

**Alternatives North
Annual Activities Report
for the
2014-15 Fiscal Year**

Introduction

Alternatives North had another busy and productive year, pursuing many and varied initiatives and achieving much. This report briefly highlights some of the areas of operation that took a substantial commitment of resources, or that were unusual. The report is an assemblage of components prepared by a number of individuals.

Giant Mine (Prepared by Kevin O'Reilly)

Working Group Preparation and Participation

Kevin O'Reilly and Gordon Hamre participated in ten Working Group meetings in 2014-15. This group reviews the general work and planning for the Giant Mine Remediation Project.

Alternatives North also retained Dr. Sue Moodie, CCSG Associates to participate in the November 13, 2014 Working Group meeting to provide independent advice on the design of human health impact assessment and human health risk assessment. The Giant Mine Remediation Project is required to carry out a new human health risk assessment and to meaningfully engage the community.

Review of Regulatory Submissions

Alternatives North participated in meetings related to the following regulatory submissions made by AANDC on the following subjects:

- May 23, 2014 meeting to discuss Underground Stabilization at Giant Mine; and
- March 26, 2015 meeting to discuss Underground Stabilization Phase 2, Stage 3.

Alternatives North made regulatory submissions as follows:

July 9, 2014 - Alternatives North Comments to the MVLWB on Underground Work Stabilization Plan

March 26, 2015 - Alternatives North Comments on the Giant Mine Roaster Deconstruction Waste Management Plan Amendment for Tarping

Giant Mine Environmental Agreement Negotiations

As required in the Report of Environmental Assessment, negotiations on an Environmental Agreement recommenced in September 2014. Alternatives North was a full party at the table and secured shared legal counsel with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Alternatives North tabled discussion papers and drafts of the agreement. Seven negotiating sessions were held in 2014-15, culminating in the

signing of an Agreement in May and June 2015. Alternatives North is a full party to this historic arrangement for independent oversight, ongoing research and development of a better alternative than freezing the arsenic underground forever, and public reporting.

Poverty (prepared by Aggie Brockman)

In October 2014 Alternatives North joined groups across Canada in a *Chew on This!* event bringing attention to the need for a national anti-poverty strategy. We gave out lunch bags with apples and postcards to send to the government.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) held a second anti-poverty round table with delegates from around the NWT at the end of 2014. Aboriginal governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), municipalities, relevant GNWT departments, the private business sector and other NWT stakeholders were consulted on ways to reduce and mitigate the impacts of poverty. (Roundtable notes are online at <http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/sites/default/files/td201-175.pdf>)

The discussions, along with previous consultations, fed into the development of [*Working Together: An Action Plan To Reduce and Eliminate Poverty in the Northwest Territories*](#), a document released by the Minister of Health and Social Services in June, 2015. The priorities include health and wellbeing, housing, sustainable communities, and integrated services.

While there was nothing explicit in the anti-poverty action plan for people living on income assistance, the GNWT increased the allowances for food, incidentals and clothing in the budget. Rates vary by community and family size, but as an example, the food allowance for a family of four in Yellowknife increased from \$571 to \$685 each month in April. By 2018-19 that same family of four will receive \$952 per month, an overall increase of 67%. The goal is to increase food benefits to allow for the purchase of healthy foods in all NWT communities, according to a food basket measure developed in cooperation with the NWT Bureau of Statistics. This is the first food allowance increase for income assistance clients since 2007.

The NWT government decided this past summer to not claw back the *Universal Child Care Benefit* retroactive payments from income assistance and public housing clients, a decision that may set a precedent allowing people to keep more of their incidental income, now deducted after reaching \$1,200 each year.

For the second year the GNWT allocated \$500,000 to community based anti-poverty projects. Information about the funded projects is included in the action plan or can be found on an interactive map as information becomes available. The small committee that advised the GNWT on this action plan and reviewed applications for anti-poverty funding for the previous two years was disbanded spring 2015. It's not clear if another committee with members from outside government will be

established to advise the government on anti-poverty measures, though the government has committed to annual roundtables.

Alternatives North, the social justice coalition that coordinates the *No Place for Poverty* alliance, received anti-poverty funding to determine a living wage calculation for Yellowknife. The calculation places a living wage at \$20.72. Alternatives North will launch a living wage campaign in the fall of 2015 and hopes that its work can offer a model for other NWT communities.

Fracking Action North (prepared by Tasha Stephenson)

Alternatives North is a founding member of Fracking Action North, along with Ecology North and Council of Canadians (NWT).

Big Visioning & Strategy Retreat Oct 26 2014 at LA with Coalition partners– produced Draft Strategy for FAN activities

Film Screenings: **Gasland II** Sept 2014; Cold **Amazon** March Water Week (with panel discussion in Yk)

Global Frackdown Nov 2014 - March down main street of 40 people in the rain.

In the Press: Chamber Commerce full-page ad supporting fracking; Aboriginal Business Quarterly – premier edition included nasty article. Rebuttal provided Oct/Nov – sent to all MLAs, printed in N/N; generally good coverage in Northern Journal.

Letters requesting EA were sent to Sahtu Land & Water Board June 2014 when it was reviewing Conoco-Philips application – request to refer to EA based on public concern (and other factors, of course); ultimately unsuccessful – the project was approved without public review. Also sent letter to Standing Committee (Fall 2014).

The Second Petition – [The ‘First’ Petition was one tabled March 2014] – Petition online with more specifics spelled out than in first version, but essentially calling for same thing: public review of fracking. Email push for signatures, plus paper petitions as before; local push included tables at Post Office, Snow Castle, and other events. Closing was to be March 2015, but extended to May. (Will be reported in the 2015 Annual Report)

Public Education: N/N Newspaper letter. EdgeYk article by Shannon M: “Fracking Facts: A Reality Check,” ran March 2015. Compiled binders of information for public education at tables. Leaflets, pamphlets and posters were created. New FAN logo! Banner printed with **Small Change** money. Info tables and discussions about fracking at - Wellness Conference Feb 13-14 2015; Walking with our Sisters – (people from all communities there) Opening Friday Jan 9. FAQs were revamped and posted on WEBSITE.

“Arts Against Fracking” event (artists, musicians)... March 14, Casey Koyzen and Charlotte Overvold collaborated with FAN – a successful event

Funding from **Small Change** was used for printing, a banner); **Tides Canada** provided funding for use in 2015 – website, Facebook, communications work.

Minimum Wage Advisory Committee (prepared by Ben McDonald)

In response to a public call for interest, Alternatives North sought and achieved a seat on a committee created to provide advice to the GNWT Minister of Education Culture and Employment about the minimum wage. The Committee's work took nearly a year and ended with a report outlining three possible scenarios the Minister could follow. In the end, the Minister decided to increase the minimum wage level from \$10 per hour to \$12.50 per hour. The appointment to serve on the committee continues and Alternatives North looks forward to future opportunities to improve the living conditions of the lowest paid workers in the NWT.

Canadian Health Coalition (prepared by Ben McDonald)

Alternatives North is affiliated to this national organisation. The CHC's mandate is to protect, improve and expand public health care services across the country. During the year the Coalition challenged the failure of the federal government to provide leadership in the field. It promoted especially Pharmacare and a National Strategy for Senior Care that would provide homecare, hospital care, long-term care, hospice and palliative care to aging Canadians as they need it. In the latter part of the year it developed strategy to try to make these priorities elections issues during the 2015 federal election.

Each November the CHC conducts an annual lobby of federal MPs and promotes a national "Medicare Week". A part of this activity is a conference. In 2014, Alternatives North was asked to present as part of a panel on privatisation of health in the north, which was timely considering the decision by the GNWT to P3 the new Stanton hospital.

Conclusion

As mentioned, this report only skims the highlights of the efforts made by Alternatives North activists. More information about these and other initiatives can be found on the group's web site at www.alternativesnorth.ca.