



### General Information

**Private or Public Statement?** - Private

**Statement Provider:** Anonymous

**Date:** December 17, 2014

**Location:** Indian Island, Maine

**Previous Statement?** No

**Statement Gatherer:** Rachel George

**Support Person:** N/A

**Additional Individuals Present:** N/A

**Recording Method:** Audio

**Length of Recording:** 57:19

#### Transcriber's Note

This is an anonymous statement. Any redactions in the text or alterations in the recording have been done at the request of the statement provider in an effort to protect his/ her identity.

### Recording

**RG:** All right, it is December 17, 2014. We're here at Indian Island, Maine. My name is Rachel George. And I'm here today with:

**A:** *[NAME REDACTED]*

**RG:** Great. And the file number is P-201412-00151. *[NAME REDACTED]* Have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

**A:** Yes, I have.

**RG:** Great. And I have to let you know that if at any point during this recording you indicate that there is a child or elder currently in need of protection, or that there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm or death to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information may not be protected as confidential.

**A:** Okay, I understand.

**RG:** All right. Is there anywhere in particular you wanted to start, or would you like me to go through the questions.

**A:** No, go ahead and go through them.

**RG:** Okay, could you please tell me about your past employment with, as the health director? Sorry—as the human services director?

**A:** Yeah, I came to work for the department in 1989. Um, it was still very early on in child welfare. Um, I really didn't know a lot about child welfare when I started, I had more of an administrative and budgeting background and grant writing, which is what they felt they needed here, and I could learn about child welfare along the way. So it was um, was very difficult in the beginning because I had to rely on people, people's judgment about children, because I didn't have the experience yet. And, because of that, there were some mistakes, I feel in retrospect that were made. At the time I felt like they were good decisions, but looking back on them from what I know now, I don't think they were good decisions. But be that as it may, it was what it was. You know?

Um, over the years, going to trainings and especially since 1999, when the state contacted us to um, work with them in training their workers, was a very arduous journey. Exhausting. It still is (*laughing*). But, we've come a long way. Um, went from (*sighs*)... The weird part of this whole thing is you can't say consistently that the relationship with the state over all is good. There are pockets of locations that you have a really good relationship with, and then even that relationship depending on who the child welfare manager is at that district, you can for a while have a really good relationship, but when that change over you can have a not so good relationship. Which is what we---or were, last I knew about what was going on in child welfare—that was our experience with Bangor. We used to have a very good working relationship with them, and then for a while it got—and I don't know if it still is—but it got not so good.

You know, always fighting. Not getting notifications when you're supposed to. Or, they had team meetings and you'd find out after the fact, and that sort of thing. So, you know, it's been good, it's been bad. I mean dealing at the state level is great. But how that felt just down into the people who do the actual work? Doesn't necessarily translate. And I don't know what.... I mean you can't.... if people don't want to change their attitudes, no matter what you do, they're not going to change. So, I don't know how to deal with it. Even so called social workers. You know? Who I went to school with. Some of them, it's like, oh my god. They don't even realize what they say and what they do, how racist or bigoted it is. So there's so much education, and I think that's what REACH and TRC can do, to help to reach some of those kinds of people anyway. But not... even within the state child welfare system, not all of the people that work have social work backgrounds. So, I don't know how you deal with that.

**RG:** Yeah. How long were you in the position for?

**A:** Uh, about twenty years?

**RG:** Wow, that's amazing.

**A:** Yeah, amazing and exhausting (*laughing*).

**RG:** Yeah, I can imagine.

**A:** Yeah, and stressful.

**RG:** Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was like in those early years when you first came on? What was the relationship like with the state at that time?

**A:** Well, it depends, like I said— it depended on the workers. I mean, we had quite a turnover ourselves, because it's a very stressful environment. (00:05:00) to work in. So we had um, big changeover in all the.... trying to find somebody with experience was really hard in the early years. Not so much now. But having somebody that knew about child welfare and knew about what the impact was on children was really, really difficult. So it was... I don't know, like I said, hit or miss. Even within the Bangor office, depending on which worker had the case. Some of 'em were really good, and some of 'em were not so good. Some of 'em wanted to learn but didn't know how. And there were other people just thought that no matter what happened we wouldn't be able to protect our children because we didn't want them to go out, you know... out of the tribe. So it was kind of craziness really.

**RG:** You mentioned that there were a couple decisions were made that at the time seemed like good decisions but in retrospect weren't. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

**A:** Um, I can't really say too much without...

**RG:** That's fine. Yep.

**A:** Placement—placement for children is what I think was the major issue. And I can't say too much more without, you know, getting....

**RG:** That's okay, of course. That's totally fine. Can you tell me when you first learned about Maine's policies related to Indian Child Welfare?

**A:** Actually it wasn't until really recently because they weren't anywhere. Even though we had been meeting with them for years, and I kept saying, you know, to Martha or whoever was in that position— we can say that to you, but where is it written? So everybody else will know what to do? And even getting somebody on MaineCare. I mean, we knew, but there was nowhere at the state level where they knew what to do. And I know at one time, when we contacted MaineCare, or whatever it was called at the time, they approved something thinking

we were state—the state agency, and later they tried to renege on that, but they weren't allowed to do it because it wasn't our error, it was theirs and it would have cost us thousands of dollars because it was a Psychiatric evaluation for a child. So, yeah. So those kinds of things. So it was only in— since I came back to work here about a year ago, that I actually saw, when I started looking around for policies because of my work now, that I saw that there was an ICWA policy in the state. And that's the first I'd ever seen of it.

**RG:** Wow. Wow.

**A:** Mm-hmm. And you have to really kind of know what you're looking for when you go doing that research too.

**RG:** Yeah, exactly.

**A:** Because it doesn't just pop up automatically (*laughing*). So that's when I learned about it.

**RG:** Um, could you tell me about a situation where you or your staff felt very positive about your work on behalf of a Penobscot child and family? That involved working with the state specifically?

**A:** Oh, okay.

**RG:** And then that involved not working with the state, an example.

**A:** Well the only thing I can really recall is when I first came to work here when the tribe signed the agreement with the state, the state had Penobscot children in custody. And the responsibility for those children was given to us, but they agreed to make foster care payments for those children. I'm really not so sure how much that—I mean it's good that they did that, but I'm not.... the children never grew up here, and we didn't really know what we were doing. So I don't know if it was truly for the children— looking from the children's perspective— a positive experience. Or if it really wouldn't have mattered whether it was the state or us. I mean we gave them that connection to the tribe that they didn't have before, but other than knowing who we are... I mean we didn't make any effort to really try to bring them here to attend cultural events or, you know, community events so that they could feel like they belonged here. I didn't know enough back then to see that we needed to do that. So. (00:10:00). I mean it was good but it wasn't.

**RG:** Yeah.

**A:** I can't think of anything else that was really like, such a great experience that it was imprinted on my mind (*laughing*). So, well, that's all I can say about that, I'm sorry.

**RG:** That's okay, no that's all right. How about a situation where you or your staff felt less positive about your work on behalf of a Penobscot child or family that involved working with the state.



**A:** Ah, a specific incident? I can tell you that it was very frustrating getting notices after the fact. They would do things— that things were already done and it was so difficult to try to undo things, especially when they came from the perspective that they knew better than we did what was best for our children. So that was the most difficult thing, is—and I know... I can remember one worker we had. The state had done something and I can't remember exactly what it was. Placed a child somewhere, maybe? And without asking us for assistance. And when we found out about it after the fact the worker—the state worker told our worker, you know try to make it like what we are doing to the child now. It's going to be our fault for disrupting this child's life yet again. And she said, "Wait a minute. If you had contacted us to begin with we wouldn't have to be going through this." 'Cause we found a family placement for the child. And at that time that wasn't the state's philosophy and I never could understand how they could blame a whole family for what one person does. It doesn't make sense.

**RG:** Yeah. Was that something that happened a lot? Both parts, so for example the state blaming the whole family for what one person in the family has done, and then the fact that the state wasn't notifying the tribe about those placements.

**A:** The notification part, was, you know, all the time at first. I think it depended on the worker. I think this was a young woman, fresh out of school with not a lot— I mean she had some experience, but not a lot. And I think that they thought they could intimidate her. It depends who had the job. We had a guy in this job and he could get whatever he wanted, so that was a lot of that male privilege kind of thing. Not to think that we didn't take advantage of him (*laughing*), we all do that, but. I think we all knew what was going on, at least I did.

**RG:** Would you say that that's changed over time? That now that... Is the state notifying the tribe more frequently?

**A:** Yes. The lack of notification isn't as often as it was. Sometimes— and it depends. You know, if the workers know, then they will. And sometimes they won't until, you know, a little further on, but then they'll make the effort, say, "I'm sorry, I didn't know I just found out." And that's, you know they're doing that, which is good. You know?

**RG:** Um, The next question is a little bit longer. I'm going to ask you about a number of different areas of the Indian Child Welfare Act, and ask about what your experiences were working with that aspect and any challenges that you found.

**A:** Okay.

**RG:** So we've already talked about notifying the tribes, so the next one is what are your experiences in or challenges you found in determining jurisdiction or residence? Of a Penobscot child?

**A:** Ohh (*sighs*). We had jurisdiction and that was no problem, the state was willing to give us jurisdiction. The biggest problem, ongoing problem we've had is that the only resources we have to pay for children's services and support while they're in care is through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And through the BIA, jurisdiction is the Island, tribal territory. So someone could live across the bridge, and we wouldn't be able to pay. And I didn't know that when I came to work here. I got called on it when the BIA came here. It was already going on when I got here, so the things as they were. The BIA came and did a review and said, "Oh, this person's parents are domiciled in Bangor or wherever it was at the time. And that money you're paying for this child, you shouldn't be paying for it." So it was like transferring jurisdiction back to the state. What would that look like, you know? So we managed to get a waiver on that anyway. But that's the biggest issue of being able to pay for services that children need. We just don't have a lot of resources. What I'm... the project I'm working on now will expand that so that we'd be able to have (00:15:00) greater impact on children who are placed outside the reservation.

**RG:** That waiver that you received, was that for one specific case?

**A:** Yes, that was for one child.

**RG:** Wow, so you still...

**A:** So when we had issues at the time with tribal court— 'cause they're wanting to assert jurisdiction. Of course they do. And they can. But then who is going to pay foster—who's going to make the foster care payments, and all that? So, that was the big thing at the time. They were saying, "You do this, you do that," you know, blaming us. And we didn't have the resources to say we'll manage the case. We can do that, we have no problem, we can pay for case management. But you need to pay for the foster care and other services that the child might need. 'Cause we don't have the resources to do that. The other issue, I remember this at the time, was with the health department. Because, uh, they were serving tribal members when people needed counseling and stuff. If there was a tribal member and a non-tribal member who were parents they would serve the tribal member and if you're doing family therapy, how can you do family therapy when you can't have one of the parties involved in that? So finally it was a big to-do at council I remember. And I don't know how they managed but they changed it— so that, you know, the whole family could go and not just the tribal member.

**RG:** Yeah. How about any experiences or challenges that you found in child custody hearings?

**A:** I wasn't at the hearings (*sighs*). I mean, I can remember talk about particular guardians at Lydum (?) who were just as bad as those bigoted state workers and having to fight with them in court. But luckily most of the judges were enlightened so they, you know, would defend us sometimes it felt— so that we could have a say in a case. But um, other than that I can't, you know, I wasn't in court so I don't.... nothing really stands out for me.

**RG:** That's all right. How about in arranging foster care placements for kids.

**A:** Oh my god. Yeah. Yea, we um, we were doing that— fighting to do it at first. Then that state law was passed. LD 1999, I think that's what it was called, that said the state had to honor



our licensed or approved homes. So then things got better and then we were asked—you know and it was always—‘cause we didn't have any formal procedures. So it would be always like, we'd have to have a meeting and brainstorm. Who would these— ‘cause I don't know all the people in the family and everybody knows. ‘Cause it's a small community, everybody knows parts of the family, so we would figure out who would be appropriate placements for the child. And go and approach those families directly and arrange for placement. I think we managed if not a family placement, somebody close to the family to take the child. And all... I don't recall us ever not being able to do that. But it was hard. ‘Cause everything was always crisis. And I always wanted to get past the crisis point but it seems like we never— we still haven't really gotten there. ‘Cause a lack of resources to find, to walk people through, ‘cause it's a long process to get licensed. ‘Cause we have rules now for licensing. It's such a long— and you know I have to divulge personal information, and you know, and you really need a person to help people through that. So, yeah.

**RG:** Um, would you guys say you have enough or an adequate number of foster placements on the Island?

**A:** We don't have enough reserve if that's what you mean. I mean still, you know, case by case and finding someone as the case comes along.

**RG:** Um, how about experiences or challenges you found in family team meetings?

**A:** That's something I really can't speak to either, and I don't remember anything in particular.

**RG:** That's okay. That's alright.

**A:** I just remember that sometimes they were held and we weren't there. But other than that I don't remember anything specific, sorry.

**RG:** No, that is okay. There are a lot of questions, and it's okay if you don't have answers to all of them.

**A:** Yeah, I had a different role in this whole thing.

**RG:** Yeah, that's okay, so. Um, we use uh the same set of questions for everybody, so that some have experiences and others don't. So if you don't that's okay, just tell me and we'll move right along. (00:20:00) Um, how about in family visitation— arranging family visitation? Any challenges that you found working with the state?

**A:** Well, a lot of transportation issues. Um, not so much in finding a place to have the visitation but just getting, you know making sure people were able to get there. That's the only thing I can remember.

**RG:** Yea. Um, can you talk to me a little bit about termination of parental rights and adoption?

**A:** No (*laughs*). In my whole twenty years here, especially after I started attending ICWA conferences, I really didn't like terminating parental rights. As a matter of fact what stands out for me is people, children, any child wants to know where they come from or where they belong. And when I was in my early twenties, I babysat—I shouldn't say babysat—I watched the rectory when the priest went away, because there were a lot of break-ins there. Why they thought I could protect it, I don't know. But there weren't any while I was there, anyway, I mean I didn't think about that at the time. But, that... and while I was there one time I can remember this man coming to the door. I knew exactly what family he was from. I could have pointed him in the right direction. But I did not feel like that was my place to do that. 'Cause I was a kid. So he said whatever his name was and I'm thinking "No, it's not." But then I didn't say anything and he said, "I was adopted out when I was a child and I'm trying to find my family. Can you tell me?"

And I said, "Well the priest will be back at such and such a time and I'm sure he'll be able to help you. And I'm just here taking care of this place when he's gone." After that I go, "Oh my god," you know. That is so wrong, not to know where you come from. I know where you come from, I can tell be looking at you what family you're from, you know? So that had an impact on me and really kind of helped to make me so opposed to terminating parental rights. Um, however, I did go along with it one time. Only because it was an awful case, there were sexual abuse and all that. And I just felt like that was the right thing to do. I mean I was, just—oh. But it was with a family member too. But at the time they had to— they don't have to terminate parental rights anymore. The federal law just passed. So I was just reading it before you got here. So that was the only time it happened.

The other times we'd done... One positive thing that happened, which was very weird— along the way with all those meetings I went to with the state I met up with someone that I knew—I didn't remember her. She remembered me though. Because I dealt with a lot of tutors that used to come here from the University when I was a student. And she was one of those persons that came here and I didn't remember her. But she was in charge of adoption. And then later on the state instituted guardianship program that utilized both state and 4-E money, so we were—and she gave us access to that, even for kids in our custody. So we utilized that to a significant degree. For, since probably early 2000s, I don't remember when— 2003 maybe? 2002? So we've been using that. So that's been—that was a positive thing that we've done with the state through her. Because she had some experience. Yep, so, anyway, I forgot the question really.

**RG:** We were talking about TPR and adoption.

**A:** Yeah, we used kinship guardianship, a lot— not a lot but, when kids can't go back home, that's what we use so they maintain their connections to the tribe.

**RG:** While you were working uh, as the director, did you ever have pressure from the state? (00:25:00) To terminate parental rights? It's kind of a loaded question I guess.

**A:** Well it kind of is, but the only time I can really think about is that one case. And I really had to be talking to that. I had a really difficult time. But it wasn't just the state trying to talk me into it. So, I can't say it was them pressuring—only them. It was other—tribal people too.

**RG:** So I guess what I'm asking is um, have you found that the state is respectful of the tribe's decision not to terminate parental rights?

**A:** Mm-hmm (*agreement*).

**RG:** That's great. That's really great. Um throughout your time as director, did the tribe ever decline to intervene in a child custody proceeding covered by ICWA?

**A:** (Sighs) If it was out of state, way out of state. I mean, we declined to intervene, but we asked to be an interested party, so we would know what was going on. We weren't actually an intervener. Other than that, we've always intervened in every case in the state of Maine, as far as I know. If we didn't take jurisdiction, we were there you know, insisting on certain things for the child.

**RG:** Yeah, and throughout your time as director, has the state ever declined to transfer a child custody proceeding covered by ICWA to tribal court?

**A:** Nope, they always want to do that.

**RG:** That's great.

**A:** So they don't have to deal with us I think. (Laughs).

**RG:** How has the tribe handled um situations where uh it's a mixed couple and one parent, the non-Native parent, or the Native parent doesn't want the tribe involved? Has that ever come up?

**A:** Yeah, it happened but... We weren't really involved except to oversee visitations. It happened outside of us because it was an allegation of sexual abuse and at the time how it was handled is the... I think it was the DA's office, yeah it was the DA's office that had somebody who was specifically trained to investigate child sexual abuse cases. So that person would go out and take, you know, take the lead in that with sometimes our people would go, and sometimes our police department would go with them. But there was one case that we weren't involved with at all. It was the mother that alleged something and when it went to court, um,

the court wanted to transfer jurisdiction and she wasn't a tribal member and she objected. So it didn't. I always told her, "I think you'd get better if you were here," 'cause the state screwed that case up big time. But anyway, that was the only time I know of a case not being transferred. Because one of the parents objected.

**RG:** To the best of your knowledge, does the Penobscot Nation ever use its own expert witnesses in child custody proceedings covered by ICWA?

**A:** Um, our tribal case manager and the assistance social services person goes to court each time and they testify, usually one of them. Before we go on, back up to the other question. I know what I was going to say about—okay, about one parent being non-tribal member and the other one... And I think this is important to note because people think—general society thinks that we would side with the Indian person regardless. But that's not true because we've placed children with their non-Indian grandparents before. Because they were extended family. And I think people need to know that tribes do that. They don't just, you know, place a child with an Indian person because that's an Indian person. If it's not a good place for the child, you don't put the child there. So, yeah. I just wanted that to be in the record.

**RG:** Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for adding that. Um, when the Penobscot nation becomes aware of a state ICWA violation, is there a policy for challenging the state's child welfare determination?

**A:** Going to court, getting our lawyer involved in that, and that's usually how we go about it.

**RG:** That's great. Has that ever come up? (00:30:00). That you're aware of?

**A:** Um, it has I remember. I don't remember specifics again though.

**RG:** That's okay.

**A:** Yeah, it was a long time ago.

**RG:** If you think about it later, or if something comes back you can always add to it. Um, could you talk about the importance of caseworkers learning and having a knowledge of Native American family structure and culture?

**A:** The importance of it? Well the importance of it is it will give them the major reason why we need to keep kids connected to their culture—because it's a part of who they are. I think we have a different relationship to each other and a different way to reference place that general society doesn't have. So I don't know how you make people—I guess you kind of do in a way now, with all the stuff going on with the river. All of a sudden, people that live around the river, and the tribe is taking the state to court because of all the pollution and stuff and all these dumps and everything they want to put on the watershed. People are actually thinking, are starting to get it now. Because it's—it's not involving people I guess—it's things and environment that everybody wants to be good, and not polluted. So from that perspective I guess they are starting to get it (*laughing*). Yeah. I think it's partly us being more open to and



realizing that not everybody is a racist or a bigot, we do have allies. And I think that's only happened really in the last few years. We were very untrusting of everybody before that.

**RG:** Um, can you tell me about the early years of the ICWA work group, like the coalition, which then became REACH?

**A:** The early years? Holy cow. I can rem— I remember Esther Attean and John Silvernail... Esther was doing support work and John Silvernail was the child protective person. Well I got this letter in the mail— this long letter of invitation. I wish I should have kept it. ‘Cause I read that and I remember they were working on something— and I go, “We got this letter from the state, I wonder what mandate they have to comply with now.” ‘Cause they never asked us to help them do anything before. And um, really didn't want to but I said, well we've got to, it's for kids. So we all went to this meeting and that first— well I knew Penthea in grad school. But that was the first time that we ever really met with any of the higher up echelon state people. And it— ooh, the tension in that room was, “whooh!” I've never been in an environment like that before. And actually and that was the first time— all of us tribes were working independently. We didn't do a lot of collaborating with one another either cause everybody stressed out trying to focus and trying to do the work at your tribe so you don't have time to do, you know, all this other stuff.

So we decided it was important to make that time. And I remember we had either one or two meetings where we just had to talk about everything. Everything— all the issues we had, where the mistrust came from. We talked about white privilege, we talked about racism, we talked about poverty, you know, everything, and it was like exhausting. And then at the end of it we decided we have to somehow try to do this because it's for our kids. So um, we managed to work through that initial tension and actually we could laugh with one another. But I—even to this day I have these trust issues. Trying to get past them. Every time something happens, I'll say, “They knew that was going to happen, and they didn't even— and these are supposed to be my friends, why didn't they warn me that this was going to happen?” And then I think, wow they probably didn't even know themselves for one thing. And if they did, they were probably directed not to say anything. So, we just, you know, trust is always going to be a big, big thing— for me anyway. (00:35:00) And through the years, it's gotten better. I think the people have changed and it's gotten way better. I mean it got to be tolerable, but now it's kind of really good. I know a lot of per— and some of it had to do with when we were first talking TRC and all these meetings we had that— I hate emotional meetings, and they were just so emotional and so exhausting. You know, doing these dyads, and trying to get telling people's personal stuff. And um, you know learning about some of the state workers and their personal— I never knew them on a personal level, but you know, it just really helped to bring us even closer.

And then having—trying to decide what are we going to deal with? I mean, Greensboro, they had an "it." Everybody had an "it." What was our "it?" We talked about that for I think a whole year, just going through all these things. Finally I says, "I cannot." We had to start having our meetings at the end of the day cause it was too exhausting, you couldn't go back to work and get anything done cause you were just too tired. And then um, finally when we decided what the "it" was, having to compromise you know, what period of time we were going to cover. And some tribes didn't want to talk about, you know, the tribe in that, and I thought we should. But it wouldn't happen— it wouldn't have happened. So there was a lot of compromise that had to be made so that we could get this thing done and hopefully get somewhere, you know (*laughing*). Yeah. So, that was interesting. It was challenging, exhausting, frustrating, maddening. Everything, the whole gamut of emotions.

**RG:** What are your hopes for what will come out of the TRC and REACH processes?

**A:** (*Sighs*) What are my hopes? That you don't have to fight. That there won't be any notifications that are late, that everybody will do what they want to do, that everybody will follow the spirit of ICWA and not just the letter of the law. That we can look at one another as people, and learn to trust (*laughing*). Um, basically that's the only thing I hope for.

**RG:** Um, pretending I'm not representing the TRC, what are your thoughts on how this process has progressed so far? What do you wish had been different? What would you say the strengths and weaknesses are, of the TRC and REACH processes?

**A:** I feel like I'm really on the fringes of REACH, because of my job. I can't devote enough time I think that it really deserves that I could if I—like I had been in my position before. I could have my staff doing different things that doesn't happen now. Um, so, I would hope that one of the things was that it would get the tribes more involved and collaborating with each other, and would get this department more involved in using— not using, but coordinating activities and everything with one another. Um, as far as the TRC goes, the statements you got, I'm surprised you got as many as you did, so that speaks to I think the groundwork that the community organizers did in preparing people. Um, here I haven't seen the community organizers very much. And I don't— that's not to say that I should see them. But um, I asked to go to meetings and stuff and I was never, I didn't know when they happened. I found out afterwards. So from that point of view—and I was never directly asked if there were people that might be good to interview. And had I been, I would have had to ask that person if I could mention their name. I wouldn't be able to say anything, and I did have some people that I thought should say something. (00:40:00) And I know there are people who asked some of the people who were in that video and they said, "No, I'm not going through that again." Because we didn't have the resources and supports in place. (*Sighs, mumbles*)—after the fact.

But anyway I think the TRC has done a really— actually I think it really opened up because we talked about the issue of sexual abuse by priests, but it was never like something you talked about. And actually I think because of this process, people are starting to talk about that, so that part of the healing I think is early on, but it's coming. So it's helped to do that, and I think that's a good thing. Um, I didn't like the fact that it was in Ellsworth too much. I thought it was too far away. Um, so that you couldn't just drop by and volunteer to do something or whatever. So that I think was not a good thing that it was far away. Lack of resources has been so



difficult. But considering the lack of resources, I think a lot really has been done. Um, the process—I think the process that was used to pick the commissioners was really a great one. The people who were involved in it—never heard a word about anything. So that's a good thing. And that doesn't happen very often. Usually somebody spills the beans somewhere along the way.

And, um, that was really good. Not so sure the hiring—the way the hiring was done was very good. I mean, there were some issues all along the way, not just—even before the TRC officially became a body. I mean how that happened was you know, was not good. And some of that was our fault, because we're not really good at confronting people, we like to say things when people aren't there. And I kind of like was taken aback at first. Like, I have really good hindsight, and after things are over, and I get so angry, and then I say okay, if I'm involved I'm never going to let this happen again. But, there's you know personalities and everything and it's really hard to gauge if someone is—has a personal agenda or you know is really being upfront and honest about what they're thinking. And I think you're always going to have a certain amount of that, but I think to be more aware of that for other TRCs (*laughs*) that are going to be organized at tribes. 'Cause tribes don't like to confront. So, we have to deal with that.

**RG:** Yeah. What do you wish had been different in the hiring process?

**A:** I'm not exactly sure what happened yet. I've been thinking about it. I mean, I don't like the fact that if somebody is not there, they get accused of different things and aren't allowed to say anything. But then when they're there you know, you don't say anything. So, it's like (*sighs*), I don't know. I don't know how to deal with it, except there has to be one person that this might be going on and would be willing to risk, you know, people getting pissed off with you for bringing something up. So, I can't really say much of anything else at this point.

**RG:** That's okay, that's alright. Um, before I ask you my last couple questions, is there anything specifically, or anything additional you want to add to uh, questions about the TRC process and the REACH process?

**A:** I can't think of anything right now.

**RG:** That's alright. Um what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses that the state child welfare system has in ensuring ICWA compliance?

**A:** Well they have an inability to make sure that the knowledge level of all of their staff who have this responsibility is the same and everybody's on the same page. I don't know how they would make that happen either, but. I think that's a problem. Um, and I think (*exhales*)... (00:45:00) I'm a firm believer in fake it until you make it. So if you can't be, um—if you can't

follow the spirit of the law, then you better follow the letter of the law and pretend that you follow the spirit of the law, and maybe eventually that will catch on. Um, they just— now everything is such a big mess politically in this state. I mean, we have a whack job of a governor who understands child welfare though. It's just (*sighs*)— it was because of him that we have this (*Laughs*). So in certain ways, but that's not to say—his relationship with the tribes across the board is really good, because areas like child welfare he gets, domestic violence he gets, but the other areas that are more jurisdiction related and more natural resource related are difficult. So I don't know... it's politics in this state.

**RG:** What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses that Wabanaki tribes possess in working with the state for ICWA compliance?

**A:** Strengths and weaknesses. Weakness is lack of resources— financial resources. Um, strengths are that um, we are able to assert our jurisdiction more than we used to as a state recognized tribe. Um, that's all I can think about right now.

**RG:** Have there been any changes in state child welfare policies and practices during your employment?

**A:** Oh yeah (*laughs*). There were no policies to written policies, so that was, that was a big improvement. The thing that I don't see or haven't been able to find— lets put it that way— are the written procedures for other services that effect children in care, like MaineCare, access to MaineCare, access to other services that kids have in the state. The way that tribal children can access them isn't straightforward—as straightforward as it could be.

**RG:** Um, have tribal child welfare policies changed over your employment? Policies and practices?

**A:** Yes, they have (*laughs*)— a great deal. We have so much to do and not enough staff. We managed to get foster home licensing standards that we didn't have before. And by the time I left there was a draft major revision of the child welfare code almost ready to go to general meeting. From that there was supposed to be policies developed, and I'm just working on those now because of 4-E. But there's going to be a whole system in place eventually when 4-E gets in, including um, an internet based child welfare database where you can track case, you know, management activities as well as report, do the reports that need to be done, generating data— which we have to do manually now. So it's come a long way— in that regard anyway.

**RG:** That's great. What are your concerns about tribal children who are in the state child welfare system?

**A:** Um, my concerns... that they stay in placement longer than they need to. Um, that they will not know where they belong, that's always a concern— that they will not have access to the activities that take place here. Um, those are the major concerns I have around kids. Oh, the other thing I wanted to say— what they're doing, all this thing about kids not knowing where they were and adults now who were either fostered out or adopted out not knowing who they were— and it was part of an annual community days weekend that we have in August, that we're trying to develop a welcome home ceremony. They kind of did it this year, but we want



to kind of expand it, so, you know, people can work with the culture department to have different family photos. ‘Cause they have a major collection of tribal photos that people are just giving them and he scans them in, so having different family just to run it through so they can see their family. And have people there who know their family say, this is, you know—introduce them. Like, “Oh, I know your aunt,” or, “I knew your grandmother,” and just tells stories that you need to tell. So, just trying to...

**RG:** That's amazing. That's wonderful.

**A:** Yeah. (00:50:45).

**RG:** Do you think ICWA does enough to protect the rights of Native children and families and tribes?

**A:** I think ICWA does enough, but I don't think states do enough. And there's no way to enforce—there's no enforcement mechanism for ICWA. I think that's a problem. Not that ICWA doesn't, you know, doesn't— ‘cause I think it does. It could. Let's say if everybody followed it, and if there was a way to enforce ICWA— if somebody was given the responsibility, because nobody has that responsibility right now. Although I think the BIA and ACF are starting to work together to do something.

**RG:** How could the state child welfare system improve in terms of ICWA compliance?

**A:** I don't have an answer for that. ‘Cause I don't know where it's at now.

**RG:** That's all right.

**A:** I don't know where it's at now, so.

**RG:** How about, if you could change anything, or make anything happen for a child that's involved with the Indian Child Welfare Act, what would you do? Either at the tribal, state or federal level?

**A:** I think if the state had a Native person that could go and see Native children, that might help some— have some kind of an ICWA advocate at the state level or something. Um, just to help to bridge the connection to the tribes.

**RG:** That's a great suggestion (*people talking in background*) Is there anything else that you want to add, that you want the TRC to know? Either about your time as director, or with your involvement with REACH?

**A:** Not really. I see my time with REACH coming to a close when I retire, not because— well, they don't want me to, but I'm tired, you know (*laughing*)? So, I'm just biding my time. This is like my swan song, this job here. As soon as this is done, I'm done. I want to go and work with animals at shelters and whatever (*laughing*). That's what I really want, I love animals.

**RG:** Yea, you've done a tremendous amount of work.

**A:** Yeah, very strenuous.

**RG:** I can imagine.

**A:** I can remember when this job—they couldn't keep anyone as human services director. I mean it was a big turnover. And I was doing something else at the time, and I go, “Man I would not want to be over there, no way I would take that job.” And then I was unemployed because of politics, and this job was open, I go, “No way. I don't care. I'm not going to work there.” Then they came specifically looking for me. And I'm just like a soft touch. So I go “Okay. I'll do it for a while and see what happens.” And I can remember I was almost two years crying every day because the politics, they had taken all the records out of here. We were on the verge of losing the elder services program, and heating assistance program and everything. So I had to, you know, back track and try to put reports together that had supporting documents, and it was like horrible. Horrible, horrible, yeah. They took the person in charge and walked her out of here. It was horrible. They took all the records; don't even know what happened to the records.

**RG:** Oh my goodness.

**A:** Mm-hmm. It was horrible back in the late '80's, politically. It was bad (*laughing*).

**RG:** So you came in at a good time. Making a lot of change.

**A:** Yeah, starting from nothing. Starting from scratch. And then I get a call from BIA, “So do you need any money?” How do I know, I've been here like a week, I don't know.

**RG:** Yeah, the answer is always yes. Do you need money? Yes.

**A:** Yes, but how much?

**RG:** All of it. Send it all over (*laughs*).

**A:** Yea. So we went from that and at one point I remember the BIA saying, “We have some extra money at the end of the year, I'm going to give it to you because I know you'll spend it right.” So we got like sixty thousand dollars in child welfare.

**RG:** That's wonderful.

**A:** Yeah, at the end of one year. Yeah, so we went from one extreme to the other. Yeah, the whole job is relationship building, it really is. I learned that over the years. Make sure you do

what you're supposed to do and build relationships and good things come your way. Yep. But I'm glad it's over, too (*laughing*). Yes.

**RG:** I can imagine. Well I want to thank you so much for your time this morning. I really appreciate it.

**A:** You're welcome. I don't know how much help I've been.

**RG:** No, it was amazing [*NAME REDACTED*], thank you.

**A:** Yeah, I came from such a different place, like Molly Newell, you know, she was doing cases. I wasn't doing cases. I was just trying to supervise them, not knowing what I'm doing at first. Yeah, it was hard.

**RG:** I can imagine it was a very difficult position to be in.

**A:** Yeah, it was. Having to rely on somebody, and not—I never felt like I didn't know what I was doing. That's why I went back to school, too. That's the only reason I went back to school. I was pretty happy with my bachelor's degree (*laughs*), you know? Well thank you for the tobacco.

**RG:** You're very welcome, thank you so much. And again you can add or make changes at any time. Just give me a call.

**A:** Okay, if I think of anything. Of course they'll probably say, "Oh, did you tell them?" and I'll go, "No I forgot!" (*laughs*).

**RG:** That's alright, that's what I'm here for.

**A:** I'll just email you if I remember, or if I think you need to include something, or if I just want you to know something.

**RG:** Okay, that's perfect. Thank you so much [*NAME REDACTED*].

**[END OF RECORDING]**