

Summary Report

Atlantic Indigenous Mentorship Network Kausattumi Grants Program, 2022-2023

NEIL FORBES, PHD IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre's path to growth and the systemic insouciance that blocks progress

Description of Research

In the context of a government that continues to ignore the urban Indigenous populations right to self-governance, self-determination, treaty rights, and underfund urban Indigenous organizations and research, **my research question is as follows: How can an urban Indigenous organization thrive in the context of systemic complexities and governmental insouciance?** Evolving directly from my ongoing relationship with the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre (MFRC) and created in the context of Shawn Wilson's conception of an Indigenous research paradigm, where your research is guided by your relationships and your ability to be accountable to those relationships, I am utilizing Indigenous Storywork (ISW), the wholistic methodology of meaning-making based on the stories, experiences, and understandings of a community, to co-create MFRC's interrelated understanding of their historical, political, cultural, social contexts to develop a deeper understanding of their reality and needs. This would include interviews with MFRC staff, community members, community partners, and other Atlantic Indigenous Friendship Centers. By incorporating the practice of story-talk, story-listening, story-learn and story-teach (analysis of community interviews, field notes, reports, documents, and self-reflection), ISW allows us the opportunity to create community-specific understanding their past and present, while simultaneously affording me as a researcher, the opportunity to support and contribute to their future strategies. By co-creating a deeper understanding of the MFRC's story, I intend to demonstrate the importance of utilizing an Indigenous research paradigm to understand and support urban Indigenous community-led systemic change.

Research Outcomes

It is my goal to have my thesis project be of immediate use to the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Center. By basing my project on a reciprocal relationship, and having the perceived needs and vision of the MFRC guide my work, I intend to add to the discussion on the role of academic researcher in community lead research. For example, while we have not started, through conversation, I have learned that a priority for the MFRC is to receive tax free status, allowing them the ability to retain current staff that they have already trained, but be in a better position to afford highly qualified, Indigenous staff. Because they are underfunded, understaff, and overwhelmed, this type of project ends up being low priority, even though it

would be a significant systemic change for the positive. If asked, I could use my time and experience to support their efforts towards a tax-free designation.

Knowledge Sharing

“Mi’Kmaq Family Resource Centre’s Path to Growth and the Systemic Insouciance that Blocks Progress” Thesis Presentation, 2023 National Gathering of Graduate Students, October 12, 2023, Membertou First Nation, Nova Scotia

Completed Project Deliverables

- Comprehensive examinations: completed January 2023
- Thesis committee finalize thesis question: February 2023
- Formal thesis agreement with community partner: February 2023
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Forthcoming Project Deliverables

- PhD proposal defense, December 2023
- Upon a successful defense of my thesis proposal, in April of 2024, after winter semester ends, I will complete and submit my ethics applications.
- With ethics approval, I will begin my data collection, which will include community interviews, field notes, analyzing reports and documents.
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Activities Outside of Your Research

- One year term contract, Assistant Professor, University of Prince Edward Island’s Faculty of Indigenous Knowledge, Education, Research, and Applied Studies (IKERAS): 2023-2024
- Invited to participate in community partners 5-year strategic planning: February, 2023
- Presentation: “Indigenous Research, Relationships, and Accountability”. Maritime SPOR Support Unit Annual Meeting, June 22, 2023
- Completion of Llika’Wksitqumuk (Walk The Earth) Project, an urban Indigenous outdoor education project funded by Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care’s Quality Improvement Project, in collaboration with my community partner, the Mi’Kmaq Family Resource Center: October, 2023
- Forthcoming, peer reviewed publication: “Kiskisom: Decolonization of the Settler Colonial Self”. tba: Journal of Art, Media, and Visual Culture, 5(1). Expected publication date, December 2023

Future Plans

I have been fortunate enough to receive a one-year contract as an Assistant Professor with the University of PEI’s Faculty of Indigenous Knowledge, Education, Research, and Applied Studies (IKERAS). Teaching two courses this semester (Fall 2023) has been a wonderful experience and reinvigorated my love of teaching (I went to school to be an elementary school teacher). Because my first priority is my family, and as a result, the need to stay on the island,

the extension of my current position will determine whether or not I stay in academia or pivot into consulting.