

FROM THE SPECIAL EDITOR



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I have long called myself, not without a tinge of professional regret, an anthropological firefighter. Why? Because for too many years now, I have been responding to community health problems too late, only once the fire is started. Assisting communities to enhance their wellness is extremely difficult in such circumstances — damage control is not the best way to plan, implement, or monitor long-term community health strategies.

All too often these fires have been fueled by a nearby mining project. The staff in mining companies and governments rarely has training in social sciences, and yet they are expected to produce countless reports on the projected impacts of mineral development on the health, wellness, and lives of the people who act as labourers, wives, bystanders, and participants in the surrounding areas. It is rare that these local people see themselves, their fears and worries, or their hopes reflected in these reports.

Only planning ahead and being involved in community-based research will permit more effective long-range planning. When communities do their own research, they learn about the themes most important to them, they ask the questions about what they see to be changing and what they expect is yet to come, and they employ the methods and the people that they trust.

I know that I have a lot to learn from communities doing research on health and wellness in mining. That is why I am doing a PhD. It is also why I undertook the job of editing this special issue of *Pimatisiwin* on community health and wellness near mines. As a community-based researcher, I look for publications that make research methods and findings more transparent. As I began to correspond with people who work on community wellness in min-

ing regions, I looked for work that showed how to involve communities in research and what methods can be used to learn about wellness.

Catherine Coumans' and Ella Haley's pieces on community-based research projects do exactly this. Coumans argues for community-based health research approaches in two towns that grew up around iron ore. Haley makes a case for popular epidemiology — the investigation of factors contributing to ill health in a community — after reviewing the public hearing decisions and processes in two communities near phosphate processing factories and contrasting them with the infamous case of Love Canal in the US. Another methodologically driven article, by Shirley Tsetta, Ginger Gibson, Linda McDevitt, and Sarah Plotner, working with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, outlines the process one Dene community went through to develop a socio-economic baseline of the health and wellness of workers and their families in the region of two major diamond mines. Another northern piece, by Chris Paci and Noelle Villebrun on behalf of the Dene Nation, details some of the conditions Aboriginal people feel are necessary for a community's ideals of sustainability to co-exist with large-scale mining.

In Papua New Guinea, mining has transformed many aspects of traditional life, offering up the trappings of modernization. Martha Macintyre, Simon Foale, Nicholas Bainton, and Brigid Moktel illustrate how traditional medicines co-exist with western healing practices. Kristin Patten, writing about Sierra Leone, touches on some of the environmental and human health changes that come with the business of small-scale mining. This is an issue I would love to see more community research on — and many more community-based solutions. People who make a living through artisanal mining are barely scraping by, but they are often providing for large families, living in sub-standard conditions in regions that become more and more inhospitable, as they mine more and more deposits, often with shrinking returns.

My own piece, co-authored with Jason Klinck, seeks to explain what I see as I do my own research in the North: community and individual *resilience* in the face of change. This piece seeks to build a model of change, understanding why some communities stay strong and absorb change, while others suffer greater negative impacts. As I read through these many and varied stories of suffering, strength, and survival, I tried to find within each the powers of resilience wielded by community members. I would encourage you to do the same, and to learn as I have. There will always be fires to put out; maybe together we can prevent some from starting.

I hope you will enjoy this issue of *Pimatisiwin* and find in it stories and ideas for your own work in your own communities. As has been said in previous issues, please keep on telling us your stories.

*Ginger Gibson
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