



Final Report:
MicroResearch Nova Scotia Workshop
Iona, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia
Held at St. Columba Parish Hall, Iona, Nova Scotia
September 10- 21, 2018



Building Local Capacity for Community Focused Research to Improve Local Health Outcomes

Introduction and Background

MicroResearch is an innovative research training program for community members that began in 2008 in Africa under the leadership of Noni MacDonald and Bob Bortolussi of the IWK Health Centre in Halifax. Since 2016 the program principles have been used in communities in Nova Scotia. The experience gained from work in other countries is thus being applied in Nova Scotia (MicroResearch-NS). Wherever it is used, the MicroResearch program provides community-focused research training, mentorship and small grants for health research projects conceived and done locally.

“The goal of MicroResearch is to improve health care outcomes with innovative community-based research that assures quality and integration of research into the fabric of the local health system and the community”.

Between September 10 and 21, 2018 a MicroResearch Nova Scotia Workshop was held at St. Columba Parish Hall in Iona, NS. The development of this workshop was fostered through many meetings with the community including with faculty from Cape Breton University, who comprised the steering committee, led by Dr Jacquelyn Scott. The committee worked diligently to host local “SWOT analysis” meetings in the Central Cape Breton area, as a warm-up to introduce the idea of MicroResearch and community health to the area. The site committee also engaged members of the Waycobah First Nation community in Central Cape Breton to extend the invitation to be involved in the workshop.

The workshop was led by Bob Bortolussi with local teachers and co-teachers; Katherine MacLeod, Catherine Leviten-Reid, Lesley Wardley, Jill MacMullen, and Jacquelyn Scott teaching. Audrey Walsh and Allan Fraser participated as coaches and Heather Rushton provided MicroResearch Workshop administrative support. The Workshop was carried out in consultation and/or collaboration with

1. Cape Breton University (Shannon School of Business and Department of Nursing)
2. Elder Phyllis Googoo
3. IWK and NSHA, and Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine
4. Municipality of Victoria County (Physical Activity Strategy)
5. Central Cape Breton Community Ventures Inc. (CCBCVI) (local development corporation)
6. St Columba Parish Hall hosted the workshop and provided delicious lunches daily.

Rationale for MicroResearch-NS

Nova Scotia rates poorly on many health indicators compared to other provinces, and health care funding is becoming increasingly limited. The gaps in knowledge translation/ adaptation/ implementation at the community level are widening and there is a need to better align local resources to improve outcomes at the community level. Continuing to deliver health care – preventive, acute and chronic – as is currently done, will not bring the changes needed to improve local health outcomes and meet the Nova Scotia Health Priorities. While the business plans at NSHA, IWK and Nova Scotia Dept. of Health and Wellness all encourage strategies and collaboration to address complex health problems, local health problems need community-focused, locally driven, sustainable, culturally and local resource appropriate solutions. Building on this need, MicroResearch-NS aims to develop local community-focused research capacity to find solutions to local health problems deemed important by local participants.

Rationale for MicroResearch-NS in Central Cape Breton

MicroResearch Nova Scotia has completed workshops in seven Nova Scotian communities, and several past participants and site coordinators encouraged the development of a Cape Breton area workshop. Ellen Stoddard, site coordinator from the Kentville workshop, connected MicroResearch to Dr. Jacquelyn Scott, former President of Cape Breton University. Dr. Scott indicated that the central, more rural areas of Cape Breton would be a good fit for this workshop.

MicroResearch-NS Program Model

The fundamentals of the MicroResearch-NS program include:

Workshops:

1. Training – participants are taught practical and applied community focused research skills over 10 half days- this was decreased to 9 in this workshop due to the holiday for July 1 being on July 2.

Proposal Preparation:

2. Interdisciplinary collaboration - teams work together to move a research idea to a fundable proposal
3. Seed funding - of up to \$3000 to support quality projects

Implementation:

1. Project management – teams work together to carry out the community project
2. Knowledge sharing – of research outcomes with stakeholders



See MacDonald et al MicroResearch: Finding sustainable local health solutions in East Africa through small local research studies. *Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health* 2014;4:185–93

MicroResearch-NS Program Accreditation

The MicroResearch-NS workshop received accreditation from Dalhousie University Continuing Professional Development, Faculty of Medicine for 40 Category 1 RCPS / CCFM credits. The full program was also reviewed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and Category 2 and 3 credits can be garnered for those physicians who complete the entire program. Continuing Professional Development credits can also be garnered by other health professional participants for their continuing education.

Participants: Workshop participants were recruited through personal meetings, referrals and personalized invitations to the NSHA and IWK health workers, and local community organizations. The site committee, led by Jacquelyn Scott, were very active in helping to recruit participants from the central Cape Breton community. Due to many circumstances only 6 were able to attend the duration of the workshop, with many other interested parties coming and going to observe or contribute in small ways. A complete list of participants is available in **Appendix 1**.

Pre-Workshop Assessment

A summary of the findings of pre-workshop assessment are shown in **Appendix 2**. Only 2 of the participants had any previous research experience.

The most common reason participants gave for attending the workshop was a variation on: To learn about MicroResearch and how it can be used to improve community health; recommended by site committee or supervisor.

Workshop Facilitators, Coaches and Guest Lecturers: All faculty who facilitated this workshop had research experience and several had MicroResearch teaching experience. The list of faculty can be found in **Appendix 3**. The coaches can be found in **Appendix 4**.

Workshop Logistics: All the workshop sessions were held at the St. Columba Parish Hall on weekdays from 10:00 – 2:00 pm. Jacquelyn Scott was helpful in facilitating access to the building and support to use the building. An amazing lunch was provided each day, thanks to a dedicated team of local members of CCBCVI. This was a departure from the usual simple snacks offered at MicroResearch workshops, and quite a treat for participants. Its offering was also consistent with local traditions and expectations.

Workshop Format: The MicroResearch-NS workshops combined interactive seminars, exercises and daily small group interdisciplinary, project development sessions supported by local site coach. Due to the small size, participants formed one group and by week 2 had transformed into a team focusing their time, energy and effort on addressing the research question they had agreed to investigate.

The daily attendance was excellent as noted above and team's work was regularly shared by email and catch up conversations.

Workshop Program Overview:

The daily program of lectures, discussions and exercises is summarized in **Appendix 5**.

On Day 2, each participant vigorously discussed the merits of their individual research topic (See **Appendix 6**). One area was selected, shaped into a question and then refined for proposal overview development during the workshop. All expressed deep commitment to helping to make a difference in the health of this community. Having team members from the community was crucial for understanding of the local culture and context of the topic area selected.

Day 3: A team spokesperson presented the list of topics to the coach and teacher and the team discussed why the final selection was made.

Original Research Questions: Team Iona:

1. How can we encourage more residents to take part in the “work” of the community?

The remaining days of the workshop were used to refine and develop the research question idea with background, methods, budget, knowledge translation plan etc. with help of coaches Dr. Audrey Walsh and Allan Fraser. Other presentations focused on report writing, manuscript development, creating posters and abstracts as well as how to create a research PPT for the final day.

Team Research Proposal Overview Presentation and Judging

The refined research aims/ question presented by the team on last Day for adjudication were:

Team Iona:

Title: Together we can create a healthy community!

Research question: What factors encourage/prevent Central Cape Breton community members from becoming more engaged in their community?

Objective: Healthy, sustainable rural community with residents who are engaged.

On the final day of the workshop (**Appendix 7**) the oral presentation described an overview of the team’s proposal to answer their research question. The presentation included a 15-minute overview of the team’s research proposal followed by comments and questions from the judges and audience and then constructive suggestions from the other participants on how the proposal might be strengthened.

Judges:

Five distinguished judges were invited to adjudicate the presentations.

1. Sarah MacDonald, Manager, Community Health Boards Eastern Zone NSHA
2. Ron Stewart, Retired Faculty, Dalhousie University School of Medicine
3. Will Webster, Retired Faculty, Dalhousie University School of Health Professions
4. John Jerome Paul, Program Services Director, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey
5. Katelyn Christopher, Constable, Baddeck RCMP Detachment

The judges listened to the presentation, asked questions and then deliberated on whether the project could go forward to be developed into a full MicroResearch-NS grant proposal. Their Evaluation and scoring system was based on MicroResearch principles (**Appendix 8**).

Judge’s Comments:

The judges were very impressed with the enthusiasm shown by the two presenters and the work ethic of other members of the team. They noted that the team needed to stay focused and not drift off course as new factors are found during the Focus Group Discussions. They also noted that the process the team is developing and the findings may be useful to other communities in Nova Scotia facing similar issues.

The judges had a number of specific suggestions for strengthening the proposal (**Appendix 9**). This team was supported by two volunteer coaches who may continue working with the team to help bring about success.

Workshop Assessment

An assessment of the workshop by participants was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted anonymously. 4 participants completed the final participant evaluation form. The scores and summary of comments are presented in **Appendix 10**. The workshop was well received and highly valued. Of particular note, the keenness to work with the community and to use what they have learned was highlighted.

Team Evaluations

From the viewpoint of the coach and facilitator this team worked well together. They noted the commitment of the team members and valued the diversity (**Appendix 11**).



(The team hard at work.)

Outcomes and Recommendations from the Preston Township MR Workshop held at WADE

Administrative Considerations:

1. Venue: Municipality of Victoria County (Physical Activity Strategy) offered support for lunches, gas (if needed by any participants) and potential additional project funding. (Vince Forrestall, Coordinator) The support of CCBCVI and the Parish of St. Columba for site and volunteer assistants was important.
2. The link of MicroResearch goals and those of CBU was extremely helpful; win-win!
3. The distance to travel to the site was a challenge for some participants.
4. The lack of EHS, Acadian or First Nation participants limited the scope.

5. The small number of participants limited the overall educational opportunity offered through MicroResearch-NS. Consideration of workshop timing and location needs further discussion.

Educational Considerations:

1. Comments from the teachers and participants will help further refine the lectures that are more directed to social needs of rural communities.
2. The lack of internet access did limit ability for participants to search for information and articles while at the site. This is a common problem at many locations in Central Cape Breton.
3. The enthusiastic participation of CBU faculty as teachers, coaches and attendees was a great asset.
4. The small team size facilitated early bonding.
5. The pre-work conducted through community SWOT analysis discussions, attended by more than 30 people in total, assured a broad basis of agreement on community concerns and goals, despite the small workshop size.

Acknowledgements:

The MicroResearch-NS would like to express our gratitude:

1. To the 7 participants for the time, energy and passion they put into their proposal overview- an impressive small but mighty team who did amazing work
2. The guest teachers who supported the participants
3. To Audrey Walsh and Allan Fraser for their dedication, commitment and effort in coaching this team.
4. To Research Services at IWK and NSHA for supporting MicroResearch
5. To Heather Rushton for support for the infrastructure for this workshop
6. To the judges for giving so generously of their time and talents
7. To Jacquelyn Scott, for going above and beyond in leading the site committee to ensure the success of this workshop

Respectfully submitted by



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(Team Photo below)

MicroResearch 2018

The Cape Breton MicroResearch Team (below) (*Note: Jill MacMullen and Cathy MacMillan were unable to be present for the picture*)

