**Robin Rigby Trust Mid-term Reporting**

*Prepared by*: Sarah Newell

*Project*: Collaborative community-based coastal monitoring and harvesting in Chesterfield Inlet

The community-based monitoring and harvesting program funded by the Robin Rigby Trust had two main purposes: to create a coastal monitoring program to record data regarding changes caused by climate change or shipping, and to provide opportunities through this program for community members to travel on the land to share Inuit Traditional Knowledge while monitoring and harvesting local marine mammals. This monitoring program will provide necessary data to local government for negotiating the proposed Marine Protected Area and related funding to protect and support food security and mental health through time spend on the land harvesting marine mammals, a traditional food source for Inuit living in the region. The changing regulations around travel to Nunavut during the pandemic has delayed in person collaboration with community members. However, the Robin Rigby Trust’s investment in this concept has resulted in an opportunity to expand the project as the result of the delays.

In the original application I proposed collaborating with community members in Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut for this project. Due to the high risk of community members to covid-19 and the limited health facilities in the region, I was unable to travel to Chesterfield Inlet to work on this project. This has meant engaging community through virtual meetings and meeting with key community partners in Winnipeg. This delay has also expanded the scope of this project to include community members in Coral Harbour and Naujaat in the coastal monitoring program.

Since submitting my application to the Robin Rigby Trust, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has moved forward with negotiations surrounding the Southampton Island Area of Interest which is the proposed site of the Marine Protect Area in the region. Coral Harbour is the community located on Southampton Island, just east of Chesterfield Inlet and south of Naujaat. The Area of Interest surrounds Southampton Island, along the harbour and Chesterfield Inlet waterway, and along the coast towards Naujaat. This is of particular importance for community members as current shipping traffic between Southampton Island and Cotes Island disrupts the walrus haul-out, and ships being docked in the Chesterfield Inlet harbour and traveling along the waterway have interfered with seal and beluga migration and habitats. As a result, the data collected from the community-based coastal monitoring program are essential for these communities to ensure that when the Marine Protected Area is negotiated it limits the impacts that shipping is having on their ability to harvest marine mammals safely and successfully.

As a result of the need for data to specifically inform the Marine Protected Area negotiations, the community-based monitoring program was expanded to include all three communities. I was also invited by Barnie Aggark, one of the grant collaborators who represents Chesterfield Inlet, along with community representatives from Coral Harbour and Naujaat to be their dedicated researcher for their communities. What began as a working group supported by the Robin Rigby Trust, the World Wildlife Fund, and MakeWay Canada, became an independent, incorporated society under the Government of Nunavut. As such, the work towards the goals and objectives outlined in our funding application are now being completed under the new Foxe Basin Kivalliq North Sapujiyiit/Guardians of the Sea Society – named for the Foxe Basin region of Hudson Bay and the three communities are the northern Kivalliq communities incorporated in our Society. Sapujiyiit is the Inuktitut word for guardians of the sea, rounding out the name and ensuring we are valuing Inuit knowledge from the very beginning.

We have since leveraged the Robin Rigby Trust (RRT) funds to secure additional funds to support this project. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) are going to provide funding to hire local current hunters from all three communities to monitor the marine coastal areas and collect the data required for this research project – aka “Guardians”. We have also applied for funds through the ArcticNet’s North-by-North grant, alongside the funds we received from the RRT, to include youth in a process of traveling on the land to develop the overall monitoring program with the Guardians and community elders. We have also been working with the Arctic Eider Society out of Sanikiluaq, Nunavut to use their SIKU app which is created by Inuit for Inuit to record monitoring data.

At the beginning of September 2022, I will be traveling to Chesterfield Inlet, as well as the other communities, to begin recruiting participants for this research project. We will identify two youth from each community who will work directly with us on developing this monitoring program. We will also identify four current hunters from each community to be hired as Guardians using the DFO funds to contribute data on a regular basis to this project. Finally, we will also identify interested elders for this research project. While youth and current hunters will be able to collect data about the current and future status of the coastal area, elders and current hunters will need to be interviewed to understand changes that occurred prior to the last few years since the SIKU app was launched.

As outlined in the original application, the data will be owned by the local community. The Foxe Basin Kivalliq North Sapujiyiit/Guardians of the Sea Society’s data policy is that each community’s local Hunters and Trapper’s Organization (HTO) will own and control the data. This means that our organization will collect data at the direction of the HTO, manage the data, provide the HTO will access to anonymous data, and prepare reports with their permission and at their direction. This way our research will align with the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami’s National Inuit Strategy on Research.

I wanted to take this opportunity in the midterm report to thank the Robin Rigby Trust you’re your patience with our delays and your ongoing support of this research project. By supporting me as an early career researcher, you created an opportunity for me to make an important impact for these small communities as I build my career. We look forward to sharing our progress and results with you as we move forward as a Society and on this research project. Many thanks!