FWI Funding Statement

Name: Tram Nguyen
Faculty/Area: Faculty of Health Sciences- Rehabilitation Science
Project title: Fostering inclusivity and collaboration: Empowering the voices of youth and students with disabilities

Please summarize how the FWI funds have been spent:
A summary by broad category is sufficient, line by line accounting of individual expenditures is not required unless specifically requested. Alternatively, please provide a copy of your FAS for the accounts that have been used for the FWI funds.
Salaries and benefits: 4,551.82
Equipment:
Event Costs: $448.18
Travel:
Other (please specify):

Balance remaining: $0
Please indicate how the balance will be spent and when you anticipate that the funds will be exhausted.
Please submit separately a maximum 3-page summary of the results of the project with particular attention to the following details:

1. How did the initiative foster collaboration and interdisciplinary?

We convened a Knowledge Translation and Exchange (KTE) Symposium within the Faculty of Health Sciences on November 22, 2016 to facilitate communication and knowledge exchange between key stakeholders including students with disabilities, healthcare providers, students, faculty and local community partners. The KTE Symposium also allowed us learn about student needs and preferences for disability research within McMaster and Hamilton communities. Key stakeholders were engaged in the research process from the beginning, to ensure that identified issues were reflective of their needs through fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and communication between students and Faculty across campus. Connections were made throughout McMaster University and surrounding communities within Hamilton to foster meaningful partnerships.

2. How did the initiative demonstrate innovation and risk-taking?

This project is innovative as it utilized a research community and citizen-engagement approach, an emerging strategy called “integrated knowledge translation” to engage key stakeholders (here the research community at McMaster and citizens [students] throughout the entirety of this project. This approach was used to ensure the objectives and outcomes were relevant and applicable and aimed to increase knowledge uptake. This allowed graduate students and faculty as part of CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research at McMaster University to connect with the local community in a novel way, to lay the groundwork for future collaboration and engagement.

3. How did the initiative enhance McMaster’s position as a research-focused student-centred institution?

The symposium was an interdisciplinary and interactive collaborative opportunity for students and Faculty. The focus of this project was to give students a voice to address their needs and concerns for research thus enhancing student experience broadly. This aligns well with McMaster’s position as a research-focused, student-centred institution by addressing the needs of students and supporting research.

4. How did the initiative encourage collaboration between faculty members and students?

The symposium consisted of three groups 4-5 heterogeneous members including students (graduate and undergraduate), faculty and community members. Discussion included research priorities and methods of connecting interested students with researchers and community partners encouraging the development of collaborative partnerships.
5. What were the outcomes of the project? How was success measured and demonstrated?

Groups discussed several objectives using a problem-based approach:

Objective 1- Identify available resources and supports within McMaster and Hamilton communities for disability research/services and areas of improvement in research and service offerings. **Outcome:** Groups determined that available resources on campus include different research centres with a shared interest in disability, McMaster Student Resources, faculty/meetings (opportunities to attend). Physical barriers identified include inaccessible spaces discouraging participation of students with disabilities. Conceptual challenges included the differing constructs of disability, social, personal identities and the notion that disability does not equal diversity.

Objective 2- Brainstorm strategies to connect student and faculty and identify a preferred method of communication and engagement. **Outcome:** Preferred methods of communication included lectures or workshops. Several engagement opportunities included: 1) updating current websites to ensure usability and accessibility (eg. for course selection), 2) hosting “speed dating” events between students and researchers to enhance communication and knowledge exchange, 3) webinars, 4) capacity building via emailing lists for new opportunities, and 5) peer mentoring to connect stakeholders within the University and Hamilton communities.

Objective 3- Identify 3 key recommendations to enhance student experiences and engagement between students and Faculty with McMaster and Hamilton communities. **Outcome:** Disability and disability research awareness was critical for many participants. Any new initiative should include participation between students and Faculty.

i. Engaging Students with a Disability (SWD) by Improving Accessibility.

ii. Centralized User-Friendly Hub.

iii. Social Events (e.g. a graduate-undergraduate mentorship program) to Engage Graduate/Undergraduate Students with Faculty and Community Members.

Participant feedback was acquired through pre and post symposium survey questionnaires to seek input on impact and effectiveness. The majority of participants found the symposium to be extremely informative and enjoyed being involved in the research process. Some example responses include:

"Having discussions with faculty members, other undergraduate and graduate students and students with disabilities. everyone came from a diverse background that allowed me to learn from their perspectives"

"I really like the idea of brainstorming on your own, as a group, plus then as a big group - great structure!"
"The small group setting, getting to hear everyone's opinions rather than a huge crowd of people in a big room. Easier to speak up."

"I got a chance to hear about these issues that I was not aware of and learned a lot of what's available."

6. How will the impact of the project be sustained now that the initial funding has been exhausted?

The impact of this project will be sustained through involvement in the development and formation of a centralized virtual hub to connect students and Faculty with an interest in childhood disability, including young adults, within McMaster and Hamilton communities. Purposes would include: fostering partnerships, identifying priority research areas, and enhancing student experiences for research and education. This hub will create a contact point for students, faculty and community members to connect with each other to facilitate knowledge exchange and cultivate shared interests.

The investigators of this FWI project will continue to work with the Faculty and community members to build capacity for this work as well as develop meaningful resources and events to facilitate participation and engagement.

The McMaster Students Union (MSU), has piloted a program called Maccess in the 2016-17 year. Maccess is designed to advocate for students with disabilities on campus and is run by students with a disability. In addition to advocacy, they provide avenues for peer support and opportunities for people with disabilities to become more involved with the MSU, which can ultimately act as a springboard to becoming more involved in other areas on campus. Another primary goal of the group is to advocate for the development of a disabilities studies minor for all students within McMaster University. As a minor program at a major research institution, it is important for there to be disability-related research available for students to participate in undergraduate research projects.

Fitting then is the work completed as part of this FWI, which sought to provide more opportunities for students with disabilities to be involved in research. After a conversation with the current director of Maccess, we came to the conclusion that our group and the project would fit well within their “accessibility forum”. This is an annual event connecting youth and policymakers at the university but to date, no researchers have been involved. The accessibility forum is run in a roundtable-style allowing for multiple roundtable “topics.” This structure would enable researchers and students with disabilities to attend to explore goal setting in research and the development of research partnerships.

The financial and project reports can be submitted to fwi@mcmaster.ca.