

## **The morning after: Stakeholder reflections on the sustainability of a community-campus engagement center in the changing environment**

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### **Abstract**

Most analyses of the success and sustainability of community-university engagement initiatives focus on the university environment. We explore the impact of changes in the larger social and political systems on the community as well as those within the university on the meaning and use of a shared community space. The York University-TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC) is a storefront facility for research and teaching shared by York University and the Jane-Finch/Black Creek community, a richly diverse, suburban, underserved neighbourhood in Toronto, Canada. The physical space facilitates and sustains the community-university partnership in this region. As representatives of the community and/or university with strong ties to the engagement centre, we review changes in both the institution and the larger political context in which the university and community navigate their relationship. We also reflect on how these changes play a role in determining community and university priorities, the value of their relationship, and the availability of resources. Community-university initiatives emerge in environments that provide opportunities for shared activities and the development of a shared vision. However, the sustainability of a community-university initiative is strongly influenced by broad environmental changes, requiring self-reflection, trust, communication and innovation.

### **Keywords:**

Community-university partnerships, community engagement, engaged scholarship

Community-engagement initiatives emerge when they align with community and university priorities and visions. These initiatives can take numerous forms (Martin, Smith, & Phillips, 2005). One strategy of supporting a range of community-engagement initiatives is the creation of a shared physical space within the community. The acquisition and maintenance of space is a major long-term investment. Its establishment may be even more influenced by environmental opportunities than other engagement strategies. A successful partnership also requires ongoing adjustments to, and reflections on, the changing socio-political environment. There is generally recognition that partnerships develop against a backdrop of a longer historical and political context (Martin et al., 2005) but they exist in a socio-political environment that continues to change. These changes can affect communities and universities differently because of their unique social and political locations and the respective value and meaning of the partnership can change (Kassam & Tetty, 2003; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005). This can result in friction that can surprise or disappoint one or both parties and which can make the ongoing commitment to this shared resource more difficult to support. However, it can also create new

opportunities, bringing in new dimensions of collaboration, and new shared goals and visions. This paper will explore the impact of changes that support and/or challenge the sustainability of a specific shared space, a community engagement centre, as the community and university negotiate these changes and their relationship.

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) argue that successful ongoing community-university engagement requires boundary spanning: the creation of bridges between institutions and their partners. Boundary spanning activities are most successful when they are complex and multilayered, and include the sharing of resources (McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2008). These resources need to be seen as belonging to both/all parties and be shared equitably, rather than being seen as belonging to one party and charitably donated to another (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Martin et al., 2005). The genuine sharing of a physical space in the community by university and community can not only be an instantiation of boundary spanning, but a foundation on which to build other forms of boundary spanning activities, and so may contribute in important ways to the sustainability of the overall partnership. The York University TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC) is a shared space that forms a complex multi-layered bridge between York University and the Black Creek Jane-Finch community. The CEC itself is both one of the valuable resources being shared and a facilitator of the sharing of other valuable resources. It is a resource that came into being as a result of environmental opportunities, and that has been influenced by ongoing changes in the institutional, community and political environments.

Weerts and Sandmann (2008) note that environmental opportunities include (a) the presence of champions at the community and university level with strong social capital who support the collaboration, (b) favourable institutional and governmental policies that facilitate engagement; openness in both communities to putting energy into new collaborations (whether through positive experiences that pull for closer ties with the university, or increased awareness of needs that push community members and agencies to seek new solutions to challenges, the latter being particularly sensitive to the changing socio-political environment), and (c) the availability of funding to allow for the establishment and maintenance of the infrastructures necessary for success. While these may be necessary elements for the establishment of engagement initiatives, it also provides a useful framework for considering the evolution of a partnership over time. The paper draws from a number of university and community documents, studies and reports, focus groups conducted during the 5-year evaluation of the centre, and focused discussions held with staff and community representatives who have been deeply involved with the centre since its inception. The paper begins with a description of community and university contexts, and then presents changes and events across the course of the 8 years that the centre has existed as opportunities and challenges to the sustainability of the engagement centre.

## **Context**

The Jane-Finch/Black Creek Community.

The city of Toronto has a number of distinctive characteristics that provide the larger context in which the Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood is situated. Toronto is the largest city in Canada and the capital of the most populous province, Ontario. In 2011, the City of Toronto had a population of over 2.6 million people but the Greater Toronto Area had an overall population

of 5.6 million. In that census, 51% of Toronto residents were born outside of Canada, and approximately one-third of those had arrived in the last 10 years (City of Toronto, 2013a). Almost half of the residents of Toronto (49%) identified as visible minority, with 12.3% of the total population identifying themselves as South Asian, 10.8% as Chinese, 8.5% as Black, 5.1% as Filipino, and 2.8% as Latin American.

Toronto has a higher rate of low-income individuals and families (19%) than the rest of Canada, and the rest of the province of Ontario. Those neighbourhoods reporting the highest concentrations of families living with low income also have the highest concentrations of visible minority residents, immigrants, lone parent families, and unemployment, highlighting patterns of social exclusion and structural determinants of inequality (City of Toronto, 2011). The global recession has increased unemployment, with a 29% increase in numbers of families and individuals receiving social assistance from 2007 to 2010, and increasing pressure on the community agencies who supported them (City of Toronto, 2011).

Toronto has challenges in terms of affordable housing; almost one in five households (19.8%) pay more than 30% of their income on rental fees (City of Toronto, 2013b). Almost half (45%) of Toronto residents rent their homes and most renters live in high-rise apartments. There has been a building boom in the city, but approximately 70% of the new housing units have been high-rise apartment buildings. With less than four percent of new buildings having apartments with three or more bedrooms, families in Toronto face particular challenges in finding affordable housing (Toronto City Planning, 2016). As a result, the suburbs and outer suburbs have seen rapid growth, and many newcomers settle outside of the downtown core.

The Jane-Finch/Black Creek region, a suburb in the northwest part of the city, reflects Toronto's rich diversity, and the factors that have pushed newcomers out of the city core, but also has unique characteristics. The Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood straddles the intersection of three Toronto city wards. Relative to the rest of Toronto, the three wards within which the neighbourhood is situated have a younger population, with a higher proportion of children under the age of 25 living at home. The wards also report lower levels of education and a greater percentage of the community born outside of Canada, ranging from 59% to 64% (City of Toronto, 2016). The Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood resembles the wards it resides in on many measures. About 70% of the community identifies as visible minority. Reflecting the structural barriers to employment for immigrants found across the city, this neighbourhood also has an average income that is about 10% lower than that of Toronto overall (City of Toronto, 2003). It has even lower incomes and a higher proportion of lone parent families than the larger region, in part reflecting the presence of several high rise public housing units at the corner of Jane and Finch that have low income as a prerequisite for tenancy (City of Toronto, 2003).

While not dissimilar from its surrounding region, the community has been singled out for negative media representations, and has struggled to redefine its public image and bring attention to its many strengths and assets (Jane Finch TSNS Task Force, 2015). Jane-Finch, in particular, has been associated with "guns, gangs and drugs" (Pagliaro, 2013). This stigmatized identity is a source of frustration and results in a transferal of stigma onto community residents (James, 2012; Joyette & Oda, 2005; Narain & Kumar, 2013). The social construction of the neighbourhood through negative racial stereotypes and a crime and security lens has also shaped the direction of

government initiatives in the neighbourhood and justified what residents perceive as over-policing, along with ineffective and intrusive revitalization strategies (Jane Finch TSNS Task Force, 2015). Importantly, it erases the community's strong and vibrant history of civic engagement and activism. The many assets of this richly diverse neighbourhood include the numerous agencies, community groups and arts projects who collaborated in a range of community initiatives.

Sorrow and anger over the death of three year old Breanna Davy in 1999, slain by a stray bullet in a shooting, brought community and local agency representatives together into a new initiative. Community representatives initiated consultations with staff from the City of Toronto, the housing authority and police services to discuss public safety and the need to strengthen physical and social infrastructure (Rieder, 2005). One major outcome of this meeting was the development of the Black Creek West Community Capacity Project. The Community Capacity project is a three-phase community needs assessment (City of Toronto, 2003). Phase I focused on the collection of information about the population and the services available in the community. In Phase II, there were community consultations with representatives across multiple sectors including community residents, businesses, faith leaders and agencies. Phase III has focused on the development of an Action Plan to respond to issues raised in a sustainable and coordinated way. An important aspect to this initiative was the focus on community capacity; that the consultation process also recognized the importance of documenting the ability of the community to build on its strengths, and that it led to an action plan for change (Rieder, 2005). These action plans included engagement with local organizations concerned with education at all levels (primary to tertiary), and building and strengthening employment opportunities, including employment at the local university, York University, which is one of the neighbourhood's largest employers. Another action plan was creating opportunities for meaningful engagement of community residents in decision-making and implementation on community issues. These action plans describe a community that is proactive in seeking and defining meaningful partnership with their local university partner across multiple dimensions of engagement.

### York University and Community Engagement

York University was established in 1959 as a second university in Toronto; it is now one of four. It is a comprehensive university with 11 faculties, almost 47,000 undergraduates and close to 6,000 graduate students, making it Canada's third largest university (York University, 2015). The university's Keele campus was founded in 1965 in what was then farmland in the northwest of the city, next to the Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood. The university identifies social justice, diversity, accessibility and fairness as defining values, therefore creating a fertile setting for the development and sustainability of a community engagement initiative (York University, 2010).

In 2006, York University received a ten-year gift of \$1 million from the TD-Canada Trust bank that allowed it to establish a deeper relationship with the Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood through increased community engagement. The choice of Jane-Finch/Black Creek for the location of this centre reflects the recognition that York University is part of the geographic neighbourhood, and has had a long presence in it. There have been numerous individual partnerships between community residents and agencies, and university members and programs

(York University, 2009) but the initiatives have lacked coherence and visibility. The gift was made to establish a visible, pan-university engagement centre with a goal of promoting “accessibility and social justice through meaningful and transformative community/university partnerships.” In 2008, following a consultation process with community residents and agencies and with York University community members (York University, 2007), the York University-TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC) was formally opened in a shopping mall at the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue.

The receipt of the gift that supported the establishment of the CEC dovetailed with an impetus to strengthen community engagement at York altogether. In 2009, York University released the results of a consultation process that coincided with the establishment of the CEC and focused on community engagement. One outcome of this initiative was the documentation of the long history of engagement of individual faculty members and programs with Jane-Finch/Black Creek agencies and community groups, particularly in the area of education (York University, 2009). The consultations led to a 2010 White Paper in which York defined itself as “Canada’s Engaged University”. The university explicitly included community engagement as part of its strategic plan, and made a commitment to integrate community engagement into all three areas of scholarship: research, teaching and service (York University, 2010).

### **The York University-TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC).**

The CEC is a storefront facility for research and teaching that seeks to promote and strengthen the relationships between York University and the Jane-Finch/Black Creek community by facilitating collaboration and resource sharing, in service of mutual goals. The CEC is expected to benefit residents, students, faculty and the university as a whole by (a) utilizing the strengths and assets of residents’ knowledge/expertise to enhance student learning experiences, (b) addressing and reducing barriers to full participation in postsecondary education for community residents, (c) facilitating the development of new community/university collaborations, (d) enhancing the depth and breadth of new and existing collaborative research partnerships; and (e) promoting civic engagement opportunities.

The Yorkgate mall in which the CEC is located is at a transportation hub in the region, with several bus routes crossing at the intersection and a large amount of free parking. A bicycle path leads from the mall along a greenbelt to the university, which has created easier access between the university and the centre. It takes approximately 30 minutes to walk this distance. The mall also houses Seneca College’s Yorkgate Campus (offering academic upgrading and two-year diploma programs in Practical Nursing and for Social Service Workers). York University and Seneca College are co-located inside a suite of offices with both shared and individual spaces but separate storefront entrances and signage. The collaboration between Seneca and York in sharing this space increases the flexibility of the space to meet both community and university/college needs. The mall also houses the Black Creek Community Health Centre, and The Spot (a program of the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre with youth-focused programming), therefore creating opportunities for collaboration with community agencies, as well as several local businesses and a large food store that bring residents into the mall on a regular basis. The physical space for the CEC includes a large reception area, which has two computers for use by community residents and various information about the university, 5 small offices, and one large

meeting room. The meeting room is used for CEC meetings but is also booked by community agencies and resident groups, as well as university classes and programs, for initiatives that further the mutual goals of the CEC.

The ten-year gift pays for the rent and maintenance of the space to the local mall. In addition matching funds are provided from the President's Office to cover salaries of the staff: a manager, a community projects coordinator, and an administrative assistant, plus a number of placement students and work/study students, which are on-campus positions for students who demonstrate financial need. Although the matching funds come from the President's Office, the CEC reports to the Vice-President Academic and Provost.

The original governance of the CEC included an Executive Committee, and five working committees: Program (including two subgroups: Access and Public Education, and Inter-Professional Education); Evaluation; Research and Knowledge Exchange, Finance and Fundraising, Nominations and Outreach. The goal was to have each committee comprised of equal numbers of community residents and university faculty, with community resident and university member co-chairs. Finding community residents who were able to participate during workday hours, and university members and agency representatives who could participate during evening hours, was challenging. Thus, keeping an active membership on all committees was difficult. After four years, the structure was simplified into just three committees: Research and Evaluation; Experiential Education; and Access and Public Education, and the Executive Committee was eventually replaced by an Advisory Committee.

The CEC is not the only pan-university community engagement initiative at York University. A separate initiative, the Knowledge Mobilization (KMb) unit, also exists at York University and supports partnerships for research collaboration and knowledge exchange, with an emphasis on the region to the North of York University. The KMb unit, established in 2005, focuses on research alone using a knowledge broker model. Knowledge brokers bring together organizations and university faculty who are seeking research or community partners, respectively. Once the initial introduction is made, the KMb unit steps out of the relationship. Other KMb activities focus on communicating information about York research to non-academic audiences, for example by creating and posting plain language summaries of faculty members' work. In recent years, the KMb unit has joined ResearchImpact, a national network of knowledge brokers supporting a similar model of community engagement and knowledge exchange (<http://researchimpact.ca/kmbinaction/>). The KMb unit is administered by the office of the Vice President Research and Innovation. The CEC, with its education mandate, is administered by the office of the VP Academic and Provost. Although united under a shared strategic plan, the different offices have different priorities.

The result can be that activities between these two university initiatives are not always aligned and could potentially be seen as competing. Integration between these two initiatives therefore depends to some extent on communication between the two VP offices.

### **Joint initiatives and collaboration**

Since its inception, the CEC has provided space and opportunities for collaboration and joint initiatives between university and community. In some cases, the community leads these

initiatives, with the university playing a supporting role as a partner, or one of many partners. In some cases, they are initiatives led by university, in partnership with one or more community organizations. Finally, some are truly joint initiatives, developed in collaboration between university and community.

There have been a number of different kinds of programs and activities offered at the CEC since its inception. An evaluation at the five-year point of the CEC identified activities within each of the areas of the CEC goals that reflect the ways in which, by virtue of its central location in the community, this shared space acts as a bridge between members of the community and university, supporting multiple goals and functions.

Activities that enrich student experience:

The CEC has been used for undergraduate and graduate courses from several Faculties: Education, Health, Environmental Studies, and Liberal and Professional Studies. These courses have an emphasis on community engagement (e.g., community-based research) or community issues (e.g., urban planning). By physically situating the classes in a community location, students are immersed in the environment and processes that they are studying.

The CEC has also facilitated a number of experiential education opportunities, where students gain real world experiences through placements or internships with local supervisors, participated in research projects with community partners, or engaged with community members in more limited interactions, such as through interviews with community agency staff. The CEC's physical presence in the community and the relationships forged in the governance of the CEC have helped to draw attention of both university and neighbourhood community members to these possibilities. The CEC has also organized on-site student led clinics for community residents providing supervised professional services such as annual tax clinics, and a legal aid clinic, thereby using the community space for activities that bridge student learning objectives but also provide direct services of interest to the community.

Activities that reduce barriers to post-secondary education for residents

A program that precedes the CEC, now housed within it, is the Bridging Program for Women, a program offered by Women's Studies as an alternative route to accessing secondary education for women over the age of 21. The Bridging Program allows women who do not have the prerequisites for university to take one of a select number of university courses to explore the possibility of university study. Those who attain a B or higher are eligible for acceptance to York University in several undergraduate programs. Having the program offered in a shared community space increases its physical and psychological accessibility, thereby facilitating access to higher education for community members.

In addition to the academic Bridging Program for women, the CEC also offers regular information sessions for community residents about application procedures and financial aid offered within the storefront space, and support for transition programs in high schools. Information is readily available in the reception space of the CEC. The CEC staff also participate in regional and city networks on university access, ensuring open communication about the

needs of community residents, local policies that affect educational access, and university policies and procedures.

#### Activities that support new collaborations

The CEC has been instrumental in supporting community projects and initiatives, and bringing together community and university partners with shared interests and needs. For example, the Black Creek Micro-Lending Program is a community-university initiative supporting local individuals and businesses to access small amounts of funding to establish or support entrepreneurial activities. Community residents and university faculty and students, with funding from a university grant (Low, Yip, & Visano, 2008), developed this program collaboratively. For the not-for-profit sector, York University funded the Catalyst Grants program, providing small amounts of funding (maximum \$10,000) to sustainable projects led jointly by community residents/groups and York University members that met community needs. These initiatives engage both community and university in collaboratively defining, documenting and building capacity in the community.

The Good Food Market was a farmer's market, created in response to a lack of affordable fresh food in the neighbourhood. The Good Food Market ran during the spring, summer and fall in a space situated at an intersection in the community that is just outside of the university boundaries. The Good Food Market included not only fresh fruits and vegetables but also local crafts and locally prepared foods. The choice of a location closer to the university was intended in part to meet a secondary goal of the market. This farmer's market was not only to provide fresh food locally, but also to encourage more York University members to shop in the community, thereby creating another bridge for sharing resources between community and university.

The development of collaborations is also supported through knowledge sharing activities. These take place in public spaces within the Yorkgate mall in order to engage and reach out to community residents and meet community goals of better coordination and accessibility of local information. The CEC has organized community events that included presentations of a range of community and university partnership activities and projects. The CEC has also engaged in a number of strategies to share information about the community—generated by the community—highlighting the positive aspects of the Jane Finch/Black Creek community. The Knowledge sharing activities include information fairs and presentations. Agencies, research partnerships, and university information are shared to ensure communication of information and research findings, foster opportunities for new initiatives, and increase the impact of existing projects.

#### Activities that encourage depth and breadth in partnerships.

In addition to supporting new initiatives, the CEC has helped to build longer-term and larger networks of relationships that can be sustained across multiple initiatives. Consistent with the notion of complex and multilayered boundary spanning activities (McNall et al., 2008), many include research, community action, and educational opportunities. For example, Assets Coming Together (ACT) for Youth was a multi-year, multi-sectoral collaboration between community members and researchers that is funded by a federal research grant. ACT for Youth addresses



negative portrayals of youth in urban communities that focuses on the Jane-Finch/Black Creek community.

Another example is the Connecting the Dots Conference for Jane-Finch and York U Partnerships. This one-day conference, initiated by the CEC, brought together residents, agency representatives, students, faculty, and staff to reflect on relationships, perceptions, and challenges, and to foster mutual understanding in the development of future partnership opportunities. This conference not only supported and motivated reflection on the nature of the community-university relationship between York University and the Jane-Finch/Black Creek community, but also led to a commitment to ongoing support for mutual understanding, through the development of a credited course where York students can obtain a contextual understanding of the neighbourhood provided by community and resident leaders.

#### Showcasing university programs in the community

Although not highlighted in the evaluation, the CEC has also participated in a series of activities that have increased community residents' knowledge of university activities working with or relevant to the community. As with the knowledge sharing activities described above, these made use of the common spaces in the mall in which the storefront resides. Included among these are performances by York University Fine Arts students in the Yorkgate mall for Black History Month, and a University Fair held in the Yorkgate mall to showcase student placement and research opportunities. The latter provide information not only about the activities of York University students but also of local agencies, issues and research initiatives.

#### **Opportunities and challenges in a changing context and implications for shared spaces**

A number of social and political events have occurred that shifted the goals and priorities of the university and community in ways that had an impact on their shared initiatives and shared spaces, either directly or indirectly. Many of these emerged through discussions with stakeholders of the CEC in preparation for this paper. Others grew from consultations with community and university stakeholders, which have been documented in formal reports.

#### Policies Affecting Collaboration: Institutional, Municipal, Provincial

*Changes in the Regional and Municipal Context.* In 2005, the City of Toronto and United Way, Toronto, launched the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy. The intention was to invest in community infrastructure in communities most in need of support, with an emphasis on security and safety. Thirteen Priority Neighbourhoods were identified; the Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood was among them. In 2012, the City engaged in community consultations that broadened the scope of social factors and desired outcomes taken into consideration (the Black Creek Community Capacity Project).

In 2014, the City launched the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020, which led to the identification, in 2014, of Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, those neighbourhoods with the greatest inequality in outcomes across five domains: economic opportunities, social development, participation in decision-making, physical surroundings, and healthy lives.

The two Toronto communities receiving the lowest values on the neighbourhood equity scores were both within the Jane-Finch/Black Creek region. The community responded with the Jane Finch Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Taskforce, again with a focus on community consultation that put community visions of improvement front and centre.

York University and the CEC played a growing role in community organizing around the original Community Capacity Project, and played a key partnership role in the community response to the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020. The ability of York University to contribute to this response, and to see itself as part of the community, was an important step in the growing partnership between the community and university.

*Changes in the Provincial and Institutional Context.* York University's formal support for community engagement in its strategic plan aligned with a greater interest by the provincial government in the role of postsecondary education institutions in community engagement (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). A Provincial discussion paper released in 2012 identifies community engagement as one of the goals of research and teaching activities undertaken by postsecondary institutions, and a mechanism for ensuring high-quality student experiences. At the time, this was seen by many as an opportunity to increase the visibility and support for the CEC.

However, the definition of community engagement, and community partners, is very broad in the university vision. It includes a range of entrepreneurial educational experiences and partnerships, including business and government partnerships and co-op learning experiences. While community residents welcomed initiatives supporting the development of business and employment opportunities, (e.g., the Black Creek Micro-Lending Program, Low et al., 2008), they also express concern that a neoliberal view of engagement can shift energy in the area of community engagement to engagement in business and government ventures (e.g., Jane-Finch TSNS Working Group, 2015; Joyette & Oda, 2005). Thus, the engagement may lose the focus on the development of the broader range of community capacities and assets.

In 2013, the university launched an Experiential Education Working Group to support the university's goal to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience through experiential education (York University, 2013). Experiential education (EE) is defined as a pedagogy that utilizes concrete or hands-on learning experiences to support meeting learning objectives. In essence, it is putting theory into practice. The current shift to interest in EE, both on the part of the province and the university creates opportunities to highlight the strengths of the CEC, since the CEC fosters EE experiences. However, as the Working Group noted, EE can also be achieved with meaningful classroom exercises and experiences and may therefore not require involvement of the physical space of the CEC.

Concern has been raised by some stakeholders that community engaged EE experiences are time consuming and expensive, compared to classroom experiences. Although classroom experiences may not capture all of the benefits of community experiences for students, if the only goal of EE activities is enhancing student experience then in times of fiscal restraint they may not be seen as an important investment. Awareness of the range of ways that EE can contribute to the larger

initiative of community-university engagement needs to be included as part of the EE agenda and is one the strengths that the CEC brings.

This also highlights the differences between the CEC and the Knowledge Mobilization Unit (KMb), described above, which is also a place-based community-university engagement initiative but one that operates under a very different model. The KMb focuses on the large region north of the university, but is physically located on the university campus rather than in shared space. The KMb Unit organizes activities in the community, such as meet-and-greets between community and university researchers. However, most activities are episodic, the region it works in is large and so activities are offered in different parts of the region to increase access. Continuity of activities is thus not necessary, the way it would be for courses or student placements, and after the initial introduction, activities take place in a range of different spaces and no longer involve the KMb Unit. The more focused and episodic nature of the KMb activities means that the KMb initiative does not require a permanent space and its presence on campus allows it to easily align with university driven priorities and activities.

Another issue internal to the university is that including the CEC in on-campus activities can be more challenging because it requires travel by the staff from the off-campus site. The Manager makes regular trips to campus to participate in meetings and activities but this also takes her away from the CEC. This may raise some challenges for including the CEC in all relevant university initiatives and this, in turn, may create challenges to the integration of CEC activities and university priorities overall. The CEC activities are integrated at the level of the particular activity (e.g., individual courses, internships, research projects) but these individual activities may vary in how well they are integrated into the university's strategic plan or goals. Thus, the presence of a shared space in the community strengthens and facilitates university engagement in community priorities, but may also present challenges for the initiative's engagement with university priorities if policies are not in place to ensure the CEC is kept informed and included.

### Openness, trust and communication

Historic tensions exist in the relationship between the Jane-Finch/Black Creek community residents and the university, and these resurfaced in consultations with community residents undertaken as part of the Community Capacity Project. Residents expressed frustration in general at the disconnect between the high frequency with which they are consulted, studied and policed and the low rates of positive outcomes for residents (Joyette & Oda, 2005). Some of the former two activities have been attributed to York University initiatives by faculty, students, or both. This is a caution to university members to refrain from "doing research on" the community. It highlights the mistrust created by a history of research that has provided no benefit to community residents but is seen as promoting the careers of the researchers through publication and grants, a complain that has often been raised in the context of community based research (e.g., Minkler, 2005; Shields & Evans, 2008). Since its inception, the CEC has been active in promoting community-based research in genuine partnership with community, supporting these research initiatives with funding, showcasing local examples of research partnership, offering a range of in-kind support to local research partnerships, and developing tools and activities to support collaborative research. This includes the Connect the Dots conference described under joint activities. Nonetheless, some frustration remains and many university community members

are still unfamiliar with partnership approaches to research. Finding spaces to air these issues is an ongoing and important issue.

Despite the number of positive interactions being generated by the CEC and other community-university initiatives, members of the university still reflect the stigmatizing perceptions of the Jane-Finch neighbourhood that are prevalent in Toronto. Students in particular are seen as holding racist and stigmatizing views of the neighborhood, reflecting the stigma and racism that exists in the city overall; for example, during new student orientations, incoming students are warned by their peers not to cross the bridge into Jane-Finch (Narain & Kumar, 2013). These negative stereotypes were apparent when, in 2012, York University was struggling with negative image issues of its own. Following highly publicized acts of violence on campus, violence on the university's Keele campus was a topic of discussion in the media. The editor of the student newspaper wrote a piece in which he accused residents of the Jane Finch neighbourhood of being responsible for the acts of violence and assault that had occurred on York's campus. Community groups in Jane-Finch/Black Creek expressed anger, disappointment and frustration and the sense that the university did not do enough to respond to these remarks (Jane Finch Action Against Poverty, 2012). Given the long history of mistrust that has existed between the university and community, events such as these can do a great deal of damage to the development of trusting relationships. These challenging relationships with the university can also result in a lack of real engagement of community residents in CEC leadership and activities. The existence of a shared space is both symbolic of bridging the distance between the community and the university, but also provides opportunities for positive interactions between the respective members of these groups that may help build trust between them.

The active participation of York University in the Community Capacity Project, organized in response to Jane Finch Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy Taskforce and other community collaboratives, built trust and created opportunities for the kind of open communication needed to address past and ongoing tensions. Moreover, the action plans that emerged from these community collaboratives made explicit community goals and facilitated alignment between university and community priorities. The location of the CEC in the community supported the participation of York University in these activities as members of the Jane-Finch/Black Creek community, and facilitated their ability to identify and support shared community goals. An example of this is how the CEC has collaborated on taking up the community goal of improving physical and green spaces in partnerships with the Faculty of Environmental Studies and the Faculty of Health, among others, through teaching and research collaborations that actively took place within the community. The development and fulfillment of these many common goals provides the opportunity for the partnership to move the agenda and the partnership forward by strengthening the bridges between university and community.

#### Champions in the university and community

The development of community-university initiatives requires the availability of both human and financial resources (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). These are equally important in ensuring the sustainability of these initiatives. Moreover, the presence of champions may be an essential component in ensuring that sufficient funding continues to be directed to the initiative to allow it to thrive.

A faculty dean was the initial university champion of the initiative when the financial gift was received. When the dean moved into a higher executive office, the CEC moved with her. This shift into a higher office created more visibility for the CEC within the university, but also put the CEC into competition with other initiatives for the time of administrators. As a relatively small unit, and one that has been described by some stakeholders as a “boutique project,” it requires a great deal of commitment by university champions to keep it moving forward when there are so many other pressing issues to be dealt with. The activities of the CEC require administrative attention but there is also a need for ongoing financial commitment to staffing and maintaining the physical space that holds and defines these activities.

The presence of community champions, both at the agency and resident level, is equally important for the sustainability of the CEC. A number of agency leaders have remained committed to supporting the CEC since its inception, but some have moved on to other jobs, and others anticipate leaving in the next two to three years. It is not clear if the next wave of agency leadership will be willing or interested to offer the same support. Ensuring and nurturing the next wave of community champions will be critical to the success of the CEC going forward. Junior staff in community agencies tend to move positions relatively frequently, changing jobs as programs lose or win funding, or as new opportunities emerge, and typically, they will move out of the neighbourhood. Sustaining champions among less senior staff may therefore be difficult because of the turnover. The increasing burden to provide services with the economic downturn also means greater pressure on community agencies to deliver services directly and less time for staff to participate in initiatives that do not have direct benefit to clients and community residents. This too may undermine building new champions among community agencies.

#### Funding challenges and opportunities through partnership

Partnership in general can bring new resources to both the institution and the community. The Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood is relatively new and, as such, has a high proportion of relatively recent community agencies, and with relative recency comes smaller budgets (cf., Lo, 2011). Community agencies and residents note an ongoing under-resourcing of the community, and continued structural barriers to overcoming local challenges. The agencies have tremendous strength in the diversity of their staff, both in terms of ethnocultural and linguistic diversity, and provide a range of programs to high numbers of residents. However, with limited resources come limitations in the ways in which they can participate in initiatives beyond delivering their own programs (City of Toronto, 2003). Competitive applications for short term funding for projects undermines the ability of community agencies to work together, even when collaboration would be the best strategy.

The university can address some of these challenges by creating opportunities for collaboration and bridging some of the uncertainty in program funding. The CEC has supported collaboration between students, faculty, local agencies and community residents to help coordinate community responses to policy changes (e.g., the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy) and has helped bridge programs through the small Catalyst Grants program described above under the Activities section. The ability of the CEC to respond to community needs by offering some services through student led clinics, like the tax clinic and CLASP (Community & Legal Aid Services

Program) helps support both students and community agencies in ensuring that community residents have access to needed resources in a predictable way. Importantly, in this neighbourhood a major challenge agencies raised is space to provide the programs they offer, both in terms of simple availability and in terms of costs (City of Toronto, 2003). The CEC has been able to provide space for community programs, which is a valuable contribution to the community and has helped to foster relationships between university and community members through repeated interactions. The value of being able to share this resource, and the frequency with which the community makes use of it, is an important part of the CEC's success in being visible and valued in the community.

With a large body of students and faculty engaged in social science and humanities research and teaching, several strong professional programs, and a very large undergraduate body, York University has been characterized as a large liberal arts institution, which is both a strength and a challenge for the institution (York University, 2015). The challenge comes from the larger grants awarded to science and medical research, and the risks of being identified as a “teaching institution,” which can jeopardize its research and graduate studies activities. The advantage comes in the form of opportunities to develop large collaborative initiatives in the social sciences, a strong grounding in participatory methods and philosophies, and in thus defining itself as distinct from more “medical” approaches to issues of health and well-being.

Increasingly, the national funding agencies have been encouraging large partnership grants, often in the social sciences and often with a focus on partnerships that engage community partners. The CEC has facilitated the development of applications and supported these partnerships. An example of this success is the ACT for Youth project, which secured a \$1 million Community University Research Alliance (CURA) grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). As funding is increasingly focused on larger grants to larger partnerships, the presence of trusting and long-standing relationships that address social and community issues can benefit both the community and the university.

Other funding challenges.

As noted above, community engagement is not just a means of improving student outcomes and benefiting the community, but also as a mechanism for increasing funding to the university. Partnerships can bring financial resources to the university through increased grant revenue; however, the presence of partners who can bring their own large resources to the partnership can make other engagement opportunities more attractive to the institution. The Jane-Finch/Black Creek community is not York University's only neighbour and thus not the only potential local partner. While the other universities in Toronto are situated in the downtown core, or to the east and west of the city, York University is situated to the north, and is the local university for York Region. York Region, north of Toronto, is a rapidly growing community of 1 million people who are often overlooked by the other Toronto universities and eager to partner. Compared to the Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighbourhood, York Region is larger, has greater resources, and provides opportunities for partnership with larger organizations, industry and governmental agencies. As noted earlier, the KMB unit focuses on building research partnerships with this region.

Working in York Region can be more rewarding for the university not only because of the greater resources of community partners in the region but also because of political interest. Politicians in the City of Toronto may not be focused on the Jane-Finch/Black Creek neighborhood or the CEC activities in it, but the municipalities in York Region are very excited about opportunities to collaborate with York University. The city of Markham and the region of York have both donated substantial sums of money towards the development of a York University campus in Markham, a small city north of Toronto that will serve the York Region. There are clearly much greater opportunities in the north for resources that arise directly from these partnerships.

A bigger question regarding funding arises with respect to the 10-year donation that has been funding the CEC. It is not clear whether the CEC will be able to continue without the external funds that had been available through this gift, nor whether another source of funding will be available. Sustainability for other initiatives in the university has depended on their ability to meet their mandate but also their ability to attract external funding. The loss of the CEC would weaken the relationship that the university has been building with the community however, who already mistrust the university's long-term commitment. It may be difficult to sustain the existing initiatives should the CEC close. Such a closure may result in widening the already wide chasm between the University and a community that still has some mistrust of the motives of institutional interest.

## **Conclusion**

The York University-TD Community Engagement Centre is shared space that exemplifies the notion of boundary spanning. The CEC emerged at a time when community engagement in teaching and research was a provincial, and thus a university, priority. Its establishment was made possible by a one-time donation. Maintaining a shared physical space is highly visible and makes a strong symbolic statement about the importance of the relationship between the community and its neighbouring university. However, staffing and maintaining a physical space in the community is costly, and questions can be raised about whether this approach to community engagement is sustainable as interests, and funding, shift over time.

These concerns speak to the importance of viewing the CEC in terms of its broader boundary-spanning role. The goals of the CEC explicitly include teaching, research, and civic engagement, thus creating rich and diverse bridges between the community and the university. Over time, the CEC's presence in the community has facilitated open communication between the university and the neighbourhood, created opportunities for the sharing and development of mutual goals, and facilitated ongoing communication and collaboration across numerous dimensions. It has created meaningful and unique educational experiences for university students, increased access to education for community members, enhanced sharing of knowledge and resources, and has attracted additional funding and resources to both the university and an historically underserved community.

Sustainability for the CEC may depend most heavily on the on-going commitment of champions within both the community and university. The CEC has demonstrated an ability to enhance education, research and civic engagement for both communities but these contributions must be

kept visible and be valued. The ability of the CEC to continue will require capacity and willingness on the part of the community to continue to engage in the governance and collaborative opportunities and on the part of the university to support the costs of maintaining and investing in the space. It seems unlikely that many of these initiatives could continue without the presence of a physical space in the community that can host, organize and make visible collaborative initiatives. Planning for the next great challenge in the future of the CEC, namely the end of the donation that supported its creation, may be the next environmental challenge that the community and university must face together.

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