



Liliana's story

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My name is Liliana, and I am a proud First Nations woman. I grew up in several small communities, attending local schools before leaving high school partway through Year 10. My early years were relatively stable, and I don't recall experiencing any significant trauma during my childhood or teenage years. My father worked in manual labour, and my mother was a homemaker.

I became a mother as a teenager, giving birth to my first child. At the time, I was staying with family members in different locations. My relationship with my child's father was extremely violent, and I often ended up in hospital due to his abuse. To cope with the trauma, I turned to alcohol and marijuana, which became a pattern in my life during difficult periods.

When my first child was still very young, I arranged for them to be cared for by their paternal grandmother through a cultural family agreement. This practice has been part of our culture for generations. Although my child stayed with their grandmother, I maintained regular contact with them throughout their childhood and into adulthood. They have since grown into a strong adult and now have a child of their own.

Over the years, I had more children, but my relationships with their fathers were often toxic and violent. My substance use escalated, and I struggled to provide a stable environment for my kids. Child protection services became involved, and some of my children were removed from my care. For example, two of my children were taken due to my struggles with alcohol and marijuana, as well as the violence in my relationships. One of them was later cared for by their older sibling through another cultural arrangement.

I've been trying to reunite with my children for years, but it has been an uphill battle. One of my children has been on a short-term custody order for over six years, even though the original goal of the order was reunification. I've faced significant barriers in maintaining contact with my children, as they were placed far away from me — one in a regional city over five hours away and the other in a remote community two hours away. Without access to public transport or a car, visiting them has been extremely difficult. Most of the time, I've only been able to see them at family funerals, which is heartbreaking and unacceptable.

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I've also faced challenges with my work schedule, which makes it hard to arrange regular visits or overnight stays with my children. Despite these obstacles, I've made every effort to stay connected with them and to advocate for their return. I've repeatedly expressed my concerns to child protection services about their lack of genuine attempts to reunify us. I feel that the system has set me up to fail by placing my children so far away and not providing adequate support for reunification.

One of the most troubling aspects of my experience has been the involvement of a senior practitioner in child protection services who I believe has a clear conflict of interest. This individual was involved in the removal of two of my older children many years ago, during which I was charged for threatening them out of desperation to keep my children. Despite this history, they have been actively involved in decision-making regarding my younger children. I strongly believe that this person has not acted impartially and has made decisions that have hindered my efforts to reunify with my children. Their involvement has caused me significant distress, and I feel it has compromised the fairness of the process.

For example, I believe this individual's decisions have contributed to the lack of progress in reuniting me with my children and the failure to return one of my children to their cultural caregiver, as per our traditional family arrangement. I have raised these concerns multiple times, but I feel they have not been adequately addressed. This situation has made it even harder for me to trust the system and to feel that my voice is being heard.

I've also been deeply hurt by the lack of communication from child protection services. For instance, I wasn't informed about serious allegations of harm involving one of my children, even though I am still their legal guardian. This has made me feel excluded from decisions about their well-being and has added to my frustration with the system.

Despite these challenges, I've worked hard to turn my life around. In recent years, I've stopped drinking alcohol and completed programs on family violence and substance abuse. I've gained stable employment and have been actively involved in my community, serving as a director on the board of a local organisation. I've also been approved for prescribed medical marijuana to help manage the trauma I've experienced.

Today, I'm still the legal guardian of two of my children, and I'm actively contesting child protection services' applications for long-term guardianship orders. My goal is to reunite with my children and provide them with the love, care, and stability they deserve. I've come a long way, and I'm determined to keep fighting for my family and our future together.