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# ***It's the Basement Stories, not the Belt***

**Lessons from a community-university  
knowledge mobilisation collaboration**

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Academic research is under increasing pressure to be relevant to individuals and communities outside of the academy. Interest in increasing the impact of research on public policy and professional practice is growing in the United Kingdom (Holmes & Harris 2010), Australia (Butler 2007), Canada (Cooper & Levin 2010) and has been observed in other countries as well (Boaz, Fitzpatrick & Shaw 2009; Lavis et al. 2006). Methods of linking research to action include activities collectively referred to as knowledge mobilisation, knowledge transfer, knowledge translation and knowledge exchange, as well as other terms (Estabrooks et al. 2008; Gagnon 2011). These methods of linking academic research to policy or practice are not new concepts. The 19th-century US land grant colleges enshrined 'service to society' as a mandate, along with teaching and research (Bonnen 1998). One setting of such engaged scholarship is the ubiquitous support for university-industry engagement framed in paradigms of technology transfer and industry liaison (Agrawal 2001). Community-university engagement has received less institutional support and is either left up to individual researchers and their partners or is framed in institutional paradigms of civic engagement or service-learning (Lerner & Simon 1998), as well as community-based research (Hart & Wolff 2006; Minkler & Wallerstein 2003).

York University has previously described developing the first Canadian institutional capacity to support knowledge mobilisation (KMb), the way most universities support technology transfer (Phipps & Shapson 2009). York's institutional capacity to support KMb is based on methods of 'producer push, user pull' and knowledge exchange (Lavis 2003) and extends these to include the co-production of knowledge. These KMb services are based on a knowledge broker model (Lomas 2007; Ward, House & Hamer 2009) and use established tools such as clear language research summaries, graduate student interns, social media and knowledge exchange events to link researchers to non-academic research partners (Phipps 2010).

York University's KMb service is delivered in conjunction with community partners in York Region, led by the United Way of York Region (UWYR). Our community-university KMb partnership is similar to community-based research in a number of ways. Both feature co-production methods of research where community and university researchers work together to produce new knowledge that is both relevant to community needs and fulfils academic criteria for tenure and promotion. Both are change oriented, seeking to use research to inform decisions about public policy and professional practice. Both seek to 'level the playing field' and recognise the mutual value that both bring to the research partnership. However, there are also significant differences. (1) Community-based research often works on persistent social issues such as HIV/AIDS, Aboriginal concerns, poverty, health disparities and climate change. KMb is content agnostic. KMb seeks to broker relationships between researchers and non-academic research partners regardless of the topic or discipline. (2) Community-based research fosters relationships between community and university. KMb embraces research collaborations with community agencies but also works with governments, NGOs and the private sector. About 30 per cent of the service York's KMb Unit provides to non-academic agencies is provided to municipal and provincial government agencies. (3) In community-based research, the community identifies the research question. About 30 per cent of York's KMb service derives from university faculty seeking a community or other partner for their faculty-driven research projects. (4) Community-based research is a co-production method, while KMb also embraces methods of producer push such as clear language research summaries that make the results of academic research accessible to non-academic audiences. (5) At York University KMb is supported by university staff, while university faculty members undertake community-based research with their community researcher colleagues.

This article presents the lessons learned from four years of community-university collaboration for knowledge mobilisation. The lessons are based on reflection upon experience and practice data collected from KMb activities. From May 2006 to September 2010, York University's KMb Unit conducted 162 information sessions for community and government audiences and 132 information sessions for the university faculty and graduate students. York has engaged over 200 faculty (approximately 14 per cent of faculty) and 149 graduate students. We have brokered over 200 research and KMb relationships, working with 195 distinct community and government agencies. At each KMb event we collect survey data to complement the qualitative stories disseminated via 237 blog entries published on Mobilize This! ([www.researchimpact.wordpress.com](http://www.researchimpact.wordpress.com)) and over 3000 tweets, which are picked up by more than 1100 twitter followers (@researchimpact). In 2009–2010 York and our community partners from the United Way of York Region and the York Region District

School Board conducted a formal evaluation of the KMb Unit's activities. The findings of the evaluation were generally positive and are posted online (York University 2010). A component of this evaluation included the evaluation of York's Knowledge Mobilization Intern Program. The positive results of this evaluation have recently been released (Hynie et al. 2011).

Reflecting on this analysis has allowed us to identify common lessons learned through four years of community-university KMb collaboration. These lessons show that sustainable community-university collaboration is a journey not a destination. We first describe the partners, York University and the United Way of York Region, and the collaboration that has grown and evolved over four years. We then turn to a story of another journey taken by one of us, Daniele, as he travelled to spend the summer with his relatives. Both the getting there and the journey he took with his relatives after he arrived serve as allegories which highlight the lessons we have derived from our community-university partnership. We then present the lessons with examples drawn from our community-university KMb practice and conclude with a vision of what might be possible as we continue our journey.

### **ABOUT YORK REGION**

It might take a whole village to raise a child but it takes sustainable collaborations to support a population as diverse as York Region.

York Region sits to the north of Toronto, Canada's largest urban space. Administered by a regional government comprising nine independent municipalities, York Region ([www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)) covers 1776 km<sup>2</sup> and encompasses nine municipalities. York Region had a total population of 983 100 in 2007. With a five-year growth rate of 22 per cent (2001–2006) and with new Canadians making up 43 per cent of the population (almost twice that of the rest of Ontario), York Region is one of Canada's fastest growing and most diverse communities. It has elements of inner city (i.e. downtown Markham), high wealth creation (i.e. Vaughan), an Aboriginal reserve (in Georgina), rural agriculture (i.e. East Gwillimbury) and environmentally protected areas such as Oakridge's Moraine that crosses the townships of King and Whitchurch-Stouffville. The complex social and human service needs of such a diverse region are confounded by a relative lack of investment in human service infrastructure. In 2007, PriceWaterhouseCoopers released a report comparing the level of investment in human services in 905 (the telephone area code for the regional municipalities to the north, east and west of Toronto) with other regions in Ontario. The report showed that each 905 resident receives C\$218 less for social services than the average Ontarian, which translates into a total funding gap of C\$708.2 million – an increase in the total operating gap for social services of C\$156.7 million or an increase of 33 per cent from 2003/04 to 2005/06 (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007). This gap intensifies the need for human services provided at the community

level. Along with other social service organisations, United Way of York Region helps to bridge this gap not just with funding but with civic engagement, community building, leadership and a desire to work across all sectors to improve the quality of life of the citizens of York Region.

### **THE PARTNERS**

Established in 1976, United Way of York Region (UWYR) is a registered charity uniting people and resources to improve our communities. In its 2010 fundraising campaign, UWYR raised C\$8.1 million to support human services provided by its 39 member agencies, delivering 100 programs. UWYR also funds coalitions of residents and organisations. United Way identifies community priorities and works with partners to take action, supporting a network of 100 critical programs across the region's nine municipalities. Research on the provision of human services in York Region shows that UWYR touches one in three people across the region – over 290 000 in 2009 ([www.uwyr.on.ca](http://www.uwyr.on.ca)).

In 2008, United Way released what the media dubbed 'a landmark report', if addressed. The report juxtaposed York Region with the outer suburbs of Toronto circa 1979, comparing the current demographics of York Region with findings from *Metro suburbs in transition*, released in the late 1970s by the then Community Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto. The report articulated the single defining issue for the region and social services: the intersection of a breathtaking pace of growth, the changing face of growth and the places where this growth was happening.

In 2009, United Way released the follow-up, *Addressing our strengths* ([www.unitedwayyorkregion.com/pdf/2009/addressing\\_our\\_strengths\\_report.pdf](http://www.unitedwayyorkregion.com/pdf/2009/addressing_our_strengths_report.pdf)), gathering stories and themes and priorities from its most extensive community engagement process to date. The findings were simple: residents wanted United Way to help youth grow up strong; help individuals and families achieve economic independence; and support individual and community wellbeing. As important, the community asked United Way to focus on strength as opposed to focusing solely on need – supporting the rich and vibrant infrastructure of volunteer groups already at work across the region, and incubating new ideas to address our most pressing social issues.

All of this, of course, has focused not only the work of United Way but that of our partners, most specifically York University.

York University is Canada's third largest university with research and graduate programs, spanning the full spectrum of disciplines from health and the pure and applied sciences through business, law and the humanities, social sciences and the creative arts. York University is home to the Schulich School of Business, which is ranked 15th overall in the world and first in the world for international business programs. Osgoode Hall Law School

is ranked first in Canada for faculty quality, based on academic citations of research, and York University's Faculty of Fine Arts offers Canada's largest fine arts program.

York University is an active player in the civic and economic fabric of York Region and has a number of university outreach activities in collaboration with York Region communities, businesses and municipal governments. As described previously (Phipps & Shapson 2009), York University has invested in the first Kmb Unit in Canada that is fully integrated into the research enterprise of the university. Operational since 2006, the Kmb Unit serves to enhance access to research and research expertise so that academic research can inform decisions about public policy and professional practice.

### **EVOLUTION OF THE COLLABORATION**

UWYR is a key partner in York University's community outreach and engagement and a key player in York University's Kmb strategy. But this relationship took time to grow. We didn't plan to get to where we are now. Rather, it was a process of evolution. We started out by acting as gateways for our organisations. If a United Way member agency sought research expertise, the UWYR pointed them to the Kmb Unit. If a university professor sought a community partner, the Kmb Unit would seek the advice of UWYR. One-off researcher-agency project brokering allowed both organisations to develop trust and a shared understanding of community-university collaborations. We deepened our relationship by supporting each other in governance and decision-making roles. York University invited UWYR to sit on its Kmb Joint Advisory Committee. David Phipps was invited to sit on the UWYR Community Engagement & Research Committee and Daniele Zanotti was invited to sit on the President's Task Force on Community Engagement ([www.yorku.ca/commeng](http://www.yorku.ca/commeng)).

We also collaborated on projects of mutual benefit. Over the last two years, York University has posted 136 ResearchSnapshots, clear language research summaries, in an online searchable database ([www.researchimpact.ca/researchsearch/](http://www.researchimpact.ca/researchsearch/)). Over the summer of 2010 the Kmb Unit targeted research that falls under the UWYR's three strategic priorities: helping our youth grow up strong; enabling individuals and families to achieve economic independence; improving the wellbeing of individuals and the community. Of the 63 research projects submitted for drafting as ResearchSnapshots in 2010, 44 met one of the three UWYR priorities. These 44 ResearchSnapshots provide access to research and expertise that will assist UWYR and its member agencies in decision-making. Collaborating on shared projects creates value for both of our organisations.

UWYR and York University are publicly supporting each others' community outreach and engagement efforts by being visible at each other's events. Daniele speaks at each Kmb Expo, York University's annual Kmb colloquium (<http://researchimpact.wordpress.com/2010/03/11/525600-minutes/>) and David attends

and supports community consultations, such as those that led to the UWYR 2009 strategic planning document, *Addressing our strengths* (United Way of York Region 2010). Daniele was also a keynote speaker at the May 2010 York Leaders Roundtable ([www.yorku.ca/yfile/archive/index.asp?Article=14820](http://www.yorku.ca/yfile/archive/index.asp?Article=14820)). Beyond public speaking, we also publish together. You can read the top 10 lessons learned from knowledge mobilisation as articulated by David and Daniele in Phipps, Johnny and Zanotti (2009). Daniele has been featured in nine stories found on York University's KMb blog, Mobilize This! (<http://researchimpact.wordpress.com/>).

This publicly visible partnership has extended to investing in collaborative research projects. Over the summer of 2009, York's KMb Unit invested \$30 000 in each of two collaborative research projects between York researchers and York Region community partners. One collaboration examined mental health services for teen mothers in York Region and another collaboration explored youth resilience. Both of these collaborations continue today and have received additional funding, or are seeking funds to continue their work.

We have since evolved to co-funding graduate student interns. In the summer of 2010, UWYR and York University co-funded three graduate student interns to undertake neighbourhood-based research in York Region to help inform UWYR investment decisions. York University's KMb intern program (Hynie et al. 2011) has supported 31 graduate students working in research-based summer jobs for community partners. Students get real-world experience applying their emerging research talents and the community partners have a better sense of the potential for community-university collaborations. The three UWYR KMb interns: (1) undertook a literature review focusing on the impact of growth and change on human services and various responses to address the impact; (2) conducted social asset mapping in identified geographies of growth in York Region; and (3) identified, refined and piloted potential neighbourhood assessment tools for future consultation and engagement activities with residents, community groups, service providers and other key stakeholders. In addition to this co-investment in current KMb interns, Daniele hired a former York University KMb intern as part of UWYR's campaign staff. Hiring experienced KMb interns illustrates the value of the internship in training graduate students for a career in community-based work.

We have grown from being gateways into each other's networks to co-investing through a shared philosophy built on trust and experience. This four-year story of a growing relationship and a deepening trust between collaborators has allowed UWYR and York University to embark on a truly transformative or, as Daniele says, 'disruptive' ([www.unitedwayyorkregion.com/pdf/2010/AGM\\_remarks\\_DZanotti\\_June2010.pdf](http://www.unitedwayyorkregion.com/pdf/2010/AGM_remarks_DZanotti_June2010.pdf)) initiative. More on that later.

We now return to Daniele's story of his *zia* which illustrates the lessons learned from the York/UWYR KMb collaboration. The underlying message is that community-university collaborations

are about the journey not the destination. Sustainability is possible but it is not an end in itself. Sustainability is a by-product of a successful relationship which we will illustrate with examples from our knowledge mobilisation practice.

And now, Daniele's story.

*My best childhood summers always included a family trip to North Bay to visit my aunt and uncle, zia Angelina and zio Vittorio; four Zanottis packed into a Pontiac Parisienne with enough sandwiches, thermosed espresso and Milano 'S' cookies to last three weeks let alone four hours, singing along to classic Italian Alpini songs like 'Rosamunda' and 'Quel Mazzolin di Fiori'. And once there, in between a few trips to the corner store, church and visits to relatives, the bulk of our time was spent either at the basement table eating, preparing to eat, or cleaning up after we ate, and at the sewing machine, watching and listening as my zia weaved threads and stories of back home and relatives. A summer of stories, you might say.*

*My zia is a master seamstress and storyteller – one and the same trade. For a gift, each year she would make me one thing: a shirt, a bag, a hat, a scarf. I would stew over it for weeks, talk to my mother about it and then finally decide – a leather belt. My zia's answer was always the same, 'Ah, perfetto, a [insert garment here]. It is going to be the best [insert garment here] ever.'*

*And so that one hot and humid summer in North Bay, amid all the scraps of flowered fabric and plastic couch covers and threads, in the scent of always brewing espresso and fresh sauce and frying onions, with a radio crackling more Italian tunes on the large fold-out sewing table, I sat with my zia as she made me a thick brown belt – so thick it could hardly fit into my jean buckle.*

*I asked her, 'Can the leather be a little thicker zia?' and she told me stories of my nonno, her brother, the shoemaker, of my great uncle, a farmer, who grew figs and grapes. I asked her, 'Can we use a big silver buckle, bigger than the one you have?' and she told me about my great grandma, who never went to school a day but was the town mortician and advocate and counsellor. And then, after days that flew so fast, she turned, smiled and handed me the belt. 'Danie, the best belt ever.'*

*I was shaking with excitement, nervous as I strung it through my jeans. I kept repeating, 'So perfect, zia, so perfect'. I marvelled, 'How do you make it so perfect?'*

*And she turned the tiny radio off, and said, 'It's the basement stories, Danie, not the belt'.*

### **Lesson 1: Build on Shared Histories**

No one would spend four hours in a car with their family to visit strangers. Daniele's family members have a shared history as do UWYR and York University. Over 25 per cent of York University

students and 19 per cent of staff live in York Region, second only to students and staff from Metropolitan Toronto. York University staff and students contribute to and benefit from the human services of York Region in which UWYR is a key player. We also have considerable shared KMb history. Thirty-eight per cent (13/34) of York University KMb interns have had placements with York Region agencies and 38 per cent of requests for KMb services have come from York Region. This shared history is deepened by shared governance activities including York University's President's Task Force on Community Engagement and the Community and the UWYR Community Engagement & Research Committee. When considering community-university collaborations, you choose those potential partners with whom you have a shared history on which to build.

### **Lesson 2: Recognise that One Collaboration Comprises Many Small Activities**

Daniele and his family made trips to the store, visited their church and their relatives, and ate and sewed and talked. No trip is made up of a single activity and neither are community-university collaborations. While keeping your eye on the outcomes of your collaboration, you need to pay attention to the little things along the way. As described above, the three UWYR–York University KMb interns are undertaking neighbourhood-based research – a great collaboration. But in order to get the three interns to their jobs, the KMb Unit and UWYR sought buy-in and commitment from decision-makers and then developed: (1) a job description; (2) a process for soliciting and reviewing applications; (3) eligibility and evaluation criteria; (4) a timeline for applications and review; (5) work space and supervision requirements; (6) training requirements; and (7) an MOU for fund transfer – all before the students could begin. Pay attention to all the little details (which are often invisible to the outcomes of community-university partnerships) because these are the determinants of success and sustainability. The finished painting is made up of many, many brush strokes just as every community-university relationship is the product of many little activities along the way. Don't forget to track all these little activities (meetings, attendees, evaluations, outcomes, tweets, blogs, media stories, trainees etc). Count them because you're going to have to report on them. But also celebrate them because they are the heart of your collaboration.

### **Lesson 3: Seek Co-collaborators along the Way**

Daniele didn't go to visit just his *zia*. While there he visited other relatives, friends from church and all the store owners that sold the food they would need to keep the kitchen hopping. He visited and talked with all his family and relatives that summer. These are the allies, enablers, amplifiers and connectors of all our relationships and collaborations. The knowledge brokers who form the staff of the KMb Unit are the main connectors and supporters of community-university collaborations at York University but they do

not work in a vacuum. There are a number of other York University offices that support community-university engagement as outlined in the *Final report of the President's Task Force on Community Engagement* (2010). These diverse offices include Experiential Education, Office of University Events and Community Relations and the TD Centre for Community Engagement. Other examples of such allies and connectors include the Office of Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria ([www.uvic.ca/ocbr](http://www.uvic.ca/ocbr)), the Community-University Partnership Program (CUPP) of the University of Brighton ([www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp)) and the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship at the University of Guelph (formerly the Centre for Families, Work and Well-being [www.worklifecanada.ca](http://www.worklifecanada.ca)). The most established of these is the work of Cupp. Angie Hart has literally written the book on community-university partnerships (Hart, Maddison & Wolff 2008). Cupp is based on a Community of Practice model (Hart & Wolff 2006) and employs a knowledge broker who operates the Research Help Desk (Hart et al. 2009). When seeking out your community or university partner(s), look to the enablers of community-university collaborations in your locality and use them for guidance and support.

#### **Lesson 4: Collect the Stories as well as the Outcomes**

As Daniele sat in the basement, his family cooked dinners and shared the summer's stories. If food was the outcome, then the stories were the process that got them there. In learning about what works for sustainable community-university collaborations, it is important to recognise that the process is as important as the outcome. It is even more important if your goal is to leave a legacy from which others can learn. This was well articulated by Andrew Campbell and Nick Schofield (2007) who urged research funders to 'fund the arrows as well as the boxes'. When we surveyed our online and community users in 2009, they told us that one of the developments they would like to see is more information about KMb tools. In the fall of 2010 we launched a series called the 'KMb Tool Box' in which we articulated different KMb tools representing the processes for many of our main KMb services. Not all tools will work in all contexts and modification will be required to tailor the tools to different community-university situations. Nonetheless, these tools will serve as the arrows (= processes) that connect the boxes (= outcomes). Seek out the right tools for community-university engagement so that they become the stories that are exchanged while cooking the food.

#### **Lesson 5: Think Carefully about Outcomes**

Daniele thought hard before deciding that, this specific year, he wanted a new leather belt. Similarly, sustainable community-university partnerships require careful consideration and usually refinement by evolution as much as by design. For sure, some quick wins are important. One type of quick win that the KMb Unit supports is a request for a 'Lunch & Learn' speaker. The request

is received, speaker identified, Lunch & Learn session happens, speaker leaves and everyone is happy. Sustainable community-university collaborations are not quick wins but the product of ongoing relationship building and management. Think hard about what you want to achieve but also be flexible in accommodating emerging opportunities that might be able to help you achieve your outcomes.

### **Lesson 6: Speak and Listen to Others, Don't Collaborate in a Vacuum**

Daniele did think long and hard but he also talked to his mother before deciding he wanted his *zia* to make him a belt. We also need to create spaces where we can reflect on our community-university collaboration and obtain support and feedback from others. The annual KMb Expo is one such space where we tell our stories in large and small groups and seek input to help sustain collaborations as they move forward. 'Project Teen Moms' was featured at the 2010 KMb Expo. Project Teen Moms is an ongoing collaboration arising from the 2009 investment by the KMb Unit in research to explore mental health services for pregnant teens and teen mothers in York Region. It is a collaboration amongst Kinark Child and Family Services ([www.kinark.on.ca](http://www.kinark.on.ca)), the Children's Aid Society of York Region ([www.yorkcas.on.ca](http://www.yorkcas.on.ca)), and researchers and graduate students from the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University ([www.yorku.ca/lamarsh](http://www.yorku.ca/lamarsh)). Not only did they share their stories (told in their own words on a video at [www.youtube.com/researchimpact#p/u/2/RcEIwAhwo3Q](http://www.youtube.com/researchimpact#p/u/2/RcEIwAhwo3Q)) but they received valuable feedback from other community and university members throughout the day. Seek out feedback from whatever communities of practice or networks are available to you as this will help sustain your community-university collaboration.

### **Lesson 7: Aim for the Best**

Daniele knew the belt made by his *zia* would be the best belt ever, not because it was a belt, but because his *zia* had made it. She had made any number of garments for him before and each one was the best garment ever. Some of the best community-university collaborations are sustainable but they do not aim for sustainability as an outcome. They are sustainable as a by-product of ongoing collaborations between organisations who are experienced in collaborating. The UWYR and York University collaboration is sustainable because of four years of working through a number of projects with collaborators who are experienced in community-university work and who work from a position of trust and shared philosophy. Aim to do the best in all your projects with your collaborator(s) and sustainability will be possible. When we started working as mutual knowledge brokers we didn't plan to launch a disruptive collaboration, with the potential to transform investments in human services in York Region. But we will. And it will be the best collaboration ever.

### **Lesson 8: Collaborating is Messy, Labour Intensive, Social and Works Best in a Shared Cultural Environment**

The basement in which Daniele sat next to his *zia* would never be featured in a designer home magazine. It was a real basement that was lived in and worked in and as a result it remained covered in scraps of fabric and thread. This basement was ripe for collaboration and those easiest to collaborate with were also comfortable in this basement. But this is not an absolute. Davies, Nutley and Walter (2008) have discussed how research utilisation has moved from a two-communities (= different cultures) model to iterative models where terms like ‘knowledge interaction might more appropriately describe the messy engagement of multiple players with diverse sources of knowledge’. While it is easiest for collaborations to form amongst partners from the same cultural background, knowledge mobilisation services help to bridge different cultural backgrounds until the partners can build their own shared culture.

Bridging these cultures requires flexibility, which is the key to successful collaborations and, therefore, sustainability. York University’s KMb Unit was approached by York Central Hospital to facilitate a collaboration on youth engagement. The KMb Unit identified a researcher from the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Health and two other collaborators, York Region District School Board and the Town of Richmond Hill (home to York Central Hospital). When the hospital was hit with restructuring, they backed away from a leading role and the school board stepped up to assume this responsibility. The hospital remains involved in a diminished capacity and this project went on to receive one of the previously mentioned \$30 000 awards for collaborative research. Seek collaborators who share cultural norms and values but also seek knowledge mobilisation services and flexible arrangements to overcome any cultural differences.

### **Lesson 9: While Working Together towards Outcomes, there’s a lot of Knowledge Exchange along the Way**

This is similar to Lesson 4: the process is as important as the outcome. Daniele and his *zia* worked together to make the best belt ever. Daniele would make a suggestion and his *zia* would listen, exchanging knowledge between each other. Unlike knowledge exchange, knowledge transfer is the one-way movement of knowledge between researchers and decision-makers. This can happen through a producer push or a user pull method (Lavis 2003). Daniele and his *zia* were practising knowledge exchange, which is an iterative, multi-directional method of collaborating. One of the KMb Unit’s hallmark knowledge exchange events is ‘KM in the AM’ (knowledge mobilisation in the morning). KM in the AM is a monthly thematic breakfast meeting that has attracted 209 unique participants (many attending multiple meetings), including 99 from community organisations, 47 from the Regional Municipality of York and 63 from York University. Covering topics as diverse as mental health, immigration, youth poverty, seniors,

housing and homelessness, and diabetes among many others, KM in the AM provides a venue for community and university members who share a research interest to meet and explore potential collaborations. As opposed to a Lunch & Learn where the university talks *to* the community (uni-directional), KM in the AM is an iterative exchange event where university and community members talk to each other (multi-directional). Both Project Teen Moms and Mobilising Minds started at a KM in the AM, illustrating the potential of knowledge-exchange events to foster sustainable community-university collaborations. Attend all of the networking, community of practice and knowledge-exchange events you can manage. You never know who you're going to meet.

And after all that Daniele finally tried on his belt ...

### **Lesson 10: It's not the Destination, it's the Journey**

Daniele's destination was the belt. The basement stories were his journey. UWYR and York University never consciously aimed to create a sustainable community-university collaboration. The collaboration evolved through shared activities, shared decision-making and shared investment in research and training, resulting in a sustainable collaboration. Every step was made possible by the trust and shared commitment built up over the preceding steps. Our journey has involved all the little things that go into making presentations, attending meetings, sharing meals, supporting staff, sharing press releases, linking websites, writing blogs, drafting agenda, taking minutes ... and they continue. Don't worry about sustainability as a destination. Pay attention to the journey and you'll get where you want to go.

These are the lots of little things that allowed us to collaborate on a scale we never imagined.

### **A COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION FOR TOMORROW**

On 6 October 2010, UWYR and York University presented a call to action for Change Inc., a Social Innovation Incubator (<http://research.news.yorku.ca/2010/10/06/united-way-and-york-university-launch-change-inc-to-address-complex-social-issues-in-york-region/>). This incubator will support new social entrepreneurs and social enterprises that promise to make a difference in the lives of citizens of York Region. York University will provide space, access to shared administrative services, and access to graduate students and to faculty (i.e. business, law, design) to help entrepreneurs make evidence-informed decisions as they nurture their social ventures. UWYR will provide funding and access to a network of community and human services agencies. The Social Innovation Incubator is also supported by an Innovation Advisory Board made up of York Region business leaders, including leaders from companies like IBM, Open Text, CGI, York Region Media Group and the Royal Bank of Canada. These business leaders will provide access to seasoned business mentors so that the social entrepreneurs are guided not only by research evidence but by

practical experience. Change Inc. will help the partnership move from the process of knowledge mobilisation to the outcome of social innovation.

Social innovations are the outcomes of successful knowledge mobilisation: social innovations such as those we described for the York Region Immigration Action Plan and Free the Children (Phipps & Shapson 2009); social innovations such as helping the Children's Aid Society of York Region provide evidence-informed mental health services to teen mothers; social innovations such as the Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre (PARC) Heat Registry that tracks and provides services to poor and vulnerable populations at risk of heat exposure on hot summer days; social innovations such as a sports camp for diabetic children and youth; social innovations such as the UWYR Strength Investments that invests in coalitions of citizens and organisations, not just UWYR member agencies; social innovations such as the Homeless Hub that makes research available to policy-makers and providers of services to the homeless. These are just a few examples of the many social innovations which were informed by research collaborations between community agencies and York University and which help improve individual and community wellbeing. Deepening the UWYR–York University collaboration to focus on social innovations as outcomes of knowledge mobilisation will help maximise the relevance of university research in the lives of York Region citizens.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have reflected on our experience and our evaluation of four years of community-university KMB collaboration. The 10 lessons learned from our experience demonstrate that sustainable community-university collaboration is possible – but by evolution not by design. Do the little things as best as you can. Learn from the little things when you do them incorrectly. And in four years, you too can have a sustainable community-university collaboration. It is never only about the belt. It is always about the basement stories that gets you there.

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