

Chapter Activist Profile

Mandy Melnyk – Peace River Region, Alberta



Peace River is located northwest of Edmonton, Alberta, 200 kilometres north of Grande Prairie. It is home to more than 6,000 people. Residents have expressed growing concern with Bruce Power's plans to build Alberta's first nuclear reactor on private land beside Lac Cardinal about 30 kilometres west of the community. Mandy Melnyk is one of the Chapter's founding members.

How did your chapter start?

A community member had been working on nuclear issues and she was in touch with the Council of Canadians' Prairies Regional Organizer who suggested that we start up a chapter. I had been aware of the Council of Canadians and its place on the "right" side of issues, its work as a watchdog group and its efforts to educate Canadians.

Can you talk a little more about what you mean when you refer to the "nuclear issue?"

One day I woke up and heard that the government was seriously proposing to build a nuclear plant in our region with Bruce Power. A bunch of us from the community came together to educate ourselves and connect with other people who had the resources we needed to learn more. We formed as a chapter because of this in August 2008 and became active in the Keep Alberta Nuclear Free coalition.

Mandy Melnyk (middle) and other members of the Peace Region chapter hold the Council of Canadians' banner during their inaugural meeting. The Peace Region chapter has focused its attention opposing plans for Alberta's first nuclear reactor, which is proposed to be built near their community.



What has it been like to campaign against Bruce Power?

Bruce Power has \$50 million to spend on a public relations campaign so we are up against quite a machine and we don't have the same resources. We have been looking at water use impacts and fiscal concerns with building this plant – there is no money to be made, so there has been lots of speculation that the energy that would be produced would be exported to the United States. Locally, we see that the Alberta government has not

been investing in the infrastructure that exists. Half – 50 per cent – of the electricity running on old power lines is being lost. Rather than fix these and encourage conservation, the government is opting for a quick fix.

What has the chapter been doing?

Since forming we have sponsored speaking events, forums and movie screenings. We have collaborated with the Friends of Medicare and the National Farmers Union. Most recently we screened a film with the Friends of the Lubicon Cree First Nation. We participated in the [Council's] annual general meeting in Edmonton and presented a resolution on nuclear power. [Ed. note: the motion was passed by the Council's membership.] For the Energy Day of Action we secured support from four local politicians to call for a national energy strategy.

What tools have helped your chapter organize?

Having good email communication has been really important; it keeps us together when we are busy organizing. I think this is a key ingredient for success. It can keep communication open and clear and keep things moving. Also, it is not just me that is front and centre – we keep working with new people, we get the Council of Canadians banner out to all events, and this gives us great exposure.

Any last comments?

I'd like to mention the key people who are part of our chapter. It is so important to have a strong group, and we do. They are Susan Thompson, Barb Johnson, Carol Arkinstall, Donna Hardacre, Diane Plowman and Wanda Laurin.

On the day of the interview with Mandy, the Alberta government announced it was holding its public consultation on the nuclear power plant online for only one month. She was outraged at this lack of process and public input. The chapter worked quickly to develop a response to the lack of public participation. We wish the chapter success in its organizing on this important issue.

For more information about how to join a chapter in your area, visit our website at www.canadians.org, or call us toll free at 1-800-387-7177.