a little bit more sympathetically. And, come on—try to understand where I'm coming from. Because you're far—she's far from understanding where—like what I've done in my life, unfortunately, the struggles I've had here. You know? Take... take a look at, you know, this cultural, that whole culture shock of moving to a different country. That in itself's traumatic. Getting to know people, and opening up to them and trying to trust people that are just going to backstab you, or discriminate you, or secretly talk behind your back, or, you know, try to use you for something. Or having... just, like that. So, it's just like that, that—that should be something that they're more sensitive towards. And, the whole Mi'qmaq thing, you know? Anthony... when they first placed him into the foster family there, they were non-Native. So when Anthony came back to me the first time, he (*Knock on door interrupts*), you know, he made, he kinda made...

RG: Just a second (*statement Gatherer moves to get door*).

MP: ... he didn't...he. We went to this grocery store once and he's like, "Mom, don't speak that." You know? I was like, "Wow! This is not good." You know? "What is this?" Like, he didn't—it was like being with them he adopted their ways. Um... and they didn't, they didn't like....sit down and say, "This is... you know, you're a little Mi'qmaq boy and you gotta stay true to your culture always, no matter what, so you don't lose that." You know? "Your Mom's Mi'qmaq. Your Dad is a quarter Penobscot. And, you should keep this Native culture important to you all the time. No matter what." And, they didn't do that.

Anthony was placed there, and he stayed with them for... I think it was... October, November, December, January, February, March, April. He got returned to me back in May. So, that time. They didn't take him to PowWows. They didn't do that stuff. They just went along. They wanted him to just...fit in as a white kid. And that's the—I'm sorry if that phrasing... I should maybe rephrase that? That he was, um, I don't know how to say that in a way like, where it's not sounding bad. Um, well they... he was losing his little Native ways, that's all.

And, this time around, you know, when he did come back to me, I made sure we smudged everyday. Um... I spoke Mi'kmaq to him regularly everyday. Made sure, like, almost at least once a week he know a new word. And, you know, I would—at the grocery store or at home, you know, speak to him on a daily basis and explain to him how important it is to you know, "You're pretty...it's pretty cool to have a different language, you know? You just gotta try to be open to it." And, so, it was a little bit harder for me to try to teach him. Because they've already kinda— they didn't get it. They don't get it It's just their too shallow minded to even understand what it is, really. It's just like these...

Then, if—if a child is Native they, he should be placed with Native family. Even if they placed



him in Indian Island or, or somewhere around here. Even if they did it on a reserve 'cause I know that, you know, there is families... foster families, that are Native. And, I would've already been more comfortable with that. But they didn't, so, that was a huge negative.

And, so, the second time when, you know, um, they took him. And then I seeked the help. And I finally surrendered all this other stuff. It's like now, they're giving me a hard time. Try and get him, I'm trying to get him back and it's... they keep making up these excuses on what I should be doing. Or, what I could be doing different.

Well, you know... there's only a certain degree where I'll allow somebody to try to change me. Um, I'm open to new things, and I'll adopt it in a diff—like, a little bit. But, you know, ever since... ever since I was seventeen and I moved here I had to remind myself, "You're leaving there Melody, but you're not gonna leave your culture behind. You're not gonna not speak Mi'qmaq. You're gonna call your Mom once a week. You're gonna do this. You're gonna carry it with you and then try to fit in with this culture." And, I... I think I've done okay with that.

The difficulties of the whole part, with the racism that I had to experience when I first moved here. You know, I... I got past that. It's already passed. Um... I learned from it. Move on. You know? Unfortunately, people don't... they're not sensitive. They just look at somebody and they just are quick to judge. Instead of saying, "Hey, you know, maybe that person's feeling a little sad because, you know, they're family is far away?" Or, "Maybe they feel like shit 'cause they're not with their son - or, daughter?" And, "Maybe they're drinking because they don't know what else to do? Maybe they don't know that there's help out there, and they just don't know how to connect with the right guide...guides?" (*Laughs*) So, yeah... it's been, that's about it with that I think. It's just, it's...

RG: How long has your son been with the state, currently?

MP: Um, I have court Monday, and he's, I think it's.. it's really close to the end. And, what's funny is she's, like, eight months pregnant. So, they can't keep postponing it. We've been in this court process, like, they did the—tried to do the cease in June. And, so, um, when we go to court to do the—she wanted the permanency with the aunt, and supported that. And it was like, you know, "But I went to rehab for you." You know? "I'm still sober. I'm offering you this. I'm doing all this good stuff and you just don't give me the time." Because even right now today, she...I only talk to her like, you know, um, maybe a hour a month. That's the communication we have... is at least a hour a month in the whole month. And as time went on, it's been negative, more negative. Um, so, I don't know if—I don't know. I really don't know what will happen next week. But I'm hoping that, you know, since I got my place, I'm working on myself on a regular basis. Um, that I can have my son back, and me and him can start fresh. Like, real fresh. Not, not no medication management. No....you know, super sober route.

RG: Mmhmm.

MP: And not having anything to try to get me through being a Mom. Just doing it, and not....not— not faking it. You know? Being real about it. So, that's about it.

RG: So, I just want to clarify one thing. So.... the second time the state got involved, when was that?

MP: That was, um... June 2012.

RG: Okay.

MP: And they took him because I was intoxicated.

RG: Okay.

MP: And... I was not doing so good.

RG: Okay.

MP: So.

RG: I just wanted to clarify that. Do you have any other comments that you want to add about your experiences with the state child welfare system, or, with tribal child welfare?

MP: I wish the Tribal welfare, you know—I wish they would step in more, and not be so neglectful on people even though they're, you know, I'm Mi'qmaq, from Canada. They should be able to say, "Hey," you know, "she's...not from here, she wasn't born here, but we need to help her still because she's, you know, she's Mi'qmaq. And we need to all help each other. Instead of pushing her away to have the state deal with her, and then the state's dealing they're not treating her the way that—they don't understand because she's Native." So, it's a whole miscommunication in itself. Is what it is.

It's like they don't—if they were more, um, culturally sensitive. If they didn't—if they didn't want to take the easy way out, and make their job easier. They maybe should do their homework more. Um, you know, instead of trying to make it easy for themselves. And I know that sounds bad. Um, but, c'mon and live a day in my life and then you'll know the real—the real deal here. You know the—it's like, it's like a repetitive process. She even one time told me, um, I went to take a drug screen, and she told me, "So your, your urine screen came up good." And I was like, thinking to myself, "Wow. She really doesn't believe me." That's the sad part. It was like, you know, a couple weeks ago I told her, "I'll have my year, year anniversary." You know? Um, "You're invited to come, if you wanted to just see that."

Or, all the months, every month that goes by, um, I told her, "You know, you wanna go to a meeting with me? Experience that part of it?" You know? I put, like, over 600 hours...over 600. I counted about two months ago, all the hours I put in. Um, to my sobriety and my sanity,



and it's over 600 hours... just for the state. Now, all this hours, all the time, the rehab, the groups, the completing this program, the self-help thing, all the meeting, um, therapy. Um, they don't—she doesn't want to take it into consideration and be like, “Wow, she's really doing good this time.” She doesn't want to compare what last time, unfortunately, and this time—to do her real homework. “Open up your pages there and just check it out.” There's a huge difference.

First time, I didn't go to rehab. First time I wasn't even sober. When they return him back to me, I was still on medication that was, like, highly addictive. And, so, this time around I'm not on medication. I haven't had a drink in over a year. I go to therapy and I'm really close to my therapist. Um, I work with a sponsor on a regular basis. I go to meetings when I'm stressed. I will reach out to, you know—even if I'm, even if I was lonely and just wanted somebody to say, “hi” to or whatever, and I didn't know, you know, just to drop in and have a coffee, I go to Wabanaki and do that. You know?

If I'm feeling like, I just want to vent, and I could go, you know, call. There's hotlines you could call, and people will listen. It's just like, it's so different the first time around to this time around. I'm single, doing this by myself, trying to get my son back to me. And the first time around I was with...still with his Dad, and that was not a healthy relationship. This time around they don't want to see, you know, “She's single. She's doing this. She's working on herself.” Um, you know, thinking about going back to school. Um, I have my family's support now. And, like, it's really good for me. I could call my Mom now once a week. And, if I don't call her, you know, I just, I message them all the time. I'm in contact with them on a regular basis. It's so different now. Like... my life is good again, and I just don't want to ever go back to using. I'm, like... I've already committed myself where I just—I won't get on any medication, unless I'm dying in the hospital. That's how much I'm like, don't wanna be on any meds. Like, super-sober route. Like, I don't wanna ever—you know? Unless I'm, like I said, unless I'm in the hospital and they tell me I'm gonna die. That's if I, “Oh, Melody you have a week to live.” Well, alright, you know, then I might be like, “Alright, I'll take these medications.”

But right now I don't—I don't wanna take anything for nothing. I like life. I like experiencing life, and I don't wanna go back to using anything, and that's—I just wanna keep moving forward. And, it's been difficult for me to reunify with my son... um, when they are so strongly like... they don't want to reunify. And they promised me that I would.

I even asked the state worker. I told her, you know, “If I do this program, I surrender myself, and take the steps that I need to take, are you gonna give me my son back?” And she said, “Yeah.” So, it's like, no, she, she's—she's lied now. So, it's okay for them to lie. It's okay for them to twist words, and, all this other negative stuff. And, when you make a wrong, the littlest wrong, it's just like, they—they will run with it. And, that's what happened.

So, like, I didn't graduate because—I said I was gonna to graduate, but I didn't graduate. I completed the program instead. And that was that. And she, she...didn't wanna sit down and talk to me and say, "If you didn't wanna graduate Melody, why didn't you just tell us?" Well, I felt pressured because my drug and alcohol counselor made me feel intimidated. So, that first month she said, you know, if you're—when I was wanting to still be on prescriptions, she said, "If you're not ready to commit yourself then you can just leave." I was intimidated. I felt uncomfortable, you know, pressured. So it was, it was—I never been in that institute before. I didn't. Even leaving when I was, before I was... 'legally' of age to be an adult. I left when I was seventeen. Came here. I followed, you know, I did my own thing. I knew not to get in trouble. I know not to do crazy stuff.

Um, so, I wasn't used to that institutional life, what they provided. It was—that was different for me. And I just wasn't used to that. And—but I did it, so. It still wasn't good enough for them though. And that, that's the sad part. It's like, all this work and you're still not gonna even, you know, try to? You know, I've offered to do all this stuff still. You know? Stop playing with my life already. I wanna move on.

I can't move on, because I want my son back. I want him home with me. And, I wanna keep growing with him. And they're not allowing me to do that. And the more he's away from me he's losing his language. Um, he's growing distance from me. And it's like—they've already kinda, you know, they've distanced him from me. I—all this time from, from this past, um, five months, I've, I see him two hours a week supervised. And, I just recently had him unsupervised, this week. It was like, all this time? And so, now, when court's next week? You're gonna have him unsupervised just one week before court? Like, that's not cool. *(laughs)* So, there's a lot of things there.

RG: Do you have any other comments that you want to add?

MP: Not really *(laughs)*. I don't... like what? Maybe?

RG: Whatever you feel like you have to get off your chest.

MP: Um. I just really hope that, you know, five-ten years time down the road, and somebody from Canada, same situation from—like, like I was. You know, no family support. No, nothing. You have to get—get adopted with anybody that will take you in. Um, the Native people here to step in more. Step in more and help, you know, "She's Native, she." It's like, don't be...don't—don't push this person away. Because if you push them person away they could easily self-destruct.

I've seen that happen with a lot of people, you know? So many times they've self-destructed and resorted to drugs and alcohol. Instead of saying, "Hey." You know? Talking to them for a hour. "How ya' doin'?" You know? "What is your struggles?" Guide them a little bit ta', you know, where there is help. You know? Don't be so—don't push them away, because you never know. That might be the last time—you could be saving somebody's life if you just ask them how they're doing. Talk to them a little bit, you know... help in any way. It's like, instead of pushing them away when they're just—obviously, if they're, like, drinking all day everyday



they're—something there that just needs to be helped. They, they just need help. And, instead of, I don't know just, if you see somebody sick and struggling, um, just try to help, you know? Try to guide them—especially, if they're Native (*laughs*). So—that's about it.

RG: Do you have any recommendations on how to improve the system, in addition to just jumping in and helping?

MP: Um. I think that the um— they should take, ah um culture, like, sensitivity? Like, don't be so judgmental towards—towards Natives. And, don't be so like, hard, like, difficult. ou know? And, do your homework more. You know? My son's Mi'qmaq. He's registered. They haven't, they haven't tried to even—I don't know if they've even tried to say, you know, “Let's try to get him a Mi'kmaq teacher once a week.” You know? So, he doesn't lose that language. So, just to have 'em more, just to be a little bit more culture sensitive, I guess. And not so quick to judge. And, don't be so mean about it.

Like, they have some attitude problems... really bad. They like, will treat you like you're— like you're like a child predator. When they get your—when they—they'll wanna anger you. I don't know if they're trained to anger you. But they will try to set you off where you just wanna freak out. And you have to, like, exercise every coping mechanism you can have to restrain yourself to not freak out. Because it's almost like they're programmed to piss the parent off. So, that they could push them away, and they'll self-destruct. And they'll have the child in their system, and then that's that. That's the sick part. And it keeps going on. And, it's like (*shrugs*). Send them to more—get 'em off the prescriptions. Don't put 'em on the— the stuff that's gonna just—I know it can be helpful for some people, but. It's—just do it cold turkey. Do it super straight. Don't try to be on anything. Just do it the way that we're all born to be. Like, not on medication, not on any type of alternative medication to deal with life. Just deal with it go to—that first time around? They should've sent me to Wellsprings the first time around. If they sent me the first time I wouldn't even be in the second time. That's what I believe. It's like... that was so intense. They should do that to like, the—anybody. Non-Natives, it doesn't matter who they are.

It's like, they should—if a, if um, if a Mom, or Dad, or parents are struggling, instead of... they should have them go super straight. Go to rehab for three months. Or, go to rehab for a month and then you're gonna live your life for five months super straight, then we'll give you your child back. If you could succeed in those five months being sober, clean and sober, with no medication and no, you know, nothing to numb you, then, self-help stuff and all, you know, drug screens and everything.

Make sure they're sober. Don't just assume that they're sober. Because they're telling you that they went to meetings and then they're in the program. Because they might not be telling the truth. And, these caseworkers, should go to meetings. If the person... like my caseworker,

when I invited her, to come with me to get one of my chips. You know, if she sat with me for a hour. You know, this is it. You've made me do already six months of this—five and a half months of this. At least you could do is sit a hour with me at a AA meeting to get my chip. This is it right here. But, she wasn't allowed to. Her Supervisor told her she's not allowed to go to meeting. Now, going to a meetings like having a lunch break. That's like one hour of your time, when you're already stripping these parents, or, a person from their like—their like love, is their child. So, you're gonna take their child, but you're not gonna even spend a hour with them to a AA meeting? But you, it's just like— it's nuts.

They should get a little bit more educated on certain things like the whole cultural difference part. Be more, a little bit more real. Don't be so...um...mean (*laughs*). Don't be so judgmental. Don't be like, so negative and miserable. Just because, you know, you didn't make it to this appointment at exactly ten o'clock. Well, you know what, everybody's late once in a while.

It's just like with me. If I'm late to their appointment fifteen minutes, they'll turn that—they'll say like, "Oh. But you were fifteen minutes late." And they'll write it down there, "She came at forty-five minutes." They'll write it down there, that I was late forty-five minutes. So it's like... I'm at a point where I even told...when I had my team meeting over to Spruce Run, um... I told the DHS worker, "I don't trust you...by myself. I don't wanna talk to you on the phone by myself. I won't do it."

I wish I would've done that when I left rehab. Because all the words that I already told her, she twisted 'em, she wrote 'em wrong. It's like...(*sighs*), "Not true." Spend more time with them. Don't be so, "Let me do my work and get outta here." Just really do your work. Make sure these people are not using. It's like, be real. It's like, they should—they should at least go to meetings to do their homework.

They should—they shouldn't just say, "Are you doing it?" And, then, you know, write it down. Because that's what I did. And that's probably why they're giving me a hard time of getting my son back. Because I did manipulate the system and I did it—I wasn't sober the first time. I said I was sober. That's the whole sickness of it. I was a addict. Addict will say and do whatever to get them by. It's like—it's just—it's just a mess.

And then the second time, it's just—I hate saying this but I really wish I would've—they would've made me go to inpatient before, and not outpatient. And maybe there would not been a second time. If I got that, if I did all the work. If I surrendered myself the first time, the second time mighta not happened. But, um, I'm dealing with that everyday.

I haven't relapsed. The other day I broke down at like, you know, because I was asked about the whole year. I broke down and I um—it felt good to break down though. It's like, "I don't hide these tears in front of you. This, this is the pain you already caused me. I'm already living with it. That's why I avoid your phone calls most of the time." Because I don't even trust the worker right now. I don't even trust what she says. I won't, it's almost like, once they get the idea that they're gonna do something, it's gonna be, it's gonna be their way. They've already controlled the whole situation.



It's like, "No, Melody," you know. "We know you're"—they've already told me twice, in not a nice way, you know, "We know you're Mi'qmaq. How many times do you have to say it?" They've told me that. And my son's aunt even said, "I can't speak Mi'qmaq." Well, at least find somebody that's—that does. So my son's not missing out. If you're not gonna allow me to teach him and be with him, why don't you teach—have somebody teach him once a week at least. So he's not losing that.

That's about it, with that. It's just like, craziness (*laughs*). I had to deal with for this long and, um, they're not gonna get me down. I'll be alright. I've struggled so much here that, you know, I don't wanna—I don't wanna not keep going. It's gonna be okay, you know? Just keep being sober. Stay away from the negative and keep moving towards the positive people. People that will help you. Go to meetings. You know, work the program.

Get a sponsor. Go to support groups. If you're not in a good relationship remove yourself from it in a safe way. Reach out to Spruce Run, they are awesome. You know? Go to get a case manager that will help you so you're not homeless, and having to deal with being homeless. That in itself could drive a person to drink. Like, really. It's—it's tough out there (*laughs*). And, if people—if—you know, every time I'm out there, somebody's walking, you know, and they're having struggles some way and if I can notice it now I—I've become—I've become really good at noticing if somebody's having a hard time. Because I recognize it. I know the signs. Like, I just, it would take me five minutes to know if, you know, if their lack of—having a hard time with their housing situation. Been there, done that. You know? Having a hard time fitting in with, um, a different country? That in itself is hard. So, I can recognize that and deal with it.

It's like, having to speak a language that's not my—this is like my second language. Having to adopt that and vocalize it everyday. That in itself could cause somebody to go nuts. And it's just like—you have to try, to try to do it. Keep on going (*laughs*). It's, it's pretty hard. Even if you don't have a vehicle but, you know, this—it's. Life is funny (*laughs*). Life is really, really—that's the whole, that's the whole thing. You don't even need drugs or alcohol to get high on life. Just experience life the real way and it's pretty trippy in itself (*laughs*). It is. So that's about it.

RG: So, if you don't have anything else you'd like to add, I want to thank you, for taking the time to sit down and let—honor the tremendous amount of courage it took for you to sit and share with me. Um, I know you don't know me that well, but, I feel very honored to have listened. And, to have heard what you have to say. And, I—I'm hearing that it is very difficult. And, so, I want to thank you for your courage.

MP: You're welcome (*laughs*). Well, it was good to, you know—hopefully somebody out there, that might be watching this video, and if they're, like sitting right there. And they're like,

“Wow, I’m in this... not a good relationship.” You know? Or, if they could just step out and say, “Wow, let me, let me think this through.” You know? “Is there help out there?” “Yeah, there’s help out there. You just have to, like, look in the phonebook. Don’t be afraid of people.” You know?

And the NA—AA community too, they’re, like, awesome. You know? Go... if you’re having struggles with drugs and alcohol, go to a meeting. There’s people there just like you, same struggles, that will help you. You know? If people—if you work the program, it does work. And just, you know, just—just do good.

You know, don’t let the negativity of the world get you down. Just keep moving forward. Try to get help. Yeah, this person on the bus might have a attitude, or, somebody when you’re driving might have a attitude and cut you off. It’s like, keep going. Deal with it, and just, stay focused. You know? Don’t let it—don’t let it drive you to drink or drive you to the mental hospital (*laughs*). Or, drive you away, so that you’re running away. Don’t run away, deal with it.

But, um.... yeah, other than that I hope it can maybe help somebody to not make the same mistakes I did. Do it the right way the first time. Don’t—don’t even try to fake it. Just surrender yourself. If you’re ready, surrender yourself. Drop the medications. Drop whatever you’re doing. If you’re ready, then seek the help so that, you know?

Or, even if there’s parents out there, like, that—that are listening. You know, if you’re secretly hiding the addiction from your family and your friends. You know? That’s not good. It’s gonna catch up. It will catch up, and, it might even be really bad. You know? Don’t let it get that far. And just—that’s about it (*smiling*).

RG: Thank you.

MP: You’re welcome.

RG: I’m gonna stop the recording now.

[END OF RECORDING]