Denise Altvater: Comments TRC signing ceremony

I am Passamaquoddy from Pleasant Point and I work for the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia.

13 years ago when I agreed to join this working group, I came to the table full of mistrust, fear and anger.

I came as an adult full of childhood memories about the abuse and torture that I suffered in a foster home for four years as a young girl.

There were many times I thought to myself, “why on earth am I doing this”, and I am pretty sure that the State Workers weren’t too thrilled either.

But Penthia Burns from the Muskee School would not give up, would not go away and continued to believe in all of us. It is because of her leadership and stubbornness that we have come this far and for that she will forever have a special place in my life and in my heart.

As we continued to worked together and came to know one another we found in each other trust, respect and true friendshipand I found a place where I knew I would never feel alone again.

This work is not going to be easy, it will transform all of us just as it will transform the lives of those individuals who will finally have a place where their voices will be heard and they will be believed.

It has been 13 years since I first told my story. A story that I did not even know needed to be told**.** Since then I have learned to feel, care, loveand most of all, strive to become the person that the creator meant for me to be when I was born.

From the very beginning we decided that this truth and reconciliation process was not going to be between two departmentswithin our governments but between our governments themselves and here we are today, side by side as equal partnersdoing what I once thought was impossible.

Everyone wants to know what the goal of this project is; For me, it is about healing, educating and learning, it is about changing how we do our work in the future so that every child we are responsible to protect is treated with kindness, dignity and given the best we have to offer so they will have a place that is always safe.

We move forward after today with many tasks ahead of us and many challenges to overcome but as partners we have found the courage to do what we know is the right thing to do. So to all of us who have worked on this project, to the Tribal Chiefs and the Governor of Maine and to all of you who will come forward to tell your stories, I offer this;

Without courage, we cannot be kind**,** truthful, merciful or whole.

Anyone who has been treated unkindly, unfairly or experienced emotional or physical abuse, ache for a safe place where they can be who they were born to be and not be judged or dehumanized;

This is especially true for an innocent child.

We will not struggling in isolation, but as members of a community who depend on each other, who benefit from each others' help in finding our way out of the darkness of the past.

From that, everything begins: equality, freedom and justice But most important, a safe place.