

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2021-2022

NEIL FORBES, PHD IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

*Translating Indigenous Research Methodologies to Empower Community Led Research****Description of Research***

Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach (auto-ethnography, storywork, and translational research), the purpose of this thesis is to support and examine a community-led research project's processes to understand how an academic can use their research skills and translate relevant and effective Indigenous theory and methodology into community-led praxis. This work is framed within traditional ways of knowing and being, to empower community led research and promote better health outcomes for urban Indigenous communities.

The overarching research objective is to support the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre, Prince Edward Island's (PEI) only non-political organization that services the PEI's urban Indigenous population. My PhD work will collaborate with their Llika' Wksitqumuk (Walk the Earth) project, which aims to support the needs of First Nation, Inuit and Métis families with children with special needs by developing an outdoor education program. This work will continue to demonstrate the importance of urban Indigenous programming (Newhouse, 2012), the validity and importance of Indigenous research methodologies (Tobias et al., 2013), and the importance of self-determination of Indigenous communities as the most crucial determinant of health (Reading & Wien, 2009).

As an urban Indigenous member of Saddle Lake Cree Nation, I was raised on PEI by a loving and caring mother and grandparents (non-Aboriginal) in a province that has an Indigenous population of 1,730, with 70% of that population living off-reserve (Newhouse, 2012). It was not until my twenties that I realized the impact of being raised away from my language and culture. The machinations of colonization successfully colonized me; however, I am excited and proud to spend the rest of my life working towards decolonization to support my daughter, family, and community. My thesis directly results from my cultural reclamation experience in creating the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN) 2019 funded research project titled "*Creation Stories: Creating Strong Families Through Our Stories*" (a partnership with the MFRC and Holland College). We created culturally grounded curriculum for both a pre-natal and early year's program for expectant urban Aboriginal parents (newborn to 3 years of age). The project and our relationship were a success, and in September of 2021, I officially joined the MFRC's Llika' Wksitqumuk project.

Since enrolling in my Interdisciplinary Ph.D., my experience and relationships have guided me to focus my thesis on urban Indigenous health, wellbeing, and self-determination through the translation of Indigenous research methodologies. My thesis intends to utilize an interdisciplinary methodology. This approach will include auto-ethnography, storywork, translational research, and transformational Indigenous praxis to create a transformative framework for better understanding the researcher/community relationship. The process and outcomes will follow OCAP guidelines so the community will continue to own their story.

For a timeline, I intend to defend my comprehensive examinations by December of 2022 and have a thesis proposal submitted and approved by January of 2023.

Research Outcomes

Like most aspects of Indigenous/government relations in Canada, Urban Indigenous organization have little autonomy to create change that is designed and implemented specifically for their community (Laforest, 2011). Community led research is a way to create community led change, but how can they have access to the institutional knowledge of academia without giving up control in the context of existing underfunded and time-demanding programs (Holkup et al., 2004). In the context of the MFRC's community-led research priorities, self-determination, achieved through healing, decolonization, transformation, and mobilization (Smith, 2012) this research will contribute to the knowledge base that is needed to grow and evolve a decolonized Indigenous research paradigm (Cochran et al., 2008; Wilson, 2008) by examining current trends in knowledge translation and generate a list of wise practices (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015) for the MFRC to consider.

Knowledge Sharing

- Attending monthly staff meetings at the MFRC
- Attended MFRC 5 year strategic planning meeting

Completed Project Deliverables

- Completed comprehensive examination paper and pass oral defense on January 16th, 2023.

Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- Complete and submit PhD proposal by March 2023;
- Write and submit ethics applications to the University of New Brunswick and Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch by August 2023.

Activities Outside of Your Research

- Attended National Gathering of Indigenous Graduate Students Conference in June 2022;
- Attended the 'Take It Outside' forest school training by Fredericton's Friendship Centre 'Under One Sky'; September, 2022
- Completed Wilderness First Aid Training Fredericton, NB with staff of Lika' Wksitqumuk; January 2023;
- Supported MFRC's application to the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being Enhanced Support Grants; February, 2023

Future Plans

I have submitted both my comprehensive examinations. I have been given verbal confirmation that I passed my first comprehensive question and have been instructed to move on to my oral defense presentation while I am awaiting confirmation for my second. I plan to have my thesis proposal draft submitted to my committee by January 2023.

References

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