



PROFILE ON SHERI HARPER: 2008 EcoHEALTH RESEARCH GRANT RECIPIENT

Generally it is suggested that climate change will cause changes in precipitation, runoff, and hydrological extremes which might increase the risk and incidence of infectious disease. For example, heavy rainfall events, flooding events, and increased temperature increase the risk of waterborne illnesses substantially – especially in northern Canada. Thus, collaboration with Nunatsiavut communities evolved into a study (2008) comparing weather patterns, drinking water quality, and infectious gastrointestinal illness outcomes. However, for the study results to be utilized and applied, the study results needed to be shared with local residents. The primary goal of this intervention study was to develop locally appropriate educational media in Rigolet to build community capacity to understand and identify potential risks, and adapt and manage future changes in water quality due to a changing climate.

Together with a Rigolet research assistant, Labrador Grenfell Health Authority, Nunatsiavut Government, and Northern Lights Academy (NLA) teachers and staff, we designed, developed, and implemented this intervention study. A five-day hands-on workshop was co-implemented with stakeholders to teach high school students (1) how weather and water data are collected and analysed; (2) about local weather-water-health relationships uncovered in the Weather-Water-Health study; and (3) about health media campaign design and implementation. Then, the students were asked to identify a message from the Weather-Water-Health study results that they felt was most relevant and important to their community. Students then created proposals that described their message, identified the best medium to communicate the message, and outlined a media dissemination plan. Student proposals were reviewed and commented on by NLA teachers, Labrador Grenfell Health, Nunatsiavut Government, Rigolet Inuit Community Government, and representatives from the University of Guelph and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Students incorporated this feedback into their final media campaign. The media campaign was launched at a community celebration at the school, where student media was showcased. It was hoped that this method would facilitate the identification of a locally appropriate and relevant health campaign message, and the development of culturally appropriate media to communicate the message (health media campaign by Inuit for Inuit).

Based on very positive informal feedback from the community and stakeholders, the Nunatsiavut Government translated the media into Inuttitut and will distribute the translated media in all Nunatsiavut communities in March 2010. A process evaluation will evaluate how well the program operated and will focus on what the program does and for whom, and an outcome evaluation will help determine the short term changes (if any) in weather-water-health knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours as a result of the program, and whether the program is having the intended effect. This information will provide insight on the usefulness of the program, and will inform future knowledge translation tool development and research. Digital equipment purchased for the workshops formed a small 'Digital Library' in NLA to promote technology skills development, and contribute to the expansion of educational opportunities. A second small 'Travelling Digital Library' is currently being created to provide researchers with media equipment to take to Nunatsiavut communities they are working with to help facilitate knowledge translation. The collaborations, partnerships, and interest generated by this research led to a community-driven and directed project entitled *Changing Climate, Changing Health, Changing Stories*, which successfully obtained Federal funding (\$200K) for community research on climate change and adaptation.

I am very thankful to be a part of CoPEH-Can. The CoPEH-Can course was a fantastic opportunity to be taught and mentored by world leaders in EcoHealth, where I was introduced to many EcoHealth tools, methods, and values that I have already found useful in my MSc work, and I will undoubtedly use throughout my career. Furthermore, the mentorship and friendship provided by both the CoPEH-Can core team and the students continues to be an incredibly valuable source of inspiration and support. Overall, my thesis work substantially contributed to, and enhanced my understanding of the complexities and intricacies of the relationships between the Arctic environment and Inuit health, as well as the importance of using an EcoHealth approach. This approach resulted in richer, locally relevant, and context specific data, lasting friendships with stakeholders, and hopefully increased the sustainability of interventions. Furthermore, this multi-faceted approach allowed synthesis between scientific research, community involvement, and transdisciplinarity that created new ideas and concepts that would not have otherwise emerged.

