

**Final Report:
MicroResearch Nova Scotia Workshop
North Preston, East Preston, Cherrybrook (The “Prestons Township”)
Held at Watershed Association Development Enterprise (WADE),
Halifax, Nova Scotia
July 3- July 13, 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, NS. Since 2016 the African MicroResearch program has 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 July 3 and July 13, 2018 the first Halifax African Nova Scotian Workshop was held at the Watershed Association Development Enterprise in Halifax, NS. The development of this workshop was fostered through many meetings with the community including with HAAC, and connections through WADE and the local churches in the community. The local steering committee included Karen Hudson and Cora Lee Joudrey. Originally planned for February, this was shifted to July to be more convenient.

The workshop was led by Noni MacDonald with Linda Carvery, Bob Bortolusssi, Marlene Ruck Simmons, and Heather Rushton teaching, Ingrid Waldron coaching with Heather Rushton also providing the MicroResearch Workshop administrative support. The Workshop was carried out in collaboration with

- Tony Atuanya at WADE
- HAAC
- IWK and NSHA, and Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine
- With special thanks to the local churches for putting information in their bulletin
- Special thanks to Karen Hudson and Cora Lee Joudrey for helping to spread the word
- Thanks to Nova Scotia Power for their cooperation in securing services needed to conduct the workshop.

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 the Prestons Township

Review of health data has shown that those living in the “Prestons Township” area (Postal Code B2Z) have higher morbidity and mortality than those in other parts of the Halifax Regional Municipality. Linda Carvery, a MicroResearch graduate of the Brunswick Street Mission workshop in 2017, extolled the value of the MicroResearch concept and felt drawn to expand this to other communities. She facilitated developing links to this Preston Township African Nova Scotian community.

MicroResearch-NS Program Model

The fundamentals of the MicroResearch-NS program include:

Workshops:

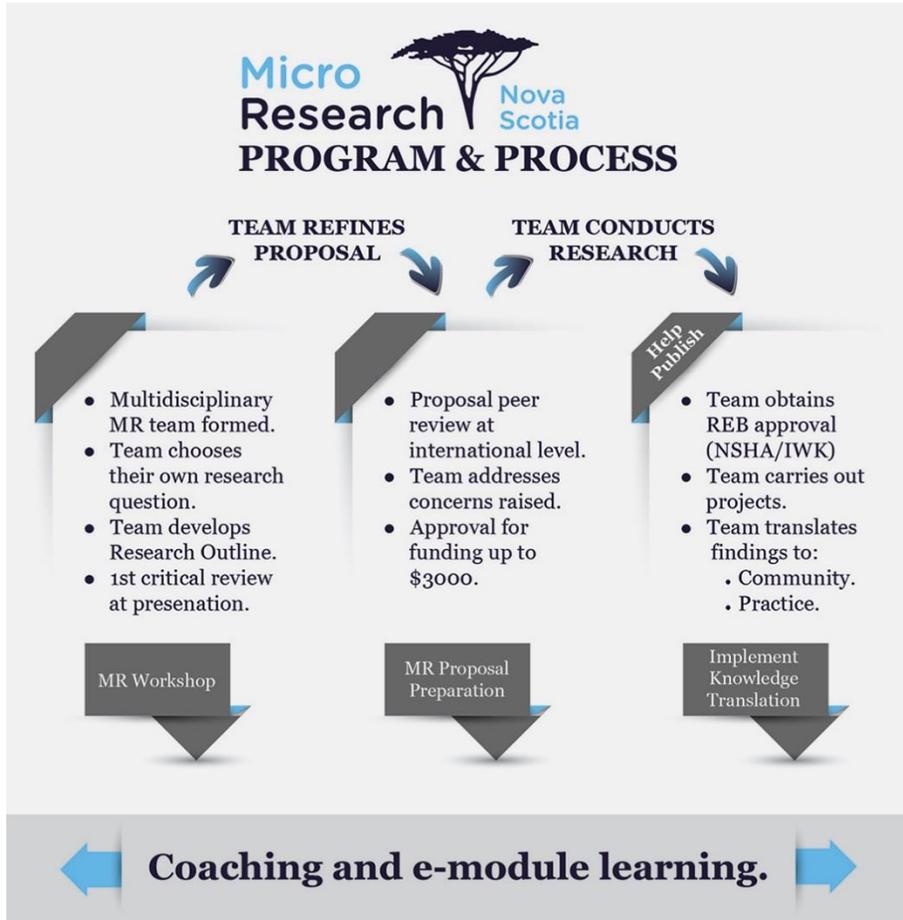
- Training – participants are taught practical and applied community focused research skills over 10 half days- this was decreased to 9 in this workshop due to the holiday for July 1 being on July 2.

Proposal Preparation:

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

Implementation:

- Project management – teams work together to carry out the community project
- 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.

MicroResearch-NS – The “Prestons Township”

The W.A.D.E, an organization lead by and long active in this community provided the space for the two week workshop.

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, Karen Hudson and Cora Lee Joudrey, were very active in helping to recruit participants from the Preston Township community. Originally, 12 participants registered for this July workshop but due to many circumstances only 5 were able to attend with 2 directly from the community and the other 3 with links to the community. On the first day a serious discussion was held about whether to go forward with such a small group. The group all agreed to strongly commit to the workshop. Attendance was 100% except for two days when one each were away due to previously planned commitments. These 5 rapidly became a team all pulling together to develop their project overview. The commitment of these 5 participants was remarkable. 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 1 of the 5 participants had had any previous research experience- even as a research study participant.

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 coach can be found in **Appendix 4**.

Workshop Logistics: All the workshop sessions were held at the W.A.D.E on weekdays from 1 pm -5 pm. Tony Ataunya, the Executive Director of W.A.D.E, was helpful in facilitating access to the building and support to use the building. Nova Scotia Power supported the workshop by cooperating to help organize services so the workshop could be successful. Tea, coffee and snacks (– fruit, granola bars, muffins etc.) were arranged by MicroResearch as the cost of local catering was too expensive. Each participant was encouraged to bring their own mug in order to decrease use of disposables.

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 Day 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 10 half day program was compressed into 9 because of the holiday on the first Monday. 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.

Research Questions:

(i.e. unrefined questions/ objectives) for development into an overview research proposal during the workshop:

Team "Prestons Township":

- For families in Preston Township- why do you make the food choices you choose for your family?

The rest of the workshop was devoted to refining their research questions and developing the proposal overview including background, methods, budget, knowledge translation etc. all with the help of the MR coach Dr. Ingrid Waldron. 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 "Prestons Township":

Title: Cultural traditions and food choices: how does Preston Township shape up?

Research question: What cultural factors influence food choices in Preston Township?

Objective: To learn about how the culture of African Nova Scotians in the Preston Township influences their family food choices.

The highlight on the final day of the workshop (**Appendix 7**) was the oral presentation describing team's proposal overview to answer their research question. The presentation included a 10-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:

Four distinguished judges were invited to adjudicate the presentations.

- Adena Cox, Research, IWK Health Centre
- Cora Lee Joudrey, Clinical Health Services Lead, NSHA Preston
- Karen Hudson, Principal, Auburn Drive High School
- Mort Simmonds, Pastor
- Crystal Watson, Director, Recreation Nova Scotia

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**).

Judges Comments:

The judges were very impressed at the importance of the question for this community- it is seen as very compelling. The passion shown by the team for this problem shone through and the team work was impressive. 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 very useful in other communities in Nova Scotia both African Canadian and other communities.

The judges had a number of specific suggestions for strengthening the proposal (**Appendix 9**). This team was supported by volunteer coach who is keen to continue working with the team to ensure ultimate success.

Workshop Assessment

An assessment of the workshop by participants was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted anonymously. All 5 eligible 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 exceptionally well together. They themselves noted the commitment of the team members and valued the diversity (**Appendix 11**).

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

Administrative Considerations:

- The venue worked well. While several participants had to travel this was made easier by car pooling.
- The lack of internet access did limit ability for participants to search for information and articles while at the site.
- The use of personal mugs to minimize paper waste worked well.
- The granola bars and banana snacks were well received along with the coffee and tea. As noted in the post workshop evaluation – access to a fridge would have helped with diversity of snacks
- The fans and cross breezes helped keep the room cool.

Educational Considerations:

- This workshop focused on the communities in the Preston Townships. Given the heritage here, the revised NSHA commitment to African Nova Scotian and Indigenous health needs to be added to MR grant writing
- Would have been helpful to have had local EHS involved but appears to be difficult to get time allocated for their presence.
- Comments from the teachers and participants will help further refine the lectures.
- Extraordinary rapid bonding into a team. Very small number of participants meant participants teacher and coach all grew to knew each other well quickly.
- MR had never contemplated such a small workshop before – this size occurred because of happenstance as noted above but ended up as a great success. The small size meant ease of asking questions came quickly, team mentoring was easy. Much more back and forth than can be managed with 2 to 4 teams. Participants noted in the evaluation that this was a safe environment to work in. The small size may have contributed to the feeling of safety and openness for participation – not a small issue for this community.

Acknowledgements:

The MicroResearch-NS would like to express our gratitude:

MicroResearch 2018

To the 5 participants for the time, energy and passion they put into their proposal overview- an impressive small but mighty team who did amazing work

The guest teachers who supported the participants

To Ingrid Waldron for her dedication, commitment and effort in coaching this team.

To Research Services at IWK and NSHA for supporting MicroResearch

To Heather Rushton for her superb support for the infrastructure for this workshop

To the judges for giving so generously of their time and talents

To Barbara Hamilton-Hinch, who was scheduled to guest teach but had to cancel due to a death in the family but made a special trip in to meet the team later in the week

To David Hendsbee who attended the final days presentation and offered comments and insights

Respectfully submitted by

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The Preston Township MicroResearch Team

