NB Media Co-op is five! A word of thanks and an invitation

Shane gas resistance has been one of the top stories covered by the NB Media Co-op. Bruce Northrup, then Minister of Natural Resources Minister, and Alma Brooks, Maliseet elder from St. Mary’s First Nation, are seen here surrounded by shale gas opponents and media at a brief occupation of the Centennial Building in Fredericton in August 2011. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

By TRACY GLYNN, SARAH KARDASH, ADAM MELANSON (BOARD OF DIRECTORS); MATTHEW HAVES, JULIE MICHAEL, RUTH BRENN, CHRISTINE CODD (EDITORIAL BOARD) & JUDY BURNELL (MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR)

Five years ago, the founders of the NB Media Co-op stood up all night to fill the pages of our news website in time for a new Brunswick Day 2009 launch. Days before, we had gathered with excitement as the first pages of The Brief arrived. We were perhaps over anxious with our launch date and our desire to immediately start covering under-reported stories. We somehow crammed six stories into our first one-page broadsheet edition of The Brief. We launched the NB Media Co-op at Fredericton’s Wilma Park, showing off our fancy banner, distributing The Brief, painting faces of kids and taking our first memberships.

The NB Media Co-op was formed in 2009 following a successful New Brunswick Social Forum in 2008 in Fredericton where 200 people rooted in a variety of social movements gathered under the hopeful banner, Another New Brunswick and World are Possible. Following the adage, “Don’t Hate the Media, Be the Media,” we did just that and the NB Media Co-op was born months later.

The founders of the NB Media Co-op share the not-for-profit, non-co-operative model as they felt it was the most democratic model for producing and disseminating media. Free from the constraints of the profit motive, advertisers and state funding, the NB Media Co-op is able to tell stories on the side of people without fear of censorship. We cover stories from the perspectives of those ignored or misrepresented in our corporate media. We aim to combat the anti-worker sentiment found in corporate media and the affects that it has on public policies and the lives of workers.

Over the years, we’ve told stories that the corporate and state media refused to tell. We’ve helped cultivate journalists so that they can tell the stories of their own lives through words and photographs. We’ve also uncovered the many forgotten beautiful moments of our history. We’ve engaged our audience through Blue Rave, which stood up for equality and justice for themselves, their neighbours and for people all over the world. We’ve organized insightful talks and panel discussions on the media’s coverage of current events and social problems with highly respected experts.

In a province with a virtual media monopoly in the local news market, and where major news networks are understaffed and have to focus on issues that will draw a broad audience from all major regional municipalities, the NB Media Co-op has found a niche covering local struggles and events that the bigger players are unable or unwilling to delve into.

Some of our memorable stories and thoughtful commentary have included:

- the plight of the people of Saint-Georges who blame the loss of their well water to the literally thousands of gas holes drilling into Corridor’s gas operations;
- why Tobique residents took to the streets to protest the sale of the local power plant;
- why Moncton residents mobilized against the proposed sale of NB Power;
- why the inspiring Idle No More, New Brunswick, and Student movements that resonated with and mobilized New Brunswickers;
- the lead contamination at UNB and Mount Allison University and the postal worker lockout;
- huge equity demands for workers in group home, home support, childcare and transition home sectors;
- the struggle of Dr. Henry Morgentaler, the closure of the Fredericton Morgentaler Clinic and the ongoing fight for accessible reproductive health care in New Brunswick;
- the show a St. Thomas University student backed by fellow students and faculty share the light on inequities and violence experienced by trans people;
- the story of Roger LeBlanc, a sick miner from Eel River Crossing who is demanding justice after decades of work at the Brunswick lead and zinc smelter in Belliveau;
- the grave actions being taken in the face of abuses of Canadian mining companies by visitors to our region from Guatemala, El Salvador, the Philippines and Indonesia;
- small acts of resistance and creative ways of living like those of Fredericton community organizers to keep their positions on poles and save the old side bar berry in Sadsville’s Open Sky Cooperative that gives organic gardening to people with mental health challenges and Moncton’s La Blixa Co-operative;
- the city of Fredericton’s cuts to fire fighting services;
- critical analysis of the New Brunswick government’s poverty reduction strategy;
- concerns of New Brunswickers over declining horse and heroin snorting the public forest;
- New Brunswick’s connection to Colombian blood coal;
- Harper’s rollback of Environment Canada and cuts to refugee healthcare;
- Canada’s role in the coup of Haiti’s democratically-elected government and Canada’s complicity in ongoing war crimes in Gaza.

The NB Media Co-op is a labour of political commitment, public service and hope for a more humane world. It’s a labour that we share with dozens of volunteers at any given time. They include: editors, writers, photo/video/audio journalists, board members (we’re an incorporated not-for-profit co-operative), a website whiz, university student interns, labour unions that financially contribute and all those working behind the scenes asking people to become a member and donate, those sharing our stories on Facebook and Twitter, and those hitting the streets to distribute The Brief throughout the province of New Brunswick. We thank all of you.

We share this five year experience with many unforgettable people covered in our stories and with our readers. Thank you for sharing your stories and the stories for ours. Not a member yet or is it time to renew? Sign up today online at nbmediacoop.org or drop by the office or check out sign up information on the back of this paper.

Of course there is still lots of room to grow and improve as a media outlet. Join us and help us make it happen. We welcome your story ideas, news stories and commentaries, personal experiences, retweets, photo/video/audio submissions, opinion and essay pieces, feedback, and any other ideas, suggestions, comments and critiques. If you have any ideas, suggestions, comments and critiques, please contact us at info@nbmediacoop.org.

Be sure to join us at this year’s Annual General Meeting scheduled for the evening of Tuesday, September 30 at 6:00pm at Conserver House, 180 Saint John Street in Fredericton. The event will begin with a panel of newsmakers called “Media and Movements.”

Indigenous teenager’s life in danger; doctors urge Eel Ground First Nation to act

BY DALLAS MCQUAIRE

Shania Simouone’s life is in danger. Doctors say that Shania, who lives in the Simouone home on the Eel Ground First Nation is a threat to Shania’s life because of her severe asthma. The Eel Ground First Nation, however, has so far refused to give doctors the necessary medicine to three of Shania’s physicians as well as the family’s anguished pleas for help.

Annie Simouone, 43, and her children, Shania, 17, Jaimes, 14, and Kendra, 10, are members of the Eel Ground First Nation, living on the reserve just upstream from Newcastle on the Miramichi River.

In November 2013, Dr. Joe Rigley of the South Side Medical Centre in Miramichi wrote to the Eel Ground First Nation Housing Council. Dr. Rigley informed the band that “Shania Simouone has severe asthma and has tested allergic for mould” and prescribed “a mould free environment” for the teenager.

Saying Shania’s asthma is “out of control despite maximal therapy,” Dr. Rigley, a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada, issued a dire warning about the possible consequences of leaving her in the house the family occupies: “if she continues on as she is now, it is very likely that she may be left crippled from a pulmonary standpoint and I think that certainly there would be some risk of a fatal exacerbation.”

Shania’s mother, Annie Simouone, says that band housing for families in need is available on the Eel Ground First Nation. Each year, such families can apply to rent band housing built by the federal department of Indian Affairs for low-income families. Families apply to the Band Council Housing Committee, which then makes recommendations about who should get such housing. In the last few years, the number of band homes allotted to families in need has varied between two and eight. “If she applied for a house, in three years, she has been applying to get into the band housing that could save her daughter’s life.” At least that’s the way the system is supposed to work. The Simouone family, however, seems invisible to the Eel Ground Band Housing Committee. “I’ve been waiting for two years,” Simouone says. “If I move off the reserve, our family is no longer a priority, and we’ll never be able to live here.”

Simouone does not understand why the Band Council doesn’t want to help band members who need to be part of the community. “We are members of the Eel Ground First Nation and we want to live as band members,” says Simouone.

Less than two weeks after Dr. Rigley’s ominous letter telling the Eel Ground Housing Council that Shania’s life was in danger, a concerned Emergency Room physician at the Miramichi Regional Hospital wrote a letter to the Eel Ground Housing Committee, Chief George Ginnimm, and the Band Council.

Dr. Michael Haydon again informed the band that Shania was “a patient with significant asthma ... who has required at times aggressive treatment in the Emergency Room for her asthma.” His note says that “from a medical perspective, given this patient’s condition, this would be an issue of some priority.”

Dr. Haydon’s letter to the Eel... (continued on page 2)

The Simouone children, James, 14, Shania, 17, and Kendra, 10, with their mother Annie. Photo from Annie Simouone.