

N S H R F



2017-18 Annual Report

A Solid Foundation

The Establishment Grant

The Establishment Grant is one of NSHRF's most coveted awards, with successful recipients eligible for up to \$150,000 over three years. The purpose of the award is two-fold, to strengthen provincial research capacity and to provide a solid foundation for health researchers in the early stages of their careers.

Dr. Kyly Whitfield is one of the eight health researchers who competed successfully for Establishment Grants in 2017-18. Having accepted her first faculty position in the Department of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University only a year earlier, she's grateful for the opportunity. "The support I've received from NSHRF has been invaluable," she says. "New researchers need someone to give us our first break, so we can prove ourselves and start our research careers."

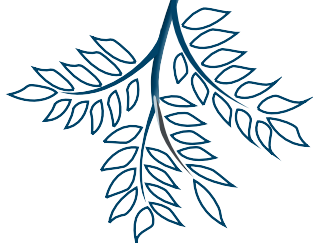
Dr. Whitfield was awarded the grant for her project to examine breastfeeding practices in Nova Scotia. She was inspired to conduct research in the province after completing her PhD at the University of British Columbia in relation to prenatal nutrition in Cambodia, a country where she says breastfeeding is completely normalized and accepted. According to Whitfield, Nova Scotia has some of the lowest rates of breastfeeding in Canada.

"The World Health Organization recommends that women breastfeed exclusively for the first six months," she

explains. "In Cape Breton, only ten percent of caregivers are following these recommendations and less than one quarter of Nova Scotian babies are being breastfed to this point."

To better understand local breastfeeding practices, Dr. Whitfield is focusing her research on a growing alternative to breastfeeding, pumping. She acknowledges that bottle-feeding human milk that's been pumped from the breast may benefit mothers as it allows other caregivers to help and is free of the stigma associated with breastfeeding, especially in public. However, Whitfield and her team wonder if the two feeding experiences are equivalent for infant health. More specifically, her research hopes to determine if the volume of human milk an infant consumes differs if they drink from a bottle versus the breast.

Embracing Nova Scotian culture, Dr. Whitfield uses a seafood analogy to explain her research. "The pacing of feeding is what we're interested in," she says. "For example, when served a lobster claw you have to shuck it, which requires time and effort, so you're less likely to over-consume." She wants to know if the same is true for breastfeeding, which she says is reliant on infant hunger and satiation cues, in comparison to bottle-feeding which allocates more control to the caregiver. "When bottle-feeding, the caregiver and gravity assist the infant, making it easier for them to consume more and feed until the bottle is empty, regardless of appetite."



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-Dr. Kyly Whitfield

There is currently little known about bottle-feeding practices in Nova Scotia. Dr. Whitfield and her team plan to interview infant caregivers and monitor their breastfeeding and bottle-feeding practices over a six-month period. She hopes the results of her research will contribute to the messaging surrounding infant feeding best practices in Nova Scotia. “Maybe caregivers here are brilliant bottle-feeders who are very responsive to their infants’ cues?” she questions. “These are the things we need to find out, so we can make proper feeding recommendations for infant health.”

Dr. Whitfield looks forward to completing research that she believes will support the health of Nova Scotians. “I love Nova Scotia,” she says. “I’m excited to take what I’ve learned abroad and apply it here.”

