

COMMUNITY

LOOKING FOR NEW IDEAS FOR LISTUGUJ

Paul Stanley from New Zealand is First Nation's new executive director, who wants better deals for band and spend more at home

ADAM HODNETT
THE TRIBUNE

Paul Stanley was in Alberta – the last stop before flying back home to New Zealand – when the Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government called. He was offered the executive director job he interviewed for while living in China.

So he drove back across the country in the snow with his wife and daughter only to run into problems. He spent the next six months waiting for his visa, unable to work.

He used the time to get up to speed. "I always do my homework," he said. Big or small, he knows who he's talking to. And he knows what he's talking about.

His CV spans more fields than seems possible for one person, and all his references write of a remarkable man, equally comfortable with gang members as he is with board members. A man with clarity of vision, and a deep commitment to his values, which includes "the development and advancement of native or indigenous peoples."

From a poor 11-year-old who supported his family, he has gone on to travel the world, carve out a small spot in academia, head the boards of multi-million dollar organizations, and put his intimate knowledge of crime, poverty, and community development to work in unorthodox ways.

And he believes he is a good fit for Listuguj First Nation.

"Listuguj is deeply committed to change," he said. "I knew I had a whole bunch of skills that could help be a part of that."

Arrival

Stanley signed every invoice that left Listuguj his first month – millions of dollars worth. He's also taken on a "line by line analysis" of the entire operation. "I see the face of mistreatment through race that happens here," he said. "And that saddens me greatly."

After reviewing how approximately \$30 million a year is spent, Stanley has concluded that Listuguj is not always getting good deals. In fact, he believes he can get better prices as an individual, from another country.

"And I think to myself, 'is that fair, I mean seriously, is that fair?'... so on the



Paul Stanley is the new executive director of Listuguj. PHOTO: ADAM HODNETT/TRIBUNE

business end of it, I think, 'well, perhaps all I'm going to do stop the deals here and find someone who will give us a good deal, and if we can't, we'll build our own,' he said. "Or at least find somebody else who will accept that money more graciously. But it's a conversation that has to be held. It has to be stopped. I'll stop it."

Stanley's job description on the Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government's website, state his goals as "to stabilize the business of Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government and increase their effectiveness in the current environment"

The first publicly released result of this was the closure of the bingo hall due to its increasing debt.

"Existing debt levels are hindering initiatives to improve the quality of life of the people of Listuguj," Stanley said in a press release at that time.

And while Stanley's job has been focusing on finances – he was a director of what he described as the largest credit union in New Zealand – his ideas are far broader.

His education in education and psychology, including research positions, international lecturer positions, and finishing third in his class of 80 in the Harvard Law School executive leadership negotiation course in 2012, still doesn't explain his multidisciplinary approach to societal problems. That can

only be explained through experience.

Growing up

Stanley says he was illiterate until he was 26 years old.

He supported his family with multiple jobs from 11, joined the Royal New Zealand Navy at 15, and was leading teams by 17. He became a weapons and explosives expert.

He still speaks highly of the military, and credits it for his leadership skills, and ability to have trust in processes.

Family eventually convinced him to give up the long deployments, and followed a common trajectory into maximum security prison guard work.

"I've had guns pointed at me, I've been knifed, I've been bottled, I've had pieces of wood smacked around the back of my head," he said. "It was scary, but the scariest ... place was in a prison."

He credits this work for teaching him to "walk in fear." He speaks of the clicking of the "double lock," which would let him know there was a riot in one of the three blocks. It also meant that he, and one other guard, were locked inside, with 38 murders.

"Nine times out of 10, you had to fight your way out," he said. "I've seen more blood in that prison than I've seen anywhere else in my life. Period."

The violence finally caught up. He left the prison after he found a friend

– coincidentally serving a life sentence – in a cell, after committing suicide.

Stanley went on to work odd jobs, and eventually decided to go to school.

School

"I told my family I was going to go to university – they all laughed," Stanley said. "Nobody could comprehend it."

He gravitated toward education and psychology.

"I instinctively understood a whole bunch of issues in and around psychology," he said. "It kept me safe when I was working in jail, it kept me on top of things in my day to day life – having really, really bad literacy."

Without literacy, people rely heavily on social engineering, and reading body language – which Stanley considers one of his major strengths.

He completed a bachelors degree, and then a masters while working at the school.

"My major job there was in research, in community development, in native communities," he said.

He later worked for both his mother's and his father's tribes. He says his interest has "only really been with First Nations."

He went on to lecture internationally, became involved in a variety of social work, and held board positions in a variety of organizations – ranging

from primary health, to the Advertising Standards Authority, and was the longest serving gambling commissioner in New Zealand's history. He also had an 18-month secondment as the general manager of the largest native organization in New Zealand.

Stanley has a history of developing unconventional approaches to societal problems, whether publicly cursing local drug producers, creating mobile kitchens to teach youth to cook, and strengthening the family ties of gang members to reduce impaired driving.

"Working with gangs is one of the things I've enjoyed the most," Stanley said. "You see, gangsters are military, actually."

"Gangs are the scourge of a society. But the ability to re-orientate people's thinking to move out from that, supercedes anything financial I've ever done."

Listuguj

Stanley has a lot of ideas for Listuguj.

Among the first will be the "dashboard," which will publicly track several key areas. The indicators strategically monitor symptoms – stray dog arrests as an indication of criminal activity, truancy as a measure of education quality, emergency service usage as an indicator of all the entire health system, and the deficit as a measure of the organizations success.

"That's an easy system for us to look at. And it's OK for us to say, we're not good at the moment, but we intend to be very good."

He has a range of other ideas, including a new shopping centre.

"I know how we can do it without putting in money," he said. "Because that's the way the New Zealand model is."

He sees a lot of similarities with First Nations here, and those in his country. But he sees differences too.

"What you have in Canada – this is a utopia for my people," he said. "To be able to have a large sector of land that people can live on. You can have a level of control, I mean a level of control because I think the government is trying to wrestle control off the reservation."

He's grateful to be working here.

"For them to hang on so long (while waiting for the visa) – I'm working my guts out, to repay back the faith they had in me," he said.

He has every intention of living up to his native name – Paora.

"Pa, meaning village, and Ora, meaning well-being. So, the person who helps bring well-being to the village," he said. "And it fits – that's what I've done most of my life."

Be the first to know. This story was posted Oct. 15 on tribunenb.ca.

Listuguj woman was at United Nations conference

Sheila Swasson attended Conference on Indigenous People in New York City, met famous actor during protest on climate change

ADAM HODNETT
THE TRIBUNE

A local woman was in the second row of largest ever climate change march in New York on Sept. 21. She was an "arm's length" away from Leonardo DiCaprio.

It was just a happy coincidence. She was really there to attend the UN's World Conference on Indigenous People.

As the president of the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence for the last two years Sheila Swasson was able to attend as an observer, and meet and hear from some inspiring people.

"It was like the Amazing Race," she said, referring to the popular reality television show.

From the moment they landed, they were off. It was Swasson's first time in New York, and leaders form around the world made for increased security in the city.

Her colleague immediately suggested they go to the march.

When they finally found their way to the march, security told them that they had to go to back. There were over 400,000 people there.

"I don't know how she did it, but we were able to get into the line – we were the second row from the front," Swasson said. "So we marched with environmentalists from around the world."

But the real reason Swasson was in

New York was for the UN conference.

"This was the first ever world conference of indigenous people," she said.

There were a variety of speeches that Swasson got to hear. Since she was an observer, she was only able to listen, often in another room, through an interpreter.

"There was a lot of discussions regarding the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people," she said. "There was a lot of reflections made to the UN on the rights."

Swasson described the experience as "powerful"

"It's very powerful to see that," she said. "Just when you think the world is small, this told me that it isn't – it's huge. We have these indigenous people from around the world. And I believe that there's some common threads among all of us. And I think one of them is our rights. They seem to be ignored often times. In being that we are the indigenous people of the land. That our voices are, often times, not heard. So we do take to the protesting and the demonstrations, and stuff like that. It's because, you know, out of frustration that our voices aren't being heard."

While she was only there as an observer, some First Nations people from Canada had the opportunity to speak, such as Perry Bellegarde, the Saskatchewan Regional Chief for the Assembly of First Nations,

"When he addressed the UN, he told them that the intervention he had prepared initially, he was going to submit to the UN for reading purposes, and that he was going to make another intervention," she said. "And that was because the Canadian government wouldn't support the outcome document from the world conference. So he made comments to that. That Canada was one of the last countries to support the UN

declaration on the rights of indigenous people. So he called out the Harper government on that."

It wasn't the only specific attention Canada got.

DiCaprio was appointed the UN messenger for peace.

"What was so interesting with him, was that right now he's talking about the tar sands in Alberta. And while he was there, there was so many media flooded around him, and he would stop, and he would whisper to someone, and they would go get an elder for him," Swasson said. "Because he was travelling with a group of elders. And the elder would be brought to him, and he would put his arm around the elder, and it as though, you know, 'I'm here, as your voice, but I need your support, you know, I need your guidance,' so that was very good to see ... And it wasn't just one elder. He had a group of First Nation people with him. Traditional people that were there with him."

While Swasson wasn't in the room during the conference, she got to use the opportunity of being in such close proximity with all of these people. She set up a meeting with UN Women – "an organization that's looking at the rights of women around the world."

"It was that networking, it was that opportunity to possibly form a partnership with them. Because through the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, we have produced a lot of documents that are available. With our partnership with them, our documents are now available on their website, for the world."

"Which is really great because shelters operate differently, family violence prevention programs operate differently, so this is an opportunity for all organizations that work in this field, to share information, and to gather up



Sheila Swasson PHOTO: ADAM HODNETT/TRIBUNE

information that would make them more efficient and more effective in addressing this issue."

Swasson was able to get into the auditorium of the Peace Awards at the Lincoln Center. But just barely.

"Again, you're in this mad rush to get to the Lincoln Center," she said. "We had to get our registration passes in one building, and then we had to go like five blocks to go get entrance, and all the security and everything."

She had everything she need – written confirmation, ID, a passport, everything. They got their tickets and found out they somehow managed to get the very last two.

"We go up the stairs to the Lincoln Center, and Al Gore is one of the speakers," Swasson said.

She saw a lot of people there, including Jane Goodall and Jackson Brown, as well as plenty of people new to her.

"They recognized a lot of indigenous people, as well as environmentalist that

are making change in the world in the way we live," she said.

Although Swasson didn't get to take in many of the sights, she did get to see some in the evenings. She made seeing Ground Zero a priority.

"That was important for me to at least go there," she said. "My dad had worked there many years ago when they first built the twin towers. My dad was an iron worker. So I wanted to pay a visit to that. It's right down town, but it's just so sombre. It's as if you don't hear any of the city noise around you. It's very emotional. You just get filled with so much emotion to be there."

Swasson said the trip was certainly worth it.

"It was a huge learning experience just to be there, with indigenous people from around the world. People I would have never even thought of, from different countries."

Be the first to know. This story was posted Oct. 8 on tribunenb.ca.