



**Final Report:  
MicroResearch Nova Scotia Workshop  
Annapolis Valley Workshop held in Kentville, Nova Scotia  
Nov 14 –Nov 24, 2017**

***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 Nov 14 and Nov 24 the first MicroResearch-NS Workshop in the Western Zone of the Nova Scotia Health Authority was held at the Kentville Municipal Building in the Kentville, NS.

The site co-ordinating team for the MicroResearch-NS Annapolis Valley site included Cari Patterson, Director, Horizons Community Development Associates; Nancy Stewart, Health Promoter, Public Health, Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia Health Authority and Ellen Stoddard of ET Stoddard Consulting Services. The workshop was led by Noni MacDonald with Will Webster, Anne Godden Webster, Bob Bortolussi and Shawna O’Hearn. Heather Rushton provided the MicroResearch administrative support and Vicki Crowell from Horizons, the local support. The Workshop was carried out in collaboration with

- Kentville Municipality
- Dalhousie University Faculties of Medicine and Health Professions
- IWK Health Centre, Pediatrics, Research Services
- Nova Scotia Health Authority, Research Development Office
- Horizons Community Development Associates
- Kings County RCMP
- Fidelis House, Annapolis Valley Regional Hospital

### **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.

### **MicroResearch-NS Program Model**

The fundamentals of the MicroResearch-NS program include:

Workshops:

- Training – participants are taught practical and applied community focused research skills

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 Workshop in the Annapolis Valley, Kentville Municipal Building**

After discussion and thought the Annapolis Valley was selected at the first Western Zone site for a MicroResearch-NS Workshop with Cari Patterson, Nancy Stewart and Ellen Stoddard given their community connections and leadership backgrounds as the site co-ordinating team. They arranged for the program to be

held at the Kentville Municipal building – a site very suitable for MicroResearch-NS workshop.

**Participants:** Workshop participants were recruited through personal meetings, referrals and online invitations by the site coordinating team. In addition a “Meet and Greet” was held approximately two weeks before the workshop (November 1, 2017 ) by the site coordinating team where Heather Rushton briefly spoke about MicroResearch to potential participants and answered questions. This was a great success and helped participants better understand MicroResearch as well as providing a great opportunity for them to meet each other prior to the workshop. This was the first time such an event was held.

The breadth and depth of experiences of the participants were remarkable. Initially 20/21 participants enrolled in the Workshop with two having to withdraw due to pressing commitments leaving a total of 18/19. The 18/19 while odd reflects two people sharing their place – so their regular job could be done. To make this work they spoke each evening to bring the other ups to speed to their team would not be jeopardized and their MR certificate in the end – shared. A complete list of participants is available in **Appendix 1**.

### **Pre Workshop Assessment**

A summary of the findings of nine pre-workshop assessment are shown in **Appendix 2**.

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 . The community focus was appealing to many participants.

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

The faculty teaching the workshop filled in as **Coaches** until the local coaches could connect. The timing of the workshop- i.e. mornings, and the time of year –for academics made this difficult. The local coaches can be found in **Appendix 4**.

**Workshop Logistics:** All the workshop sessions were held at the Kings County Municipal Building on weekdays from 8:30 am -12:30pm. The workshop was modified to be 9 days because November 13, 2017 was a holiday as Remembrance Day fell on the Saturday before the workshop. The site provided had IT, computer projector and screen access ample space for the three teams as well as easy parking. Tea, coffee and snacks etc. were arranged by the site coordinating team – fruit and home made cookies.

**Workshop Format:** The MicroResearch-NS workshops combined interactive seminars, exercises and daily small group interdisciplinary, project development sessions supported by local site coaches. Course participants were divided into three “groups” by the MicroResearch-NS faculty on Day 2 of the workshop series such that each group included a variety of professional disciplines and gender equity across the groups. Each groups had 6 members. By Day 5, the three groups had evolved into “Teams” who focused their time, energy and effort on addressing a research question they had agreed to investigate.

The daily attendance was moderate to good- there were several days when teams were missing several participants, and some participants missed 1 or 2 days. This was due to family emergencies and prior work commitments.

**Workshop Program Overview:**

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

On Day 2, each group vigorously discussed the merits of each of their individual research questions (See **Appendix 6**). One question was then selected as their team workshop project. For one group this proved difficult as several questions had much appeal.

Day 3: A spokesperson for each group presented the list of questions to the entire class, noted the one selected by the team and then the rationale for its selection. Following a lecture on quantitative research methods, the two groups then worked on these questions, further refining them. In one group- the initial question was changed as discussion had revealed concerns that finding the answer might or might not be able to change any outcome.

**Research Questions:**

The final three topics selected by the teams (i.e. unrefined questions/ objectives) for development into an overview research proposal during the workshop

**Team 1:** What can help create sense of community; which elements are needed?

**Team 2:** What's preventing people living in public housing from growing their own food?

**Team 3:** What factors influence or affect the level of social connectedness of people in a growth centre of North Kentville?

The rest of the workshop was devoted to refining their research questions and developing proposal overviews including background, methods, budget, knowledge translation etc. Other presentations focused on report writing, manuscript

development, creating posters and abstracts as well as how to create a research PPT.

### **Team Research Proposal Overview Presentations and Judging**

The three refined research aims/ questions presented by the teams on last Day for adjudication were:

**Team 1:** Do participants in a Buddy-Type program become more engaged in community activities and what are the transferrable qualities of the program?  
*Rec Buddies Exploration*

**Team 2:** What factors influence the ability of families with dependent children living in north Kentville's public housing, to grow their own food?

**Team 3:**  
Is close proximity to parks and open space a factor in the experience of "community connectedness" in young families in three neighborhoods in North Kentville?

The highlight on the final day of the workshop (**Appendix 7**) was the oral presentations describing how each team would attempt to answer their research question. Each 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:**

Five distinguished judges were invited to adjudicate the presentations.

- Gerry Johnston (Dalhousie University)
- Chris Giacomantonio (RCMP)
- Sandra Snow (Mayor, Town of Kentville)
- Deborah Conner (Executive Director Annapolis Valley Regional Hospital Foundation)
- Cari Patterson (Director, Horizons Community Development)

The judges listened to the presentations, asked questions and then deliberated on whether each of the projects 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 noted that all three questions were important, timely and relevant to the local community and to Nova Scotia. The judges commented that it was very evident the much effort that had gone into developing the proposal overviews and into the high quality of the presentations and responses to questions. There was

much appreciation of each team's recognition of the importance of involving community earlier in these projects. There was some concern that there might be overlap in the target groups to be involved in the project. This could be a strength if well managed as the project findings may dovetail but there is risk of participant fatigue if not well organized. Hence the three teams need to stay in touch. The knowledge translation and budget sections appeared to be on track and were well done. The next steps seemed reasonable. Of note- the world café process might work well for all three teams to consider given their questions.

The judges had a number of specific suggestions for strengthening each proposal (**Appendix 9**). Each team were supported by volunteer coaches who stated that they were keen to continue working with the teams to ensure ultimate success.

No best team presentation was selected as all had done well.

### **Workshop Assessment**

An assessment of the workshop by participants was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted anonymously. 12 eligible participants completed the final participant evaluation form. The scores and summary of comments are presented in **Appendix 10**.

### **Team Evaluations**

From the viewpoint of the coaches and facilitator the teams worked exceptionally well together. They themselves noted the commitment of the team members and valued the diversity (**Appendix 11**).

### **Comments and Recommendations**

#### **Outcomes and Recommendations from the Annapolis Valley -NS Workshop**

##### **Administrative Considerations:**

The local site committee (Nancy Stewart, Ellen Stoddard and Cari Paterson with the support of Vicki Crowell) did a remarkable job of recruiting diverse workshop participants, organizing for a great site and ensuring the daily smooth running of the workshop.

Each site needs solid, dedicated local leadership and local organization for MicroResearch-NS to be successful. This committee's success in recruiting the diversity of participants exemplified the value and importance of this. They sent out and connected with over 70 potential participants and 25 came to a meet and greet to learn more about the proposed workshop. Twenty of these came to first day of workshop and 17 (includes the shared post) completed. Holding a meet and greet

where Q&As about the workshop can be addressed needs to be considered in future workshop preparations.

More discussions are needed to see how to best fit timing of the workshop – participants needs and coaches availability. Coach support for the teams during and especially after the workshop concludes is much needed to ensure each team completes and submits a full proposal for funding consideration. The Coaches are critically important for supporting and encourage teams to complete their proposals and following through.

**Educational Considerations:**

Having a variety of topic experts and coaches participate in the workshop sessions and provides insights to support teams was very helpful (e.g. Shawna O’Hearn, Anne Godden Webster, Lesley Frank, Meaghan Sim) and kept the workshop sessions and group discussions flowing. Consideration needs to be given to determining how this can be done in the more outlying areas in the province such as in Cape Breton.

The revised 9 day workshop lectures that took into account the holiday worked relatively well but was packed. Losing a day in week one had more impact than if had been in week two as less refined question by weekend than usual. The morning session time also meant could not run overtime. A number of participants raised concerns about the homework –but because the session ended sharp at 12:30 this meant less time than had happened in other workshops where some team members might stay for an additional hour. I.e. decreasing any “home work time “needed.

Comments from the teachers and participants will help further refine the lectures.

**Acknowledgements:**

The MicroResearch-NS Facilitators would like to express our gratitude to the following people who were instrumental in helping to making this Western Zone MicroResearch-NS workshop a success:

- The participants for their time and the energy and passion they put into their proposal overviews
- The teachers and coaches who supported the participants
- The Municipality of Kings and the Town of Kentville for providing the site and to site coordinating committee for set up and arrangements for refreshments
- The site coordinating committee for the recruitment of participants and the efforts to support participants
- Research Services at IWK and NSHA for supporting MicroResearch
- Heather Rushton for her superb support for the infrastructure for this workshop

MicroResearch 2017

The judges for giving generously of their time and talents

Respectfully submitted by

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