



Lois Frank stands in front of fracking trucks to stop them from getting onto Blood Tribe land. (Inset) Community residents, joined by Council of Canadians' staff Brigette DePape and Diane Connors (back row on left), take part in the inaugural meeting of the Council of Canadians Blood Tribe Chapter.

Blood Reserve Chapter: A community taking a stand

The Council of Canadians recently welcomed its first Indigenous chapter. The Blood Reserve Chapter was formed by Council of Canadians Board Member Lois Frank and local activist Kimberly Weasel Fat. We spoke with them about their local efforts.

Why is social and environmental justice important to you?

Lois: I made a stand against hydraulic fracturing on the Blood Reserve [in September 2011] because I was concerned about the water and the environment. I was an educator at the University of Lethbridge for 10 years, so I knew what was happening. I went to court seven times and represented myself. Eventually they just dropped the charges, but I thought, what will happen if our whole land is leased to oil companies? What will happen to our land and our water? All we have is our health, our kids, our grandchildren. What if we leave them with a wasteland? I was standing in front of 25 fracking trucks and I was the one charged with intimidation.

Kimberly: Growing up on the reserve I experienced systemic racism and didn't really understand what it was at the time, but knew something wasn't fair. When I became a mother, that's when I realized I wanted to do something to change the way things worked. When Idle No More burst onto the scene I really became aware. I became an organizer in Calgary, and I was exposed to and learned about

different injustices, including the struggles around decolonization.

Also, my Mom was a residential school survivor – my sister and I lost her to that system. When I became a mother it opened up my eyes. I want to be part of a change for my kids. I want them to have a better life and I don't want them to have the struggles we had.

Do you have feelings, as an Indigenous person, about the complexity of organizing under a "Canadian" banner when many Indigenous activists avoid identifying as Canadian?

Lois: I am proud to be a Blood Tribe member, and an Albertan and a Canadian. I am proud of my own heritage. In terms of being labelled Council of Canadians, I'm proud of that, because of the work they do in social justice. That is what we need in our communities!

How did you learn about the Council of Canadians? How was the chapter formed?

Kimberly: The first time I heard about the Council I was a volunteer Idle No More organizer. We had a teach-in, talking about our rights and things that Harper was trying to do. A bunch of people from the Calgary Council of Canadians chapter came and they were so supportive. It was so refreshing. In the context of racism in my homeland it makes my heart smile when I meet people who aren't

racist. The Council of Canadians gives me a chance to stand up for my community.

Lois: A major inspiration was Maude Barlow. Maude came to Lethbridge where she and I spoke at an event. I was later awarded the Council of Canadians "Activist of the Year" award in 2012 at the Nanaimo AGM. After Nanaimo, I started on the Board and it was nice to also meet Board member Gary John, former Chief of St'at'imc Nation. There is no watchdog organization [for First Nations], and life can feel very oppressive at times. The Council of Canadians is a breath of fresh air: we can speak out, we can gather. I asked people in my community to form a chapter, and connected with Kim.

What do you hope the chapter can do for your community?

Kimberly: We intend to provide a safe space for people to share their concerns and ideas while supporting positive action. We are excited about our screening [of *Fractured Land*] with Caleb Behn coming!

Lois: We are focused on educating people. We have workshops every month on issues such as health, education, leadership, land rights and parenting. Residential schools had a major impact, and we lost traditional parenting.

For more information about joining a Council of Canadians chapter visit our website at www.canadians.org/chapters.