

# In Brief: Why a Fredericton first responder's struggle with PTSD should alarm us

• More children in New Brunswick are living in **poverty** than 25 years ago, according to a Human Development Council report. Twenty-one per cent of children in New Brunswick live below poverty line in 2012, compared to 19.8 per cent in 1989. One in three kids live in poverty in Saint John and Campbellton. Single parent families in New Brunswick are disproportionately affected by poverty in the province. In Campbellton, 44.4 per cent of single parent families live in poverty while the rate is 43.7 per cent in Saint John.

• According to the **2014 Hunger Count**, more people accessed food banks in Canada this year than last year. There has been close to a 25% increase in food bank usage in Canada since the economic crisis of 2008. In New Brunswick, 19,590 men, women and children used food banks since March of 2014. More than one-third of those accessing food banks in Canada this year are children under 18 years old, 17 % have a job or are on Employment Insurance and close to two-thirds (63.2%) are on social assistance.

• Several opponents to the **Kinder Morgan pipeline** survey work on Burnaby Mountain in BC were arrested in November. Over 90 arrests were made in a week including an 11-year-old girl and David Suzuki’s grandson, Tamo Campos, and Simon Fraser University professor Lynne Quarmby. Most were arrested peacefully under civil contempt charges.

• **Hassan Diab**, a 60-year-old sociology professor, was falsely targeted under Canada's flawed and unjust extradition laws in 2008, according to supporters. On Nov. 13, 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada denied Diab an appeal hearing. He was extradited the next day based on a discredited handwriting analysis report that was described by the Canadian extradition judge as “convoluted, very confusing, with conclusions that are suspect.” The evidence against him relies on unsourced intelligence that would be inadmissible in a criminal court in other countries like England. "I am deeply shocked that the Supreme Court refused to even hear the appeal in my case. This is a very sad day for me, my family and supporters, and the state of extradition law in Canada. I had hoped for justice from the Canadian legal system,” said Diab. Whisked away from Ottawa before dawn with no chance to say goodbye to his pregnant wife and two-year-old daughter, Diab now remains in detention near Paris. An investigating magistrate placed Diab under investigation upon his arrival in France. Diab can expect to be held in detention for nearly two years while waiting for the magistrate to decide whether to put him on trial.

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By MATT MOSHER and TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - Jeff Mack, a firefighter for 26 years, says one call a decade ago in Fredericton left him with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and a drinking problem.

“My PTSD was a result of cumulative traumatic calls with the 2005 fire being the last straw,” says Mack.

Mack and his partner responded to a dangerous structure fire in the winter of 2005. Mack was knocked semi-unconscious while fighting the fire. He was forced to leave his partner in the burning building to get help. The two survived but Mack says he stopped sleeping after that fire. He was angry all the time and lost interest in almost everything. He was afraid to go back to work and he developed a drinking problem.

Mack attended a debriefing session after the incident. One month after the fire, he sought counselling. Within a year, Mack was diagnosed with PTSD and chronic alcoholism. Three years after the fire that altered his life, he was told that if he continued drinking like he was, he would have three months to live. Mack's story is featured on the A&E show, Intervention.

Glenn Sullivan, President of the Fredericton Fire Fighters Association, argues that the social stigma associated with PTSD that kept it a hidden problem is dissipating but more resources are needed to avoid and treat PTSD in New Brunswick.

Services in New Brunswick are not up to par with others across Canada. Workers in New Brunswick experiencing PTSD symptoms have a tougher time linking it to their work and accessing any support from bodies like WorkSafe NB, according to the union president. WorkSafe NB does support the cost of PTSD assessment and treatment.

“In some provinces, they have presumptive PTSD coverage for first responders. That's not the case in New Brunswick,” says Sullivan. “The issue lies in the treatment facilities for substance abuse and the funding for it. The problem, I believe, is that there is widespread acknowledgement of PTSD and mental wellness, but when it comes to funding for a program to address substance abuse, that's where it falls apart.”

Sullivan says there is a need for a holistic approach to wellness and early detection and treatment of PTSD symptoms. "WorkSafe NB needs to provide funding in the event that PTSD results in substance abuse. They need to streamline the process so that someone with PTSD isn't further stressed with excessive paperwork and having to jump through hoops," says Sullivan.

Support for prevention and treatment of PTSD for first responders cannot come fast enough for Sullivan. “Things seem to moving very slow given the numbers of first responders that have succumbed to PTSD by taking their own lives," says Sullivan.

Twenty-three first responders across Canada—firefighters, paramedics, police officers, soldiers and corrections officers—committed suicide in a six month span from April to September of this year, according to Tema Conter Memorial Trust.



**Jeff Mack, a Fredericton firefighter who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), has brought awareness to the problem of PTSD in first responders.** Photo courtesy of Jeff Mack.

The Ontario-based foundation launched a suicide awareness campaign called "You Are Not Alone" in September. The foundation aims to provide first responder organizations with resources and peer support. The campaign has been successful in garnering nationwide media attention on the suicide crisis and its links to stressful work environments and PTSD.

Too few resources and the city of Fredericton's cuts to the fire service have contributed to stress in the workplace, according to Sullivan. “PTSD is cumulative in nature and organizational changes at the workplace have an impact on stress levels. I have seen this in very young firefighters who have really become frustrated in the decisions made at City Hall without truly realizing the impact on safety."

"It adds a great deal of stress knowing that you don't have the resources to do your job effectively. It's one thing to cut back on personnel at city hall, but when you are dealing with people's lives it's entirely different."

Although Sullivan admits that there has been a significant change towards the view of mental illness within fire departments during the last 18 years, he still believes there is much more improvement needed. "Organizational behaviour, in the context of psychology, is often ignored in the public sector. When all that is talked about is 'leaning' out the organization to find 'efficiencies'- that can't help an individual's well-being."

Mack has been in recovery since 2008 after receiving four months of treatment in B.C.

Sullivan admits that he would like to think that Mack's story is an uncommon one with Fredericton firefighters but he knows of one Fredericton firefighter who recently retired with PTSD and another who has just filed for Workers' Compensation. Many more have taken time off to deal with stress and other mental illnesses.

*Matt Mosher is a social work student at St. Thomas University doing a placement at the NB Media Co-op. Tracy Glynn is an editor with the NB Media Co-op.*

## First Nations oppose development of pipeline on unceded territory

*(continued from page 1)* ...sense, rather by being “prepared to take action if necessary.” She feels that another Rexton-type confrontation may happen. Anti-fracking protesters clashed with the RCMP on a highway in Rexton on Mi'kmaq territory on October 17, 2013 resulting in four police vehicles being burnt and 40 arrests.

“There are many people ready to demonstrate... we are waiting on the Mohawks,” says Perley noting that plans for the pipeline also pass through Mohawk territory.

Andrea Bear-Nicholas, a native studies professor at St. Thomas University from Tobique, believes that First Nations have the authority to impede development on land in the province.

The treaties signed in the 18th century in New Brunswick were treaties of peace and friendship between the native people and the British. “The treaties were not land surrenders,” says Nicholas. “In fact they did not speak about land at all.”

A Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014 was resolved in favour of

First Nations in June 2014, affirming Aboriginal title of land that was never surrendered in a treaty. Given that Aboriginal title is protected by the Canadian constitution, governments cannot deal with, or interfere with the Tsilhqot'in First Nation's use of the lands and resources without their consent. As a result, the Province of British Columbia will no longer be able to issue permits to third parties for land use or resource exploitation on those lands.

Nicholas believes that the Tsilhqot'in and Maliseet struggles are comparable because both nations never surrendered their land in treaties. “This is not a Tobique issue, this is a Maliseet issue,” says Nicholas.

Responding to a statement by the Assembly of First Nation Chiefs of New Brunswick on the pipeline issued in early November, Nicholas writes in a letter published in the *Telegraph-Journal* on November 12, “the Maliseet people, including not only Indian Act Chiefs and Councils, but also the Maliseet Grand Council, need to get together to stake title claim and to declare a position on the pipeline.”

*Anthony David Peter-Paul is a journalism student at St. Thomas University in Fredericton.*

# Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org). To list your event, email: [community@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:community@nbmediacoop.org).

**Karaoke for the NB Media Co-op.** Thurs, Jan. 29, 2015 at 9:00pm. boom! night club in Fredericton. The NB Media Co-op and boom! Night club proudly presents "Karaoke for the Co-op!" This is a great opportunity for karaoke enthusiasts to come out and compete for a variety of prizes, all of which are sponsored by local businesses. Prizes include an Acer laptop, 18 speed mountain bike and gift baskets. Registration fee for entering the contest is \$10 and the cover charge is \$3. Contestants can pay at the door or pre-register by contacting Nikita at [i680u@unb.ca](mailto:i680u@unb.ca). There will be a cover charge of \$3. All registration fees and cover charges will be donated the NB Media Co-op.

**NB Media Co-op Story Meetings.** Join us at our monthly story meetings in Fredericton where we discuss politics and current events and decide what to put in this paper every month. To find out the meeting time and venue, email [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).

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