ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY AND VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

By

ANDREA YVONNE LEVEN-MARCON

BEconSci, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983
BCom (Hons), University of South Africa, 1986

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We accept this Report as conforming
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Scott Moore, BBA (Hons) MDiv, Project Sponsor
Brigitte Harris, PhD, Academic Supervisor
Niels Agger-Gupta, PhD, Committee Chair

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This research project sought to understand how a sustainable environment supporting full engagement of volunteers could be developed by examining the question: How can the program leaders at Youth Unlimited North York (YUNY) develop a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of their ministry volunteers? Action research and action inquiry methodologies guided the research process and data were gathered using an interview matrix and conversation café. The research participants were YUNY’s program leaders who lead youth skills and development programs. The study found that sustainable environments supporting fully engaged volunteers included inclusivity and appreciation of volunteers, open communication, increased learning, a well-managed recruitment system, and growth through expansion of current boundaries. Prayer was identified as a metatheme and accountability as missing data. The four recommendations are to strengthen volunteer recruitment support structure, increase capacity of staff and volunteers through learning, investigate improved volunteer care related accountability, and investigate expanded community boundaries.
Sustainability Supporting Volunteer Engagement

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................................. 3

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................... 7

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING ..................................................................................... 9
  Significance of the Inquiry .......................................................................................................... 11
  Organizational Context .............................................................................................................. 13
  Systems Analysis of the Inquiry ................................................................................................. 15
  Summary ................................................................................................................................. 19

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................... 20
  Sustainable Environments ......................................................................................................... 20
    Defining sustainable organizational environments ................................................................. 21
    The importance of sustainable environments ........................................................................ 23
  Volunteer Engagement ............................................................................................................ 25
    Describing, discussing, and defining volunteer engagement ................................................. 25
    Benefits, drivers, and limiting factors of engagement ............................................................ 28
  Learning in Organizations ...................................................................................................... 29
    Team learning ......................................................................................................................... 30
    Environments conducive to learning ....................................................................................... 31
  Summary ................................................................................................................................. 34

CHAPTER THREE: INQUIRY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY ............................................ 36
  Inquiry Approach ....................................................................................................................... 36
  Project Participants and Stakeholders ....................................................................................... 42
  Inquiry Methods ....................................................................................................................... 43
    Data collection methods .......................................................................................................... 44
    Study conduct ......................................................................................................................... 49
    Data analysis processes .......................................................................................................... 53
  Ethical Issues ............................................................................................................................. 55
    Respect for persons .................................................................................................................. 55
    Concern for welfare ................................................................................................................ 57
    Justice .................................................................................................................................... 58
  Summary ................................................................................................................................. 58

CHAPTER FOUR: INQUIRY PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS ............................. 59
  Study Findings .......................................................................................................................... 60
    Theme one: Inclusive and supportive team environment ....................................................... 60
CHAPTER FIVE: INQUIRY IMPLICATIONS

Study Conclusions .................................................................................. 78
Conclusion one: Participants focussed on maintaining and further developing strong, inclusive, equal partnerships and relationships with the volunteers .......... 80
Conclusion two: Participants understand and act on the importance of appreciating the contributions and commitment of the volunteers ................................. 82
Conclusion three: Participants identified authentic, open, two-way communication as a fundamental element of the program ...................................................... 83
Conclusion four: Increased learning and skills development for both the program leaders and the volunteers was identified as an important area of long-term focus ... 85
Conclusion five: Participants understand the critical role volunteers play at YUNY and the importance of a well-managed volunteer recruitment process and highlighted the possibility of separating volunteer administration from the program leaders’ responsibilities of managing and leading the volunteers .......... 86
Conclusion six: Participants identified the opportunity and understand the benefits of expanding their reach into the greater community ......................................... 88
Scope and Limitations of the Research Inquiry ........................................ 89
Summary ................................................................................................ 90

CHAPTER FIVE: INQUIRY IMPLICATIONS ................................................. 92
Study Recommendations ......................................................................... 93
Recommendation one: Strengthen YUNY’s volunteer recruitment and administration support structure ................................................................. 95
Recommendation two: Increase the capacity of staff by intentionally focussing on learning, in-field training, and sharing of knowledge ............................ 96
Recommendation three: Investigate how the program leaders’ volunteer care related accountability could be improved ................................................. 98
Recommendation four: Investigate how the boundaries of YUNY’s current community could be expanded and what affect this would have on the organization .............................................................................. 101
Summary of recommendations ............................................................ 103
Organizational Implications .................................................................... 103
Impact for the Community ...................................................................... 105
Implications for Future Inquiry ............................................................... 105
Summary ............................................................................................... 106
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Systems diagram of Youth Unlimited North York.......................................................... 16

Figure 2. Recommendations and outcomes. .................................................................................. 94
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Occurrences of Words of Inclusivity and Support on Interview Matrix Summary Boards ................................................................. 61

Table 2  Interview Matrix and Conversation Café Data Correlated to the Five Practices of Leadership........................................................................................................ 76

Table 3  Correlation of YUNY Research Project Conclusions to Other Research Models ........ 79
CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

The need for increased commitment and diligence regarding improved volunteer management and care by the program leaders at Youth Unlimited Greater Toronto Area (YUGTA) formed the focus of this research inquiry. YUGTA, a charitable organization, identified this vital topic as one of the most important of their 12 identified Human Resources Research and Development priorities (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

YUGTA’s dependence on volunteers underscored the importance of this inquiry topic. The organization has 50 staff and 350 volunteers who manage 35 unique programs for at-risk youth across the greater Toronto area (Youth Unlimited, n.d.c). During 2011, YUGTA conducted an appreciative inquiry and gained the understanding that some program leaders were far stronger than others (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012). Scott Moore, area director for Youth Unlimited North York (YUNY), a regional division of YUGTA, and the organization within which this research was conducted, noted that there is variability in volunteer retention and tenure and a disconnect between potential volunteer interest and engagement into volunteering (S. Moore, personal communication, February 21, 2012); Scott Moore also noted a lack of follow through resulting in volunteers “falling through the cracks.”

The YUNY team consists of an area director, eight program leaders with responsibility for 11 programs, and the associated volunteer teams comprised of 30 ministry volunteers and a small group of five to 10 support volunteers. Ministry volunteer is the term used by YUNY for a person who commits to stay with a project for a minimum of 1 year. Support volunteers provide
short-term or episodic volunteer assistance. The focus of this research was confined to the program leaders and their leadership of the ministry volunteers.

Senge (2006) stated that shared visions are one of humankind’s most powerful forces and “create commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities” (p. 192). A vision becomes shared when a group of stakeholders are joined together in their mutual aspirations, purpose, or connection to the vision. This commonality of caring creates the power of a shared vision, which in turn fuels learning through focus and energy. Generative learning, or the expansion of peoples’ abilities to create, only happens when people enthusiastically pursue a vision they are committed to and desire to achieve (p. 192). In a similar vein, determining how the program leaders at YUNY could jointly create a sustainable environment was central to this inquiry.

My personal interest in this inquiry topic was threefold. Firstly, I was curious about the ability of a leadership team to create a sustainable environment that promotes engaged volunteers. Secondly, as a lifelong volunteer, I was also very interested in how the management and leadership of volunteers relates to their organizational attachment. Thirdly, my goal was to contribute to an area of academic research in which there is an identified gap. This research project afforded the opportunity to further explore all three interests in a more formal manner.

My relationship with YUNY began in October 2011 when organizational leaders called me seeking technical input for their 2012 major fundraising event, The QR Code (Youth Unlimited, 2012). These conversations serendipitously led to YUNY becoming my research project sponsor organization. I felt the newness of my relationship with the organization would
be of mutual benefit, as I did not have any preconceived ideas or prior knowledge of the program leaders or the volunteers that might otherwise bias my research questions or approach.

The main inquiry question supported this initiative: How can the program leaders at Youth Unlimited North York develop a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of their ministry volunteers? The subquestions were:

1. What does a sustainable environment for engaged volunteers at YUNY look like?
2. How is volunteer engagement at YUNY defined?
3. How does leadership behaviour affect volunteer engagement at YUNY?

**Significance of the Inquiry**

My hope for this project was that program leaders’ commitment to effective volunteer management and care would improve and their follow through on legally important administrative tasks would be more diligent (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 21, 2012). In essence, this was a quest for improvements in leaderful behaviour (Raelin, 2010, p. xvi).

Benefits could include high volunteer retention and a closing of the gap between those interested in volunteering and those making a commitment. Additional benefits are retention of relevance, reputation, and alignment with financial donors (Andreadis, 2009, p. 9). Ultimately, growth for this donation- and volunteer-dependent organization is achieved primarily via an increased volunteer base (S. Moore, personal communication, February 14, 2012). This research project is a potential catalyst for an increase in the retention of engaged volunteers and the resulting benefit of significant organizational growth.
The benefits of the project are potentially multifold. The area director and team of program leaders could benefit from sharing in the mutually developed vision and understanding of how to achieve their most critical goal. Added benefits of maintaining volunteer commitment would include the lessening of program leaders’ workloads, decreased disruption related to recruiting and training replacement volunteers, and an increase in the program team’s ability to focus on their current projects. From the area director’s perspective, improved team cohesion and experienced volunteer teams are a necessary support for additional programs. From a governance perspective, knowing that legislative requirements are being adhered to will reduce the board of director’s compliance concerns. Other chapters of the worldwide Youth Unlimited organization and other volunteer-dependent organizations may also benefit from the results of this study in gaining an understanding of how to create sustainable environments that support volunteer engagement. Ultimately, those people whom these organizations serve, as well as spheres of society in which they interact, can potentially benefit from the results of this study.

If this topic of inquiry had not been addressed, the status quo or endless stream of short-term fixes that do not fix anything will recur (Manoogian, as cited in Senge, 2006, p. 250). Inefficiency, stagnation, cultural decline, and the potential demise of the organization were also possible (Andreadis, 2009, p. 9). Limited volunteer commitment would reduce the number of projects for young people and their communities, who were the ultimate beneficiaries of this research. Finally, the lack of adherence to legislation (e.g., screening guidelines for child program volunteers) could also potentially result in organizational demise and a halting or disruption to all programs. In its entirety this could result in substantial negative effects on a
large portion of society who benefit from, and are dependent on, development services provided by both YUNY and other not-for-profit (NPO), volunteer-dependent service organizations.

Organizational Context

YUNY is a division of YUGTA, a registered Canadian charity under the name Toronto Youth for Christ (Youth Unlimited, n.d.d). YUGTA is a nondenominational, Christian faith-based organization, focused on personal and spiritual holistic development programs for youth. Youth between 10 and 25 years of age, regardless of their faith, cultural background, race, or economic level, are guided to achieve their full life potential and leadership abilities (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.b).

YUNY depends on donations for its financial livelihood and on volunteers who play a crucial role in the success of staffing, supporting, and running programs. YUGTA’s associate director described the importance of program leaders who foster volunteer engagement with ministry volunteers as a “burning issue” (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012). The program leaders’ relationships with the 30 ministry volunteers are at the core of this research project.

YUNY is led by an area director. Reporting to him are eight program leaders, (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.e). With 30 ministry volunteers, they lead 11 neighbourhood-specific programs that generally fit into one of the following five categories: (a) community outreach including school-based sports and recreation programs, day camps, homework, and mentoring programs; (b) youth service including local and global compassionate service programs; (c) community resources in which youth leadership skills, development seminars and counselling
for parents, and family and youth workers are provided; (d) skills training including work skills and job placements; and (d) specialized niche initiatives focussed on leadership development, youth that are homeless, sex trade workers, or young mothers (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.c).

North York spans an area of 177 km², and its 34 neighbourhoods are culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse (“North York,” 2013). North York includes four of Toronto’s 13 high social risk or “Priority Areas” (City of Toronto, 2008, p. 1) and is home for 120,000 young people (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.a). YUNY programs are located in the Jane-Finch, Willowdale, Flemingdon Park, and Downsview areas (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013). YUNY staff members are located in the same areas as their programs, with the intention of fostering strong community partner relationships with local agencies and churches. Building and expanding these relationships and continuing to provide meaningful and relevant programs tailored for various youth groups in each neighbourhood by a team displaying consistency of care in a manner that reflects God’s love is essential to the success of fulfilling the YUNY dream. This includes youth achieving their full potential, learning to lead, and playing an instrumental role in the transformation of their communities (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.d).

YUGTA’s core values are the ideals that shape their priorities and goals (Youth Unlimited, n.d.a). There are three areas of focus. Firstly, Youth Unlimited is committed to God-centred, Bible-based, prayer-dependent, church-committed activities. Secondly, relationships are
based on a compassionate and holistic approach. Thirdly, servant leadership and integrity in all actions form the basis of excellence expected from all in the organization.

From the larger organizational context, the American-based, NPO, Youth for Christ International Ministries, was founded in 1944 (Youth for Christ International, n.d.). This is the umbrella organization for Youth for Christ organizations in over 117 nations and includes 720 ministry centres, 8,930 partner churches, 4,500 staff, 30,000 volunteers, and over 6.8 million youth program participants (Youth for Christ International, 2011, p. 2).

Youth for Christ Canada (2010), known as Youth Unlimited Canada, has 31 chapters, 300 youth centres, 438 staff, 5,489 volunteers and over 180,000 youth participants (p. 6). One chapter is Youth for Christ Toronto, commonly known as YUGTA. Each chapter is a registered charity with an independent board of directors that hire the Executive Director (Youth Unlimited Canada, 2013).

YUGTA’s Board of Directors, Executive Director, and senior management oversee four divisions, 6 major project areas, 35 programs, and 50 staff who coordinate 500 volunteers and over 2,400 youth (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.b). In summary, YUNY is part of a large, complex organizational structure. Consequently, success in this project can have far reaching effects.

**Systems Analysis of the Inquiry**

An organizational core philosophy of YUNY is to provide programs that are culture specific and relevant to the life circumstances of youth in each neighbourhood (Youth Unlimited, n.d.b). This results in a wide variety of programs and relationships that create a complex set of
interconnecting systems. These include governance, management, people, and work subsystems (Andreadis, 2009, p. 7). Figure 1 provides a systems diagram of these relationships.

Figure 1. Systems diagram of Youth Unlimited North York.

From a governance systems perspective, the commission of each Youth Unlimited (YU) chapter and their board is to ensure their programs adhere to Youth for Christ’s nationally approved strategies and conform to the international philosophy and standards of Youth for
Sustainability Supporting Volunteer Engagement

Christ International (Youth Unlimited Canada, 2013). In addition, as a charitable organization, there are governance requirements set by Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. YU also requires a police clearance certificate from each volunteer (S. Moore, personal communication, February 14, 2012; Toronto Police Service, 2013). A program leader’s inattention to obtaining a volunteer’s police clearance certificate could ultimately jeopardize a program’s safety and the organization’s reputation if an offender was engaged in volunteer activities.

The primary relationships in the management subsystem are between YUNY’s area director and his direct reports. This subsystem also includes the area director’s relationships with YUGTA’s associate director and management team members (Andreadis, 2009).

Within the people subsystem, the inter-relationships are complex. YUGTA develops the human resource policies. The area director mentors, trains, and develops staff on a daily basis. Formal training for staff is provided at YUGTA workshops and during the regional and national conventions (S. Moore, personal communication, April 13, 2012). External stakeholders, donors, volunteers, and youth participants form an important part of this subsystem (Andreadis, 2009; Bolman & Deal, 2008).

World Vision, the Jane-Finch Church coalition, and three churches are all significant partners (S. Moore, personal communication, February 21, 2012). Their individual relationships vary greatly in the specifics. By way of example, World Vision has provided project specific funding, and Spring Garden Baptist Church provides office space for the area director and space for project activities (e.g., the 2012 Spring Build a Bike Program). Developing and maintaining
relationships with all community partners is essential for the success of the organization (S. Moore, personal communication, February 21, 2012).

The work subsystem is at the core of daily activities at YUNY. To a large degree, a program leader’s focus is on his or her program, the youth in the group, and keeping the team of volunteers meaningfully engaged (S. Moore, personal communication, February 14, 2012). The area director and his relationships with the program leaders, their programs, the youth and volunteers play a significant role regarding support and design of processes in the work subsystem. The area director of YUNY is the person who connects all of these subsystems, people, and partners with the rest of YUGTA.

Oshry (2007) provided a systems description to explain the complexity of organizations; in Oshry’s terms, YUNY’s area director is a Top or the executive of an organization, the program leaders are Middles or the management staff, the volunteers are Bottoms or the workers, and the youth are the Customers, the people receiving services (p. xii).

A number of dependent and interdependent systems exist that can impact the success or demise of the donation- and volunteer-dependent YUNY organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Senge, 2006). These include the economy of Canada; tax regulations regarding donations; the financial health, management, and generosity of all partnership organizations; the strength of other Canadian chapters that host the annual conference and training meeting; social and economic conditions affecting the availability of time individuals have to volunteer; and the reputation and integrity of YUNY programs.
The necessity of program leaders balancing program management, meaningfully engaging volunteers, and conforming to the organizational requirements was at the heart of this research project. These activities and relationships require a deep understanding of YUNY’s complex internal and external organizational systems.

Summary

The importance of volunteer management and care at YUNY, a volunteer- and donation-dependent NPO, formed the core focus of this action-research-based thesis. This topic has a significant place in the future of YUNY’s growth and its continued, positive impact on the numerous sectors of society served through the development projects led by the organization’s project leaders and volunteers.

In Chapter 2, a comprehensive literature review of three areas of academic research that provided a foundation of understanding for this research project is presented. The topics covered are sustainable environments, volunteer engagement, and learning in organizations.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provided a greater understanding of the research project’s main inquiry question: How can the program leaders at Youth Unlimited North York develop a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of their ministry volunteers? Three topics were researched: sustainable organizational environments, volunteer engagement, and learning in organizations. The rationale for selecting each topic is provided in each of the three sections. The definition and importance of sustainable organizational environments is described in the first literature review section. A description, discussion, and definition of volunteer engagement and the benefits, drivers, and limiting factors of engagement are outlined in the second section. The value of continuous learning in an organization, team learning, and environments conducive to learning are discussed in the third section.

Sustainable Environments

The core of this research project investigated how a sustainable environment promoting full engagement of volunteers could be developed. In this section of the literature review an understanding of the definition and constitutional makeup of sustainable environments is provided and the related value within organizations is described. Together these elements provided sound foundational knowledge for this research inquiry.

Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) as well as Weerawardena, McDonald, and Sullivan Mort (2010) highlighted corporate sustainability as an emerging and important concept. Further Weerawardena et al. (2010) noted that current supporting research is fragmented. Lubin and Esty
(2010) supported this contention and identified the lack of clarity from the standpoint of definition, content, and means of attainment.

Sustainability traditionally focused on the consideration of nonrenewable natural resources or lowering an organization’s environmental impact (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010; Sanker, 2012). This terminology has expanded to include “environmental, economic and societal topics” (Kiron, Kruschwitz, Haanaes, & von Streng Velken, 2012, p. 70). Further, identification of volunteers as natural resources and application of organizational sustainability principles to volunteer-dependent NPOs creates a greater understanding for the collaborative development of a sustainable environment.

**Defining sustainable organizational environments**

Even though there has been an evolution in the definition of organizational sustainability over the past 50 years, Sanker (2012) contended, “Business-environmental sustainability is still often misconstrued as the revival of the green movement of the 1960s” (p. 52). Sanker supported Goldsmith, Baldoni, and McArthur’s (2010) assertion “that ‘organizational sustainability’ is not limited to the ‘traditional’ environmental factors such as controlling emissions, using green energy, conserving scarce resources, and the like” (p. 251). The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) provided a baseline definition provided that reflected this expansion of thought, defining sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 41).
Goldsmith et al. (2010) and Weerawardena et al. (2010) expanded on these definitions, adding elements beyond that of the environment. Goldsmith et al. identified five major organizational elements: “efficiency, people, clients, shareholders and society” (p. 251). These authors defined sustainability as the “degree to which an organization is capable of creating long-term wealth by reconciling its most important (‘golden’) dilemmas created between these five components” (p. 251). Similarly, Weerawardena et al. (2010) summarized their definition as “sustainability is a complex, interlinked construct” (p. 355), requiring more than a simplistic approach of only addressing physical environmental impacts. Specifically for NPOs, Weerawardena et al. added stakeholders to the definition and noted that sustainability primarily means being able to survive to continue to serve its constituency (p. 347). Eccles, Miller Perkins, and Serafeim (2012) agreed, expanded the definition, and stated “becoming sustainable involves a conscious and continuing effort to build long-term value for shareholders by contributing to a sustainable society” (p. 2). Sanker (2012) encapsulated these ideas with his cohesive conclusion that sustainability is about “meeting humanity’s needs without harming future generations” (pp. 54–55).

Informed by these developing definitions, sustainability, for the purposes of this paper, extends beyond classic environmental factors and economic resources and includes a focus on social performance and human resources (Eccles et al., 2012; Goldsmith et al., 2010; Kiron et al., 2012; Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010; Sanker, 2012; Velazquez, Esquer, Munguía, & Moure-Eraso, 2011; Weerawardena et al., 2010). The meaning of sustainability for this paper also addresses the NPO’s complex, challenging, and multistakeholder environment and associated
strategic processes versus that of a for-profit environment (Weerawardena et al., 2010, p. 347). In summary, the definition of sustainability for this paper is closely tied to Kiron et al. (2012) and Weerawardena et al.’s (2010) definitions and is the continued service and fulfillment of commitments to stakeholders and the community within which an organization operates. A sustainable environment is one that reflects this approach (Van Duzer, 2010, p. 74).

The importance of sustainable environments

Kiron et al. (2012) conducted a global survey of 113 countries and concluded that sustainability is reaching a favourable tipping point in which for-profit organizations see the need for sustainable business practices but are also gaining financially from them (p. 70). Weerawardena et al. (2010) identified the building of sustainable organizations as both an emerging “critical need” (p. 346) and “central issue” (p. 346) for leadership of NPOs. These authors identified the missing linkages between the drive of a dynamic environment fuelling the development of sustainable organizations and the influence this has on NPOs’ strategic pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness of their service delivery (Weerawardena et al., 2010, pp. 346–347). Further, Weerawardena et al.’s research concluded that in a resource-challenged and dynamic environment the central issue for NPOs is the requirement to “build a sustainable organization that can continue [to] deliver social value via the pursuit of its social mission” (p. 347). Weerawardena et al. affirmed that the need to balance “mission and money” (p. 347) is a symptom of this issue, and this drives NPOs to focus on organizational sustainability at both the operational and strategic management level (p. 346).
Kiron et al. (2012) also contended that the business question has moved from questioning the need for addressing sustainability to understanding how sustainability can be achieved (p. 70). Kiron et al. stated, “Unless sustainability adds to profits over time, a sustainability agenda will likely fail to gain or hold traction in the enterprise” (p. 72). More pragmatically, Eccles et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of knowing what specific issues pertain to sustainability for organizations seeking to become sustainable (p. 3). Haanaes et al. (2011) added to the complexity of the importance of sustainability and stated that sustainability is viewed differently at different levels in an organizational structure, specifically by senior executive officers whose core focus is on innovation and the opportunity for long-term sustainability (p. 81). Sanker (2012) agreed and noted the importance of chief executive officers’ focus and commitment to sustainability goals (p. 54). Within this body of research literature are common themes illuminating the importance, issues, and complexity of sustainability.

Weerawardena et al. (2010) identified that the literature on this research topic is both “fragmented and relatively under developed” (p. 347) in that it does not provide information regarding strategies to be employed to attain sustainability, increased efficiency, and effectiveness of their service delivery (p. 347). Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) supported this argument and also identified the lack of understanding regarding how leaders can implement practices of corporate sustainability within their organizations (p. 357).

Another considerable focus in the literature is on the balancing of money and mission and the resulting comparisons between sustainability of for-profit businesses and NPOs (Krug & Weinberg, 2004; Weerawardena et al., 2010). The focus of this research project was to
understand the sustainability of the environment pertaining specifically to the organization’s core nonfinancial resource, their volunteers. This lens addresses a gap in research for organizations focused on a social mission and their accompanying strategy of sustainability (Weerawardena et al., 2010).

**Volunteer Engagement**

Eccles et al. (2012) posited that engagement is a critical requirement for the execution of a sustainable strategy for organizations in which success is dependent on behavioural changes in people (p. 6). This statement underlies the rationale for researching and understanding volunteer engagement in support of the change-related project I conducted in a volunteer dependent services organization. Specifically, the program leaders at YUNY were also the managers of the volunteers and would also be the initiators, developers, and supporters of any changes, including the potential changes in both their and the volunteers’ behaviours. This literature review describes, discusses, and defines engagement and creates an understanding of the drivers, benefits, and limiters of volunteer engagement. Together these factors provide essential foundational knowledge that informed this research project.

**Describing, discussing, and defining volunteer engagement**

Despite the proliferation of research on work engagement there are still many unknowns with no one clear universal definition (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011, p. 8). There is, however, general consensus on the two core factors of work engagement, namely energy and involvement or identification (pp. 8–9).
Vecina, Chacón, Sueiro, and Barrón (2011) conducted an extensive analysis of both work and volunteer engagement in their study on volunteer engagement among both new and veteran volunteers; they concluded “Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption” (p. 144), or what is termed the “three-factor structure” (p. 144), described volunteer engagement. Vecina et al. also concluded engagement amongst volunteers has a similar structure to that of both workers and students (p. 144). This conclusion is important for this literature review, as sources describing both employee and volunteer engagement have been used to gain a greater understanding of engagement. Throughout the paper, clarity between these terms is maintained, specifically in situations in which engagement refers to volunteer engagement. Where there are differences, these will be highlighted.

Definitions of engagement vary according to researchers’ perspectives (Vecina et al., 2011). These include, but are not limited to, the individual, the organization, or the system. McCormick (2007) defined engagement from the individual’s perspective as “a personal state of authentic involvement, contribution and ownership” (p. 508). In contrast, Eccles et al. (2012) defined employee engagement from the organizational perspective as “actions a company takes to secure the interest and attention of their employees in their sustainability efforts” (p. 6), which Bakker et al. (2011) referred to as the “climate for engagement” (p. 23). Both perspectives are pertinent and valid for the purposes of this paper—the former, to gain an understanding of a desired end state, and the latter, the process to attain this state, the subject of which forms the core of this research project. Bakker et al. concluded their research by stating that more attention needs to be paid to the impact organizational, or macrolevel, factors have on engagement,
specifically the influence of transformational leadership (p. 23). In their words, “the ongoing challenge is to continue to merge good science and good practice in the pursuit of this worthy objective” (Bakker et al., 2011, p. 23). The purpose of this research project was to meet this challenge.

Vecina et al. (2011) further explained and expanded engagement to include both satisfaction and commitment of an individual to an organization (p. 144). The linkages between the key variables of engagement, volunteer satisfaction, and the intention to continue in an organization appear to be complex and vary with differing study samples, yet remain significant (pp. 130, 138). Vecina et al. also concluded the basis of a volunteer’s intention to stay in an organization is explained by satisfaction for new volunteers and by organizational commitment for veteran volunteers (p. 144). In Vecina et al.’s study, 10 months of volunteering appeared to provide the demarcation for those who showed evidence of organizational commitment (p. 145).

The McCormick Employee Engagement Inventory supported the aforementioned definition of engagement by describing seven scales characterizing engagement (McCormick, 2007, p. 508). These factors, and the associated desired state they each represent, are (a) communication towards feeling informed, (b) customer relationship, (c) job or role specific to clarity and confidence, (d) how a job is done as it relates to personal initiative, (e) confidence of goals and outcomes, (f) work climate with the aim of an open and trusting culture and, (g) leadership towards a leaderful organization (p. 508). I considered these scales in the development and design of the research questions for this research project.
The landscape of work engagement is extensive, complex, and at a crossroads (Bakker et al., 2011). However, for the sake of clarity, the following definition of volunteer engagement, mainly informed by the works of Hustinx and Handy (2009), McCormick (2007), and Vecina et al. (2011), was used for this inquiry: a personal state of authentic involvement, contribution, attachment and commitment.

**Benefits, drivers, and limiting factors of engagement**

Vecina et al. (2011) posited that volunteer engagement is considered a positive concept that is of importance and practical interest for the management of NPOs (p. 143). Engagement is also a “relevant variable for explaining the sought-after states of satisfaction and organizational commitment” (p. 144) for volunteering. Vecina et al. added that work engagement is not only a unique concept but also has a positive relationship with numerous favourable personal and work-related attributes (p. 132), including positive attitudes, high activity levels, and positive accomplishments (Bakker et al., 2011). Further, Eccles et al. (2012) highlighted the emotional connectivity of engaged people to their work and workplace, which results in greater productivity and involvement in discretionary efforts towards achieving organizational goals (p. 6). Adding to this, Casarez (2007) posited that engagement levels and increased ownership of outcomes are positively correlated (p. 499).

Hustinx and Handy’s (2009) study conducted in a multipurpose and multibranch service organization concluded the specific experiences of the local programs on the volunteer as well as the physical location of the program played a considerable role in the volunteer’s attachment and sense of belonging, loyalty, and satisfaction (pp. 216–217). In addition, Hustinx and Handy’s
research highlighted that the latter two factors are impacted by the volunteer’s personal profile. These authors concluded the greater the age and the higher the level of education, the weaker the volunteer’s organizational, program, or chapter attachment (Hustinx & Handy, 2009, p. 216). Hustinx and Handy also noted that the intensity of a volunteer’s participation is a mitigating factor and has a positive impact on volunteer loyalty and satisfaction (p. 215). When hiring, Hustinx and Handy advised that close attention be paid to the specific program or chapter of a larger organization (p. 205), as these are the drivers or attractors for volunteers and the resultant building of loyalties and belonging (p. 218). As the organizational profile of YUNY is similar to that of Hustinx and Handy’s research organization and each YUNY program is unique, heed will be given to these research findings.

**Learning in Organizations**

Continuous learning by individuals, groups, and organizations is necessary to prepare people for the perpetual changes presented by a complex world and to position people to maximize success (Sessa & London, 2006). Israelite (2006) agreed with this position and stated, “The modern work environment is too complex and fast changing for an organization to trust solely in self-development” (p. 24). McHargue (2003) argued, “Organizations can only become effective if the people who run them are capable of learning continuously themselves and of giving direction and support the learning of others” (p. 203).

This research project focussed on the potential changes in behaviour of both YUNY program leaders and the volunteers, and thus resultant changes in the organization. Som, Theng Nam, Wahab, Nordin, and Mashkuri (2012) stated, “Organizations, teams and individuals need
to engage in a continuous loop of learning to sustain agility and organizational transformation” (p. 2). McHargue (2003) described volunteers as a “diverse and temporary workforce” (p. 203) and a valuable resource who contribute significantly to both the “learning and performance of an NPO” (p. 203).

In addition to this introduction regarding the value of learning in an organization, this portion of the literature review focuses specifically on the concepts of team learning and the type of environments conducive to learning. This review serves to provide a deeper foundation of knowledge for this research project, in which the focus was on a team of people who are looking to create changes that in turn impact their teams of volunteers.

**Team learning**

Senge (2006) stated, “Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire” (p. 218). Senge further argued that team learning builds on the important but insufficient factors of a team’s shared vision and the individual team members’ skills. This results in the execution of a team’s mission (Senge, 2006, p. 218). Senge concluded that there “has never been a greater need for mastering team learning in organizations than there is today” (p. 219). Israelite (2006) supported this position and argued that the key to success in delivering programs to learners is to find a “balance between group and individual focus” (p. 22). Israelite (2006) highlighted the juxtaposition or difficulty learning professionals have in balancing the desire to maintain the individuality of each learner against limited resources and time. This ultimately, for the sake of efficiency, can force a move to accommodating the lowest common denominator (Senge, 2006, p. 23).
Core to this research project was the concept of a team of program leaders working together to create change and understanding how this impacts their teams and the organization. Senge (2006) highlighted that teams that learn “become a microcosm for learning throughout the organization” (p. 219). This can result in the sharing and propagation of insights and skills amongst individuals and teams and create change throughout the larger organization (p. 219).

Senge (2006) noted the three dimensions of team learning are (a) insightful thinking regarding complex matters, (b) “innovative and coordinated action” (p. 219), and (c) fostering of learning from one to another as learned concepts are instilled. Senge also posited that team learning is a “collective discipline” (p. 219), requiring the practising of the counterbalancing concepts of dialogue and discussion. During a dialogue different views are communicated and new understandings of complex issues are generated. In a discussion, teams make agreements and decisions (Kaner, 2007, pp. 24–28; Senge, 2006, pp. 221–230). Understanding the dimensions and complexities of team learning further informed this change-focussed, team-based research project.

**Environments conducive to learning**

Learning occurs in environments in which the organization provides support and encouragement towards learning and when individuals feel involved in the process and are afforded the freedom to take risks when applying their learning (Israelite, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Yukl, 2010). Kouzes and Posner (2007) also concluded that, although it appears paradoxical, the feeling of safety fosters risk taking and the willingness to make mistakes.
Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated, “Learning is more likely to happen in a climate in which people feel safe in making themselves vulnerable, safe in taking the risk of failure” (p. 202).

Israelite (2006) explained the positive relationship that exists between learners, their organizational engagement, and the associated perception of value. Engagement is directly related to how people perceive and understand their involvement in the process. Israelite concluded, “The closer you are to the learner, the more likely you’ll be delivering an experience that he or she immediately sees is valuable” (p. 21). Israelite further observed that enjoyment in learning is derived when the options are both valuable and interesting (p. 24).

Israelite (2006) acknowledged that although people’s commonalities are greater than their differences, generational differences are important to consider. Learners born after the mid-1970s have “grown up in a radically different world compared to their ‘elders’” (p. 24). Heeding this advice and “providing alternatives can help bridge any gaps related to age, experience or education (Israelite, 2006, p. 22). Israelite also noted the critical need for those managing the learning to fully understand and balance the spectrum of needs of the organization and its people.

Musick and Wilson (2008) described the importance of balance when meeting the needs of both volunteers and paid workers and observed how this affects the atmosphere within volunteer dependent NPOs. Musick and Wilson considered the following four factors important to maintain an environment in which volunteer enthusiasm and motivation remains high: (a) volunteer role clarification, (b) avoiding overregulation of activities, (c) balancing of supervision and structure, and (d) understanding the potential tension between the job requirements of the paid employees versus the freedom of organizational commitment and desire
for recognition of the volunteers (pp. 435–437). Musick and Wilson also noted “the awkward reversal of roles” (p. 436) that occurs when a volunteer with long tenure and experience becomes the teacher to newly hired paid staff. All of the aforementioned factors play an important role, especially for NPOs that are working to create an environment that is conducive to learning (Musick & Wilson, 2008, pp. 436–437).

Yukl (2010) supported Musick and Wilson’s (2008) arguments and provided a number of examples of independent factors that contribute to environments conducive to learning. The following eight examples were pertinent to this research project:

1. Create work tasks that accommodate the pursuit of a person’s interest and the opportunity for that individual to acquire new skills.
2. Schedule time to utilize new methods and evaluate results.
3. Fund continuing education.
4. Provide speakers and learning events.
5. Renew energy via sabbatical programs.
6. Offer worker counselling and self-awareness assessment programs to determine how individuals’ full potential can be achieved.
7. Encourage skill assessment and development.

In summary, Israelite (2006) concluded that meeting people’s learning needs requires the mastering of a balancing act. Israelite affirmed, “There aren’t any silver bullets, just a lot of hard work and careful thought” (p. 22). Kouzes and Posner (2007) agreed and added there are no
simple tests to determine the best tactics to lead others, but offered the three following factors to support a leader’s success: (a) exhibit a willingness to learn when approaching new or unfamiliar circumstances, (b) appreciate the importance of learning, and (c) recognize that making mistakes are inherent when learning (p. 204). Kouzes and Posner concluded, “The only way people can learn is by doing things they have never done before” (p. 204). Understanding and acting on the value of learning, how teams learn, how environments conducive to learning are created, and what commitments and sacrifices are required to achieve these outcomes can help leaders and organizations progress and “generate momentum” (p. 205) for their growth and improvement.

**Summary**

There was only a small body of academic literature applicable to the selected areas of research and upon which this thesis was based, namely sustainable organizational environments, volunteer engagement, and learning as it relates to NPOs (Som et al., 2012). The literature review on sustainability provided an analysis of the available literature specifically related to the sustainability of corporate, nonfinancial resources, as opposed to the more typical definition of sustainability as it pertains to the environment. As Weerawardena et al. (2010) stated, “Sustainability is a complex, interlinked construct requiring more than simply the ability to address impacts on the physical environment” (p. 355).

Where applicable, the literature review on volunteer engagement included academic literary sources that also pertained to employee engagement. In addition to the provision and discussion of the definitions of both topics, the importance of sustainability as well as the benefits drivers and limitations of volunteer engagement were outlined. Despite the scarcity of
available literature specifically focussed on NPOs (Som et al., 2012), specific care was taken to source learning-related literature that provided a deeper understanding of the importance of learning, team learning, and environments conducive to learning.

In the chapter that follows, the dual application of action research and action inquiry are presented as the approach used for this research inquiry. I provide a discussion related to the suitability of these methods. In addition, I describe the project participants, the methods of data collection, the study conduct, and provide an outline of the data analysis processes. Finally, I give consideration to ethical issues of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice.
CHAPTER THREE: INQUIRY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The main inquiry question was: How can the program leaders at Youth Unlimited North York develop a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of their ministry volunteers? The subquestions were:

1. What does a sustainable environment for engaged volunteers at YUNY look like?
2. How is volunteer engagement at YUNY defined?
3. How does leadership behaviour affect volunteer engagement at YUNY?

In this chapter an overview of the complementary action research and action inquiry methodologies are described. In addition, the rationale behind using qualitative research methods, the choice of the interview matrix and conversation café as the inquiry methods, and the selection of research participants are outlined. A description of the data collection activities, the data analysis processes, and the ethical issues that underscored the research are described.

Inquiry Approach

The complementary participatory action research (Stringer, 2007) and action inquiry methodologies (Torbert, 2004) formed the basis of the research approach for this project. Torbert (2004) noted that where ordinary approaches have failed to produce desired results a conversational action inquiry is a highly motivating methodology to initiate the research process (p. 31). Action inquiry’s primary value is to “increase mutuality” (Torbert, 2004, p. 3), and if mutuality is valued over unilateral control, then action inquiry becomes a comfortable conversational approach (p. 31).
Action research is an iterative, interactive methodology consisting of spiralling inquiry loops. Each loop consists of a three-step process to look, think, and act (Stringer, 2007, pp. 8–9). During the look phase data are gathered and the research situation is defined and described. The analysis, interpretation, and explanation of the information are all undertaken in the think phase. The recommendations, reporting, implementing, and evaluation are conducted in the act stage (Stringer, 2007, p. 8).

The primary purpose of action research is twofold. Firstly, action research focuses on a localized understanding of how circumstances are changing, and not just what the circumstances are. Secondly, action research serves to comprehend how the community of affected people or stakeholders, understand and act on the outcomes or events resulting from the research activities (Stringer, 2007, p. 19). In practice, action research becomes a practical problem-solving tool for everyday community problems (Stringer, 2007, p. 12).

The combination of three factors results in the transforming power of these research methodologies. The first factor is a dedication to a shared vision (Torbert, 2004, p. 9). The second is an awareness of gaps between the vision and outcomes in both self and others (Torbert, 2004, p. 9). The third is an openness to participate in a leading role with members of a team or organization towards transformation of both others and oneself (Torbert, 2004, p. 9). Increased effectiveness of work can result from this process (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). YUNY’s vision is to provide uniquely tailored programs that facilitate transformation in the lives of the youth and the communities in which they live in (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.d). Increasing volunteer care and management is one of YUGTA’s top human resources priorities (H. Wyse, personal
communication, February 14, 2012) and represents an element of the gap that sits between YUNY’s vision and its current circumstances. The willingness of the YUNY team to so readily participate in this research project was a testament to their openness of exploring the process of action research.

The focus of the research was on the program leaders working together as a team. In addition, this research aimed to gain an understanding of the program leaders’ descriptions and recollections of past events and to gather their thoughts and ideas related to what they could do together to create a supportive environment and to more fully engage volunteers. The choice to use qualitative research, rather than quantitative research, for this project was supported by van den Hooniaard (2012), who stated, “Qualitative research encompasses a variety of approaches through which researchers attempt to understand the everyday lives and social settings of those they study” (p. 2). Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) description of qualitative research as the opportunity “to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge” (p. 16) was mirrored in the essence of this research project. In addition, both Glesne’s (2011) explanation that “qualitative researchers often seek to make sense of actions, narratives, and the ways in which they intersect” (p. 1) and Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) observation that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 5) applied directly to this research project and further informed my decision to use qualitative research methods. This decision was further informed by van den Hooniaard’s (2012) conclusions that the
variety of methods available for use in qualitative research provide a “rich understanding of the social processes involved in everyday life” (p. 2), and that the power of qualitative research is based on the research participants defining, in their own terms, what is central and important in their experience (p. 2).

In her book titled *Qualitative Research in Action*, van den Hoonnaard (2012) noted the benefits of qualitative research over quantitative research resulted in “a deeper understanding of the participants” (p. 3), as they are afforded the opportunity to add details and descriptions of their personal experiences. This attribute of qualitative research applied directly to the YUNY research project. Further, the six basic assumptions of qualitative research outlined by van den Hoonnaard also supported the decision to use qualitative research methods for this project. The six assumptions are: (a) human lived reality is the focus of the research; (b) understanding is gained through inductive reasoning (i.e., start with the specifics and proceed to a general understanding); (c) meanings described by the participants are of prime importance to the study; (d) “researchers must identify the definition of the situation” (van den Hoonnaard, 2012, p. 15); (e) the research outcomes can be directly affected by the social setting, which by nature is highly complex; and (f) “understanding exists in our agreed-upon experiences” (p. 15). All of these factors applied directly to this research project. Quantitative research by way of comparison focuses on the researcher’s meanings and definitions, the development and testing of theories, deductive reasoning, objective definitions, uniform outcomes regardless of the research location, and finally that “truth is an objective reality” (van den Hoonnaard, 2012, p. 15). As the research project at YUNY focussed on how the program leaders could change and define the
sustainability of their organization, I found that none of the factors describing quantitative research reflected the core of this research project. In contrast, the described fundamental factors describing qualitative research directly supported this project. Finally, Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) comparison of qualitative research as “fluid, evolving and dynamic” (p. 13) versus the more “rigid and structured” (p. 13) characteristics of qualitative research, as well as Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) statement that qualitative research is focused on “measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes” (p. 13), highlighted the applicability of choosing qualitative research for this project.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated, “Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experiences; introspection; life story; interview . . . that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (p. 5). Qualitative researchers also utilize a variety of “interconnected interpretive practices” (p. 5) with the intention of attaining a deeper understanding. Each of these practices sheds a different light on the research. An interview matrix and conversation café were selected as the methods of inquiry for this research project to achieve the understanding and perspectives as described above. In addition, the choice to combine action research and qualitative research methods together for this research project was supported by Greenwood and Levin (2003), who noted that action research is also “inherently multi-method research” (p. 144) and “not limited by qualitative or quantitative research” (p. 144).

The two selected research methods blended and mirrored the servant leadership values of YUNY, and as such I determined these interventions to be a good cultural fit (Youth Unlimited,
n.d.a). Spears (1998) outlined 10 characteristics of servant leadership that provided a perspective for this choice. These are the ability to (a) listen intently; (b) reflect; (c) be empathetic; (d) heal oneself and “one’s relationship to others” (p. 5); (e) build consensus; (f) persuade rather than coerce; (g) conceptualize the future; (h) use foresight and apply what was learned in the past to the present and future; (i) steward or to focus one’s commitment to serving others and developing “the greater good of society” (p. 7); and (j) commit to the growth of people within the organization and the building of the larger community (pp. 5–7). The two selected methods provided the opportunity for the research to be conducted in an environment that was conducive to the values of the participants.

Bernard and Ryan (2010) described four goals of qualitative research: exploration, description, comparison, and testing (p. 8). In this research project exploration and descriptions were provided during both the interview matrix and conversation café events. I compared the data during the summarization and theming of information from both data collection activities. The design of the questions was intended to generate information that would provide the opportunity for participants to share information that could be both compared and tested (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 10).

The scope of this project allowed for one loop of Stringer’s (2007) three-step “look, think and act” (p. 8) cycle of the action inquiry process. In the look phase information was gathered and used to create a description of the situation. During the think stage that followed, the information was analyzed and interpreted to provide an understanding. In the act stage, a plan or report was generated and recommendations were provided. After these phases have been
implemented and evaluated, the second loop can be initiated to continue this “constant process of observation, reflection, and action” (Stringer, 2007, p. 9). During this research project the interview matrix and conversation café completed the look phase, and this report completed the think and plan or report part of the act phase. Recommendations are provided for YUNY to implement and evaluate and to inform their decision of initiating a second look, think, and act action research cycle.

During the data-gathering portion of this research project, my role was to facilitate the process. During both the interview matrix and conversation café I set up the environment, explained the processes, and coordinated the timing of the research activities. The participants were solely responsible for conducting the interviews and guiding the conversation; as such, I did not contribute any data (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). This research did not require me to be an “observer” (Glesne, 2011, p. 65) of the participants or a “participant” (p. 65) in the data gathering process. As I was not affiliated with the YUNY organization, there was no conflict in my role as facilitator (p. 65).

**Project Participants and Stakeholders**

A letter of invitation to both the interview matrix and conversation café was mailed to each of the eight program leaders at YUNY (see Appendix A). My decision to include all program leaders was supported by the literature, as Stringer (2007) advocated that all stakeholders should participate in the research (p. 11). The letter of invitation explained the purpose, methods, and ultimate dissemination of the research results (see Appendix A). As
everyone was invited to participate in both of the research events, program leaders each received one invitation. Participants could elect to take part in either one or both of the research activities.

Due to time limitations between the receipt of the ethics approval for this inquiry and YUNY’s retreat, where the research was conducted, the consent forms for participation in the interview matrix (see Appendix B) and the conversation café (see Appendix C) were included in the envelope with the letter of invitation (see Appendix A). This afforded the program leaders the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding participation by reviewing both the invitation and letters of consent prior to arriving at the retreat. The letters of consent included details of the time, duration, and location of the interview matrix (see Appendix B) and the conversation café (see Appendix C). All participants were clearly advised that, at any time, they could withdraw without prejudice from the study (see Appendices A, B, and C).

The research inquiry team consisted of my organizational sponsor, academic supervisor, an editor, and me. All inquiry team members signed a Letter of Agreement (see Appendix D) to agree on maintenance of confidentiality, responsibilities, and expectations. Research team members adhered to the Royal Roads University (2011) Research Ethics Policy at all times. The sponsor and supervisor provided guidance regarding the design and development of the research methods and questions.

Inquiry Methods

Specific care was taken to select the appropriate combination of inquiry methods and then sequence them to create a credible study that had integrity and provided transferable, confirmable, and dependable data (Stringer, 2007, pp. 57–59). This information also needed to
be suitable for analysis to support this research project’s inquiry questions. The following three sections provide details regarding the data collection methods, study conduct, and data analysis.

**Data collection methods**

The two inquiry methods selected for this study include a combination of an interview matrix and a conversation café. Both methods are designed to provide qualitative data, forming a baseline of information against which any ongoing measurements provided by action research cycles, which may be conducted by the organization after the completion of this project, could be compared and contrasted (Stringer, 2007, p. 9).

Two qualitative research methods were utilized and all program leaders were invited to attend both events. The first was a community-based research matrix interview method of inquiry focussed on questions related to knowledge of current and past events. The second was a conversation café with questions focussed on the future. Qualitative research interviewing is also a method that lends itself to the examination of topics in which different levels of meaning are being explored (Cassell & Symon, 2006, p. 21). Both methods had activity-based plans and allowed the stakeholders to be directly involved in the creation of meaningful data that would ultimately form a “consensual vision of their lifeworld” (Stringer, 2007, p. 11).

**Interview matrix**

An interview matrix is a powerful, focussed, and efficient way to engage an entire group of people in a team-based data gathering process in which each person has equal time to speak and share information (Chartier, 2002, p. 70). Participants are typically divided into groups of four people. Each person interviews all of the other team members, asking the preset open-ended
question assigned to them, and responding to the other three preset questions when being interviewed by each of the other team members. The exercise consists of six rounds of 5-minute interviews. Groups are then formed to summarize and categorize the information and present their findings to the entire group.

The interview matrix process facilitates consolidation of a balance of information, opinions, or ideas on specific issues or to answer specific questions (Chartier, 2002, p. 70). In keeping with action research methodology, primary data are sourced from “interviews with primary and key stakeholders” (Stringer, 2007, p. 68) to “extend and clarify” (p. 80) the understanding each participant has of the research topic. When participants are afforded the time to speak openly and freely “the most successful and productive action research is achieved” (Stringer, 2007, p. 87). The four interview matrix questions were designed to facilitate this process (see Appendix E). The first three questions specifically focussed on the past, successful experiences of the program leaders. The fourth question focussed on the application of this knowledge when advising a new program leader. The intention of these questions was to gain an understanding of what the participant’s best experience of a supportive volunteer environment had been or, through question four, what advice an experienced program leader would give to a new leader in order to create a desirable environment.

One benefit of this inquiry method was that it utilized the YUNY team’s existing high level of trust to facilitate open and expansive responses from the participants (Glesne, 2011, p. 108). As there were seven people in this study, a modified version of the interview matrix was
utilized resulting in all four questions being asked and responded to by all participants (see Appendix F).

**Conversation café**

A conversation or world café is an interactive process in which people are invited to gather together in a genuinely hospitable, café style environment. Small groups of people participate in a series of evolving rounds of conversations, sharing their ideas and knowledge; the conversation café is a facilitated discussion utilizing predetermined questions on topics of significance to participants’ lives, organization, or community (Adams & Clancy, 2006; Aldred, 2011; Brown, 2005; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Carson, 2011). The questions are genuinely those for which answers are unknown. An open invitation for innovation is presented to the participants via the combination of the process and unique environment of the café (Brown, 2005, p. 90). The small table environment is conducive to “in-depth conversations that might not have occurred in a more formal environment” (Bunker & Alban, 2006, p. 29).

Brown (2005) presented the following seven design principles of the conversation café:

1. Set the context by clarifying the purpose and parameters of the café.
2. Create a welcoming and hospitable environment.
3. Ensure that the questions are important and matter to the group.
4. Ensure that all participants are encouraged to contribute from their perspective.
5. Invite participants to share and cross-pollinate ideas.
6. Encourage intentional listening to generate deeper questions, greater knowledge sharing, and coherently capture individuals’ contributions.
7. Consolidate information to create a synthesized, coherent, and actionable set of discoveries.

Adams and Clancy (2006) posited that a “conversational greenhouse” (p. 193) is created when Brown’s (2005) seven design principles are used in combination. Further, these design principles support the conditions for rapid propagation of collaborative knowledge and insight (Adams & Clancy, 2006) p. 193). Each of the seven factors was included in the design and planning of the conversation café for this research project.

The conversation café method is particularly useful for “sharing knowledge, building a community, developing in depth exploration of key challenges, deepening relationships and mutual ownership of outcomes in an existing group” (Brown, 2005, p. 162). This inquiry method also provides a “nonthreatening way for people to think together and explore ideas” (Baldwin, as cited in Brown, 2005, p. 178) and, through conversations, facilitates the coevolvement of a group’s planning for the future (Brown, 2005, p. 208). Carson (2011) stated that this method “facilitates a shift from self-interest to the common good” (p. 13). Perhaps the most significant outcome from a conversation café is found in Brown’s (2005) statement, “We can live in whatever world we bring about in our [café] conversations” (p. 207), suggesting that there is commitment by stakeholders to their codeveloped outcomes (p. 162). Senge (2006) emphasized the importance of this type of shared vision and stated, “They create a sense of commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities” (p. 192); a shared vision binds people together through their “common aspiration” (p. 192). Carson supported these sentiments and stated, “The small group activity enhances participants’ citizenship skills and
they feel more motivated to act” (p. 13). The collection of ideas from the conversation café also becomes a “valuable resource that can inspire change” (p. 13).

The conversation café method also gathers data from primary stakeholders at the grassroots level, namely the program leaders at YUNY for this research project. Due to its iterative process, the conversation café fits well with the action research methodology (Stringer, 2007). Carson (2011) also stated that the conversation café is “very egalitarian” (p. 13) and “helps all sides talk towards a better understanding and appreciation of overlapping aspirations” (p. 13). This philosophical approach also met one of the highly preferred requirements of the associate director of YUGTA—that the team would work together during this research (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

The conversation café for YUNY consisted of two forward-looking questions (see Appendix G) and three rounds of conversations. The first question asked, “What does a supportive environment for fully engaged ministry volunteers at Youth Unlimited North York look like?” This first question was intended to have the participants focus their ideas on the environment. The second question asked, “What initiatives could we do together to support an environment that promotes fully engaged ministry volunteers?” This second question was designed to focus the program leaders on the actions they could take to facilitate a supportive environment (see Appendix G).

The conversation café was held after the interview matrix exercise and the same group of people participated in both activities. As such, the participants had already shared their individual stories. The conversation café afforded the opportunity to both deepen the program
leaders’ relationships and develop mutual ownership of the ideas they generated for this highly prioritized challenge (Brown, 2005, p. 162).

**Study conduct**

The interview matrix and conversation café were conducted during YUNY’s annual late summer retreat, which was held at a private cottage property with three separate residences in a quiet, forested area overlooking Lake Muskoka, Ontario. The serenity and beauty of the area provided an environment free of distractions that was supportive of the focus needed to complete these exercises. The research was conducted in the main cottage.

After dining together on Sunday evening, the summer retreat members took a break during which I set up interview matrix areas. One interview area was in the living room and the other in the adjoining dining room. Four flip charts were placed in separate areas of this open plan area. Sticky notepads and markers were provided at each flip chart area.

The interview matrix event began with the seven participants seated at the dining room table. After welcoming them, I reviewed the research consent guidelines, provided an overview of the agenda (see Appendix H), explained the research project, and provided an explanation of the process of a matrix interview. I also provided the group with an overview of each question. To simplify the process, I had created a colour theme for the questions. All paperwork for question one was blue, pink for question two, purple for question three, and green for question four. Each person received a coloured clipboard binder containing three sets of matching coloured paper for the interviews and a fourth set for the summary notes. The top-right corner of each set of papers contained a text box with the question number and interview number, or the
question number and the words “Summary Notes.” The question number and corresponding question were printed below the text box (see Appendices J, K, L, M, N, O, P, and Q). The four separate colour themes provided the interviewers with an easy way in which to organize their interview paperwork. Further, each of the four flip charts held coloured boards that matched the colour assigned to its associated question, and the question was written across the top of the board.

The program leaders then counted themselves off as one, two, three, and four to form one group, and then one, two, and three to form a second group. Each person was given the coloured binder that matched their number and a printout of the interview process to guide them through the progression of the interviews (see Appendix F). The interview order differed between the group of three and group of four people (see Appendix F). I then called for a short break.

Upon reconvening, I called the start time for the first 4-minute interview, and the first round of interviews commenced. I reminded participants when there was 1 minute left, after which I called for the 2-minute summary time and then for the switch in interviews. This process continued until all of the interviews were completed. Once the group of four had completed all of their interviews, three people from that group interviewed each member of the group of three people about question four. After all of the interviews were completed, the clipboard binders and interview data were handed in, and the group took a short break.

During the break I collated the interview data into four matching colour sets (i.e., one for each interview question). When the group reconvened, each person moved to the flip chart that held their initial interview question. The three pairs and one solo person, for question four, spent
20 minutes consolidating the information and providing a summary on the flip charts. Some people chose to write directly onto the flip charts and some elected to use the sticky notes that were provided at each flip chart area. Once this was completed, the group gathered together at the first flip chart and the pair who had summarized the data presented this to all of the participants. The group followed this process for the remaining three flip charts.

After thanking the group and reminding them of the time of the conversation café the following day, I closed the interview matrix data collection event and the group dispersed. I then packaged up the flip chart boards and all of the interview data sheets.

The conversation café event was held during the late morning of the day following the interview matrix. After the refreshment break, the group of participants gathered around the dining room table. I then formally welcomed everyone to the conversation café event, reviewed the research consent process, and I provided an overview of the agenda (see Appendix I). I explained the process of the conversation café and the two questions to be discussed. Everyone was asked to write their ideas and summarization of their conversations onto the sticky notes. Participants were advised that they would also be summarizing the information into themes at the end of the event.

The group took a brief break, and at this time I placed a large sheet of coloured cardboard, which I had prepared in advance, on each of the dining and living room tables. Each piece of cardboard had one of the questions written as a header. Markers and sticky notes were also placed on each table.
The group reconvened, and after a few minutes everyone was settled at the tables and the first round of conversations commenced. During the first round of conversations all participants wrote only with black markers. After 25 minutes, two people from the table of three and three people from the table of four switched tables. When the next round began, the two people who had remained at the tables provided a brief explanation of what had transpired during round one of the conversation. After two minutes I called for the start of round two of the conversation. During this second round of conversations, the participants wrote with blue-coloured markers at the one table and with markers of various shades of red at the other table. After 25 minutes, I called for the end of the second round of conversations and asked that a different person stay behind at each of the tables and the rest of the people once again switched back to their original tables. Round three of the conversations commenced. The two people who had stayed behind provided a 2-minute overview of the progression of the conversation to the new group. The use of the coloured markers facilitated the ease in which the participants could see the progression of the original conversations. During the third round the participants used green or yellow markers. After 25 minutes I called for the close of the conversations and the start of a short break.

After the break, the group reconvened, divided into two teams, and seated themselves at one of the two tables. Over the next 20 minutes the participants summarized the information into themes. Upon completion, they placed the boards onto the flip charts and each team presented the summarized information to the entire group. After a brief summarization and wrap up, I thanked all of the participants and called the conversation café data-gathering event to a close.
Data analysis processes

Both the interview matrix exercise and the conversation café provided qualitative data. At the conclusion of each of the data-gathering activities, the participants summarized their findings into common themes and unique inputs (Glesne, 2011, p. 188) and presented these to the entire group. Any progression of themes resulting from the three rounds of the conversation café was captured via the use of the uniquely coloured markers used during each round at each table. I provided observations regarding the summary of the initial themes, progression of any changes, emerging themes, and unique findings to the participants at the conclusion of each data collection activity.

In order to discover the themes, subthemes, and metathemes represented by the research data, I utilized an inductive approach combining Bernard and Ryan’s (2010) observational and manipulative qualitative data analysis techniques (pp. 56–67) with Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) four-step constant comparison method (pp. 103–116). The observational techniques included identifying repeating words, similarities and differences, and missing data (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, pp. 56–62). The manipulative techniques included cutting and sorting, identifying word lists and keywords in context, and metacoding (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, pp. 63–67). The four iterative steps of Glaser and Strauss’s constant comparison method included comparing comments applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting or reducing the categories by further comparisons, and writing of the theory (pp. 63–67). During the first three steps, I coded the data and wrote memos of observations that subsequently became the content behind the categories, major themes, and theory. I selected Glaser and Strauss’s constant
comparison method because it is highly applicable to data derived from interviews and observations and it results in an integrated, believable, and consistent theory that is “close to the data” (p. 103) and can be tested in quantitative research (p. 103).

I reviewed the interview notes to look for patterns (Glesne, 2011, p. 187) and to also ensure all of the information had been accurately reflected (p. 187). I then developed a “coding scheme” (Glesne, 2011, p. 191) to facilitate grouping of themes. In addition, I reviewed the summary of themes developed by the research participants at the conclusion of the interview matrix and conversation café events, compared and contrasted them to one another, and then followed the same process to contrast and compare to the themes I had created. Ultimately, this process led to the creation of one integrated set of themes.

During this process the consistent question I asked of every statement was: How does this statement differ from or how is it similar to this other one? This methodology was used for the separate analysis and theme creation from the conversation café data. It was also used to analyze both the original notes taken by the participants during the interview matrix, and the summary themes created by the participants. After analyzing all of the interview matrix data, I created a consolidated set of interview matrix themes. Finally, the two resulting sets of themes from the interview matrix and the conversation café were compared, contrasted and, where applicable, integrated to create the final themes and metathemes. Further, during the reading and analyzing of the data, I was mindful of noting what data appeared to be “missing” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 62).
Ethical Issues

This research project was an “undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 2010, p. 7). This project was also founded in the quest to benefit society while ensuring high ethical standards that protect and respect all participants were upheld (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 7). Guiding ethical principles of honesty, integrity, and authenticity, as provided by the Tri-Council Policy Statement (Tri-Council, 2010) and Royal Roads University’s (2011) Research Ethics Policy, provided the foundation of thought for the development of the research plan. More specifically, consideration of the Tri-Council Policy Statement’s (Tri-Council, 2010) interdependent core principles of “Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare and Justice” (p. 8) were adhered when planning and conducting this research.

Respect for persons

Honouring of the Tri-Council Policy Statement’s (Tri-Council, 2010) requirements for respect of the research participant’s autonomy of participation was achieved by providing detailed information regarding the research activities (see Appendices A, B, and C). In addition all invitations and consent forms clearly stated that an individual’s participation in this research project was entirely voluntary (Appendices A, B, and C) and that participants could withdraw at any time without prejudice.
Both the interview matrix and conversation café events were conducted during YUNY’s annual retreat, which was held on the cottage property belonging to the family of the area director. The only people present on the property during the retreat were the area director, the program leaders, and me. During both data-gathering events the area director was away from the property and only returned when he was called and advised that the events had concluded. All of the program leaders were advised via the letter of invitation, consent forms, and during the event introductions that they could, at any time, withdraw from the study (see Appendices A, B, and C). The break times provided opportunities for people to remove themselves from the group. If a person had chosen to withdraw from the interview matrix exercise during or immediately after the interviews had taken place the notes taken during their interview could have been isolated and withdrawn from the study. If they had withdrawn during the conversation café, they would have been able to remove any of the sticky notes or mark over and obliterate any of the written contributions they had made on the paper tablecloths used by the groups to share ideas in written form. As there were a maximum of eight program leaders, it would have been obvious if a person had chosen not to attend or removed themselves from the study. Therefore, the group was asked to hold in confidence any participation choices made by their team members. As matters transpired, all of the participants stayed for the full duration of both research activities.

The letter of invitation and consent forms explained how the thesis would be published, the results will be shared with YUNY, and results may be used or published in summary form in journals, white papers, or books (see Appendices A, B and C). In addition to the groups presenting the summary of their findings after the interviews matrix and conversation café, a
presentation of the final results will be made to all program leaders following the formal data analysis. The participants and sponsor organization will also receive a copy of the final report. The consent forms also detailed how all documentation would be kept strictly confidential in a locked cabinet, and all raw data will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed 5 years after acceptance of the thesis by Royal Roads University (see Appendices B and C).

All invited participants are well-educated, literate adults. Information provided by the participants was qualitative in nature and based on their interpretations of the questions asked. As such, participants held autonomy regarding any information they chose to share. Finally, as an outside researcher who has no ties or allegiances with YUNY, the opportunity for any coercion or influence (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 9) on my part over a person’s decision to participate was null.

**Concern for welfare**

The *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Tri-Council, 2010) highlighted “privacy and control of information about the person” (p. 9) as a contributing aspect of the participant’s welfare. All original paper records are kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office, and the key is kept on my person. All electronic records are kept on my password-protected laptop to which I have sole access. Neither the paper records nor the electronic records have any identifying participant information. Further, all data were consolidated and themed by participant teams. The events concluded with each team presenting summarized information to the larger group. During this process, or after the events, participants were given the opportunity to have any identifying information removed. By inviting all of the program leaders at YUNY, concern for aspects of
welfare including social participation and community membership were considered (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 9).

**Justice**

A number of factors were put in place to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all participants (Tri-Council, 2010, p. 10). These include a personalized invitation to all program leaders at YUNY to participate in all research activities. The interview matrix data gathering method allowed for “equal airtime” (Chartier, 2002, p. 70) for each participant. During the conversation café every participant had unrestricted opportunities to provide input that was captured in a nonidentifying manner.

**Summary**

In summary, the data collection methods and design of this research project were selected to provide each individual an equal opportunity to contribute as much information as they choose. At all times, the ethical concerns for the respect, welfare, and justice of each participant were a priority to ensure the integrity of all data.

In Chapter 4, which follows, the data resulting from the action inquiry methods of interview matrix and conversation café are described, analyzed, and summarized into five themes, one metatheme, and six conclusions. The scope and limitations of the inquiry are also provided in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER FOUR: INQUIRY PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the results from the research project are presented. The five themes, associated subthemes, and one “metatheme” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 66) reflect the analysis of the data collected during the interview matrix and conversation café. Six conclusions resulting from this analysis are also provided, and the scope and limitations of the inquiry are detailed at the end of this chapter.

The need for improved volunteer management and care combined with YUGTA’s dependency on volunteers formed the core of this research project. This research inquiry served to more deeply understand the main question: How can the program leaders at Youth Unlimited North York develop a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of their ministry volunteers? The associated subquestions were:

1. What does a sustainable environment for engaged volunteers at YUNY look like?
2. How is volunteer engagement at YUNY defined?
3. How does leadership behaviour affect volunteer engagement at YUNY?

The research activities were designed such that the individual participant’s data contributions would remain anonymous. Every participant had equal opportunity to share ideas, provide written and verbal input, assist with data summarization, and to act as the scribe for the group conversations.

As such, any of the participant information provided in the five themes below cannot be personally attributed to any specific individual. All of the insights and summarization of data provided in this chapter were sourced from the original matrix interviews, the summary notes,
and the summary boards from both the interview matrix and conversation café activities. For further context, the four interview matrix questions focused on the participants’ current and past experiences and the two conversation café questions were forward looking. The narrative below supports these two time tenses. All participant quotations have been coded IM for data from the interview matrix and CC for data from the conversation café; these codes are used to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality.

**Study Findings**

The five main themes and one metatheme resulting from the analysis of all of the data collected were supported by both the interview matrix and the conversation café data collection methods. Where subthemes resulted specifically from one or the other method, this is noted. In addition, analysis of the findings revealed that the data could also be categorized as the components of Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) five practices of leadership (p. 26). A synopsis of these findings is also included. The five main themes are (a) inclusive and supportive team environment; (b) open bidirectional communication; (c) opportunity for training and increased leadership learning; (d) relationships based on care, encouragement, and appreciation; and (e) well-coordinated volunteer recruitment and management process. The overarching metatheme is prayer.

**Theme one: Inclusive and supportive team environment**

Consistent in the data from both collection methods were words that described an environment of inclusivity and support. The words and the number of occurrences on the summary boards are provided in Table 1.
Table 1

Occurrences of Words of Inclusivity and Support on Interview Matrix Summary Boards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>No. of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support or Supportive</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on past experiences, the participants described the most positive program seasons to include a “supportive environment” (IM) in which “relationships [were] strengthened between volunteer and youth” (IM) and there were “strong relationship[s] between the leader and volunteer” (IM). Participants noted the importance of regular check-in times throughout a program. This included seeing how volunteers are doing personally and understanding the highlights and challenges they face on an ongoing basis. Participants identified building “solid relationships” (IM) between program leaders and volunteers as an important factor. Participants also highlighted the importance of keeping volunteers “up to date” (IM).

Interview matrix participants expressed that a preferred environment included leaders who understood the necessity of assessing the volunteers’ needs on a personal level and who appreciated, supported, invested in, trained, cared and prayed for, as well as challenged them. Interview matrix participants described an environment in which volunteers were not treated as “helper[s],” but thought of as a “part of the ministry program,” involved in program planning,
kept “up to date,” and “included as co-leaders” were described as the best environments for sustainable volunteering. Participants indicated that providing a safe place for volunteers to share their triumphs and struggles added to this environment.

During the interview matrix the participants described the best and most positive seasons as those that began with a kick-off meeting and in which regular formal and ad hoc informal team meetings were held throughout the duration of the project. Participants remembered the best projects as those in which time was taken to “have conversations as a team” (IM), identify triumphs and struggles, “celebrate accomplishments” (IM; CC), and pray and share faith. Participants suggested that volunteers be included in day-long retreats and for one of the days at the YUNY annual retreat. In addition, participants suggested the organization of fun adventure gatherings with the program leaders and volunteers (e.g., bungee jumping and rappelling). At the organizational level, participants provided suggestions for assessments of both the individuals and teams and the need to strengthen the team and to involve everyone in the program planning.

The summarized conversation café comments supported the data from the interview matrix. When describing a supportive environment for fully engaged volunteers, the participants included described a situation in which “core values, mission [and] vision” (CC) were shared, fulfilling a volunteer’s need to “feel empowered” (CC). Conversation café participants suggested the creation of a “volunteer space in YUNY Community Centre” and including “volunteer comments and feedback when program planning.” These ideas of inclusivity extended to public events: “If there is a public spotlight, then make sure the volunteers are involved” (IM).
The second conversation café question asked: What initiatives could we do together to support an environment that promotes fully engaged ministry volunteers? Data collected from this question focused on ideas the program leaders could undertake to assist one another with volunteer management administration. This included full completion of the volunteer recruitment steps and collection of the volunteer feedback forms on at least an annual basis. Apart from the administration-based activities, the participants also suggested that they could ensure that all of the program leaders are connecting with, supporting, and praying for current volunteers. The conversation café participants also supported the idea of creating the time for program leaders to share ideas and experiences that had worked well with their volunteers.

During the conversation café, participants suggested initiatives including “regular evaluations to check in and work through challenges and celebrate success.” Participants also suggested that “problem-solving spaces” (CC) to facilitate “brainstorming [of] ways to support volunteers through youth challenges” (CC) and the creation of an “environment to share stories” (CC) be created.

Participants further suggested that “volunteers be included in all work functions to hear their opinions and thoughts” (CC). This included inviting the volunteers to join the program leaders for a day at the annual retreat, to prayer meetings, and to hold “regular volunteer meetings” (CC).

In summary, data generated for both the interview matrix and conversation café provided strong support for an inclusive and supportive team environment for the volunteers and program
leaders. Both data-gathering events also provided consistent data supporting the importance of meaningful and strong relationships between the program leaders and the volunteers.

**Theme two: Open bidirectional communication**

Data from the interview matrix and conversation café events highlighted a number of aspects of “open” (IM) and “regular communication” (IM) between volunteers and program leaders, amongst the program leaders, and within YUNY. The participants identified the importance of creating “good channels of communication” (IM) and obtaining “feedback from volunteers and program leaders giving volunteers feedback” (IM).

Participants from both data collection events emphasized the importance of effective communication throughout the tenure of a volunteer. Participants also described the data associating communication and the stages of the volunteering lifecycle. During the interview process a supportive environment would include a program leader “sharing core values, mission, [and] vision” (CC) statements and who would inquire as to how a prospective volunteer “would best like to support programs and youth” (CC).

The following phrases highlight effective, open communication, which was extrapolated from the findings when participants described the best type of supportive environment: “clear understanding of [the] program” (IM); “clarity of expectations by the program leader” (IM); “clearly define the support role for volunteers with partners” (CC); and “a strong relationship between [the] leader and volunteer” (IM). In addition, data supporting the importance of open, bidirectional communication between volunteers and program leaders underlying a supportive and sustainable environment included: “keep[ing] volunteers up to date” (IM); holding both
formal and informal meetings; “regular/weekly updates” (IM); having at least one, one-on-one conversation with each volunteer per season; providing “email updates” (IM); and having conversations, in person or via telephone, to see how they are doing and to communicate about the highlights of the program events and any challenges they are facing. In addition, the interview matrix participants suggested encouraging words and actions expressing appreciation to the volunteers in the form of thank-you notes, cards, gifts, and shared meals were practical ways to facilitate communication in a supportive and sustainable environment.

“Follow up after events or call[ing] after a significant event” (IM) to give the volunteer an opportunity to debrief and provide feedback, was described as a “key” (IM) element to supporting engagement. Participants also suggested, “Creating a safe place for the volunteer to talk” (IM), either personally or in a team environment. To facilitate this communication, participants also suggested that the organization hold regular “prayer meetings” (CC); conduct focus groups that include “brainstorming feedback, sharing time and storytelling” (CC), and include volunteers in program planning.

At the organizational level, participants affirmed the importance of newsletters that provide “updates and stories” (CC) and the “creation of a website to share stories, update letters and events for all YUNY programs and highlight volunteer contributions” (CC) were components of a supportive environment to facilitate engagement of volunteers. “Dealing with the tough stuff/tough issues” (IM), “reviewing the vision” (IM), and also “reviewing youth development and targeting areas for growth” (IM) were areas that participants identified as supportive of effective communication. When a volunteer leaves YUNY, participants stressed
the importance of the program leader holding an exit interview with “360 degree feedback” (IM). During this time the opportunity to solicit feedback advice and ideas for change as well as to ask “how they enjoyed their time” (IM) would further support the need for open two-way communication. Participants supported open communication amongst the team of program leaders by suggesting that “program leaders share with one another, what has worked well with their volunteers” (CC).

In summary, the data collected during both the interview matrix and the conversation café fully supported the need and importance of open, bidirectional communication in creating an environment to support engaged volunteers. The data clearly identified the importance of this style of communication in all aspects of a volunteer’s participation, both during and at the end of their tenure with YUNY. The data also evidenced the need for open communication between the program leaders.

**Theme three: Opportunity for training and increased leadership learning**

During both the interview matrix and the conversation café, participants’ data strongly supported a focus on training and increased leadership opportunities. When describing the best and most positive past experiences, the participants noted these included times when “growth” (IM) and “growth in confidence” (IM) occurred. In addition, participants indicated that times when volunteers were able to “engage in different environments” (IM) and when, as a result of a learning experience, the volunteers experienced a “change of understanding [of the] clients and community” (IM) were also memorable.
Volunteer learning opportunities

Participants expressed that important aspects of supporting volunteers during a program included providing volunteers with “increased opportunities to lead” (IM). When thinking of replicating favourable past experiences, the participants highlighted access to development and training plans that specifically focussed on: (a) mentoring, (b) leadership training, (c) having conversations about spiritual matters, (e) maintaining the vision and direction of the program, (f) “reviewing youth development and targeting areas for growth” (IM), and (g) providing “on the job” (IM) volunteer leadership development training to assist their growth “in a new area of responsibility” (IM). Participants also identified that training volunteers to deal with difficult situations by involving them in “sharing decision-making authority” (IM), providing “regular effective training” (IM), and getting “thorough regular feedback” (IM) were important.

During the conversation café, participants generated three main ideas to develop a supportive environment. The first was the establishment of a “Volunteer Scholarship to allow YUNY workers to attend [the annual Canadian Youth Unlimited] National Conference” (CC) at which volunteer specific training would take place. The second was to include volunteers in the new staff and coaching training. The third idea was to make YU staff workshops available to the volunteers.

Participants also suggested that volunteer training be locally available, specifically to bring the training to the volunteers at the program location. In addition, participants suggested that one meeting per season would include one or two training components. The development of a “good process for accessing materials/required resources” (CC) was also recommended.
Expanded leadership opportunities

Conversation café participants identified that a supportive environment for fully engaged volunteers included additional areas of leadership opportunities outside of direct youth-related activities in which volunteers with strong technical and organizational skills could contribute. These opportunities included (a) administration of the YUNY website, (b) management of the organization’s online and social media presence, (c) writing the “semi-annual support letters and notes for staff and YUNY use” (CC), (d) “web based fundraising campaigns” (CC), and (e) development of an assessment tool for volunteer talents and skills to provide volunteers with an opportunity to utilize their skills in the program and play to their strengths. All of these activities would be conducted under the guidance of YUNY staff. Participants also noted that a team of volunteers may be required to “govern the process” (CC) of the type of expanded leadership opportunities as described above.

Placement students and program participants

During the conversation café participants also suggested that YUNY consider placement students as potential long-term volunteers, the thought being that with wise choices and investment of time, training, and development, these people may be good volunteers. YUNY “could [also] invite current youth participants to become volunteers and assume leadership roles in a defined capacity” (CC). Some participants indicated that this strategy “could be a risk to the program” (CC); a start could be to “invite participating youth to assist in volunteer training” (CC).
In summary, the participants strongly supported increased opportunities for training and leadership development for the volunteers. Participants recommended in-field training and attendance of YUNY staff training courses for the volunteers. Participants also suggested expanded leadership opportunities within the programs, and in administrative, support, and technical areas outside of the programs, in support of increased leadership learning. Consideration of some of the youth who attend the programs and placement students for volunteer positions was also discussed. The conversation café participants described a sustainable environment as one in which volunteers would “own their own responsibilities,” “be given leadership opportunities,” “build confidence in their leadership abilities,” and be “full partners in the ministry.”

**Theme four: Relationships based on care, encouragement, and appreciation**

Data gathered during both the interview matrix and the conversation café revealed how deeply the program leaders care for the volunteers. Highlights from past experiences that resonated with the program leaders included the following: building “solid” (IM) relationships with the individual volunteer and volunteer team, developing a strong team, providing caring leadership, and actively encouraging the volunteers through words and actions. Participants indicated that investing time in the volunteers and not treating them as the “helper” (IM) was also deemed important. Participants identified regular check-ins to see how a volunteer is doing, both personally and in the program, and to ask what highlights or challenges the volunteer may be experiencing as a part of current supportive and encouraging leadership behaviour.
Writing letters, notes, or cards of encouragement to volunteers to thank and identify their contributions were highlighted throughout both the interview matrix and conversation café. The elements participants had described as part of a supportive environment for engaged volunteers were numerous and diverse. These elements included ceremonies to welcome incoming volunteers and to acknowledge and thank exiting volunteers. Participants also noted that the sharing of core values, mission, and vision with the volunteers was seen to create a sense of empowerment for the volunteers. Participants expressed focus groups or regular brainstorming sessions in which volunteers would have a forum to share their experiences and have their voices and ideas heard were also deemed important. Day retreats, adventure outings, long-term volunteer recognition awards of a gift or honorarium, and the means for a volunteer to take a break or a short sabbatical from volunteering while still remaining connected were all identified as notable contributing factors for sustainable engagement. Participants noted that intentionally making the volunteers feel appreciated and ensuring they are “fulfilling their calling, passion and strengths” (CC) as important contributing factors for sustainable environments. Beyond the confines of the program teams, participants suggested planning regular or monthly celebration parties for all YUNY volunteers during which they will have the time to “have fun, eat and talk about triumphs and good things” (CC) that have happened. On a more practical note, participants suggested a clear reimbursement process for volunteer expenses.

In summary, taking the time to be intentional about how to engage volunteers; supporting, praying for, and praying with volunteers; providing “constant encouragement and loving reflection” (CC); and any “discipline out of love” (CC) were foundational elements of
participants’ shared ideas. Participants also noted that having volunteer assistance highly strengthens the programs; as such, developing relationships based on care, encouragement, and appreciation is essential for both engagement of volunteers and a supportive and sustainable environment.

**Theme five: Well-coordinated volunteer recruitment and leadership process**

The only data from the first three interview matrix questions that referred to the recruitment of volunteers was the “need to assess needs on a personal level” (IM) and to “assess needs in a program level” (IM). However, data provided in response to question four of the interview matrix (based on your experience what advice would you give to a newly hired program leader regarding volunteer support, involvement and engagement) included the need to “fully follow the YU [youth unlimited] intake process” (IM) and to place “volunteers where they can be effective” (IM). Additional data gathered from question four included the observation that a “volunteer can make or break the program” (IM), time should be taken to be “intentional on how you engage volunteers” (IM), and to “build the volunteer base as much as the participant base” (IM). Participants further observed that an advantage of volunteers is that they provide the opportunity for “participants to connect to people other than the leader” (IM). Participants also observed that although not everyone who wants to become a volunteer should be or will be a good volunteer. It was noted that effective volunteer staff could be determined by following a thorough intake process. Participants suggested that a person be appointed to lead the area of volunteer care, follow up, and feedback.
During the conversation café, participants described that a supportive environment includes “consistency in the intake process” with “clear channels” and “greater supervision accountability around all of the practices” of recruitment. This increased supervision was to ensure that the recruitment steps and the annual volunteer feedback processes are fully completed and that “program leaders are praying for, connecting with and properly supporting all current volunteers” (CC).

Participants identified the creation of an “overarching volunteer recruitment/management apparatus” (CC). This suggestion correlates to the data from the interview matrix in which participants suggested a distinction be made between tactical program activities and administration.

Data from both of the conversation café questions supported the need for clearly defined job descriptions built after “assessing the needs of staff and programs” (CC)—that is, to “start with the role and then recruit the volunteer for that role” (CC). Further, a supportive environment included volunteer roles that provided “support capacity for program administration, resourcing and development/training. Not just volunteers with mentoring skills but people to plan events, raise money, do paperwork etc.” (CC).

Data unique to the conversation café included reaching out into the community beyond the current environment in which YUNY would expand networking activities and “tap into volunteer networks” (CC) and other Christian circles or organizations, communicate with new churches, and host neighbourhood barbeques to inform the surrounding communities about
YUNY volunteer opportunities. The participants also suggested starting a youth-focussed church in North York where the volunteers could also participate.

In summary, the participants suggested that “expanded and improved volunteer recruitment” (CC) would facilitate a more supportive environment for engaged volunteers. The data suggested that “expanded and improved volunteer recruitment” (CC) would be accomplished by combining all the prayer, regional activity, training, and online.

**Prevolunteering considerations**

The initiatives to support an environment promoting fully engaged volunteers included a focus on “prevolunteering assessment” (CC) to ensure volunteers were “working in areas of their gifts and passions” (CC). Prospective volunteers should be provided with a job description, be invited to observe the ministry program, and attend a “thorough orientation” (CC) session before signing up.

**Placement students and current youth participants**

Data gathered during the conversation café included the consideration of placement students for long-term volunteer positions and graduated youth into volunteer opportunities and leadership development programs. Conversation café participants noted that these options could present a risk to the program and that this should be an area of consideration for the proposed volunteer recruitment staff. The participants highlighted that wise choices and an investment in personnel development would be required.

Access to job descriptions, newsletters, stories, and needs could be provided via the development of a volunteer opportunity section on the YUNY website. Participants also shared
the ideas of creating “a database of short/long-term volunteers available to assist across YUNY” (CC) to “share volunteers for ‘ministry crossover’ experiences” (CC), and affording volunteers the opportunity to “see what YUNY does as a whole” (CC).

**Metatheme: Prayer**

A consistent thread running through all of the data collected was the emphasis on prayer for all aspects of YUNY’s programs. Included in the data was the importance of regular prayer for and with (a) the volunteers as individuals and as a team, (b) the program youth participants, and (c) the program leaders as individuals and as a team. Participants also placed emphasis on the continuity of prayer throughout the lifecycle process of meeting and selecting prospective volunteers through their tenure and ultimately completing their volunteering commitment.

Participants expressed that “prayer and shared faith” (IM) were highlights of past programs; prayer was also deemed an important part of supporting and encouraging volunteers as well as a cornerstone for creating a best environment. Participants offered “consistent prayer” (IM) as one of the pieces of advice suggested for newly hired volunteers.

When sharing forward-looking ideas during the conversation café, the participants highlighted the importance of prayer meetings, providing the volunteers with “access to counselling and prayer” (CC) and inviting the volunteers to the program leaders’ prayer meetings. Participants also saw being more intentional about praying for current volunteers and their specific individual needs as well as the leaders and volunteers each praying for one another as an important cornerstone of an environment that is supportive of engaged volunteers.
AHA moment

During the discussion of question two of the conversation café, the comments “have 24-hour access to staff” (CC) for “debriefing” (CC) and have volunteers be “connected to ALL staff [with] strong relationships” (CC) were recorded. In the second round of conversations the comment made in response to this last point was that it was “not realistic—[volunteers] are deeply connected with 1–2 staff, but volunteers have limited time to connect with all staff” (CC). What resonated with me when reading these comments was the interpretation of the importance of accessibility for the volunteer to someone in a leadership position.

Missing data

The only recording of accountability was by the conversation café participants; they noted that accountability, related to the supervision of recruitment, was an important factor in providing a supportive environment for engaged volunteers. None of the interview matrix or conversation café data provided any information to recommend that the program leaders hold one another accountable for the provision of their volunteer care duties, endeavours to support greater volunteer engagement, or actions to increase organizational sustainability. In both of my early conversations with the associate director of YUGTA, she highlighted the importance of leadership accountability as it pertains to volunteer care (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012; H. Wyse, personal communication February 21, 2012). In a research review conversation I had with the area director, he suggested accountability as a recommendation topic (S. Moore, personal communication, February 14, 2013). Thereafter, I reflected on these
conversations, re-reviewed the data, and determined that accountability was a missing data element.

**Alternative viewpoint: Five practices of leadership**

When analyzing all of the data collected, it became evident that the participants’ comments could be identified as fitting into Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) five practices of leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (p. 26). The 69 main comments from the interview matrix and the 91 comments from the conversation café are summarized independently and in combination in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Interview Matrix and Conversation Café Data Correlated to the Five Practices of Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Practices of Leadership Categories</em></th>
<th>IM No. of Data Points</th>
<th>IM % Share</th>
<th>CC No. of Data Points</th>
<th>CC % Share</th>
<th>IM &amp; CC Total No. of Data Points</th>
<th>IM &amp; CC % Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model the way</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable others to act</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the heart</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>91</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>160</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. IM = Interview Matrix; CC = Conversation Café. *From Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) *The Leadership Challenge* five practices of leadership (p. 26).*
The interview matrix questions related to what had been done in the past and explored the participants’ experiences (see Appendix E). The heavy weighting of enabling others to act and encouraging the heart reflected the key strengths of the program leaders as well as the focus and emphasis the program leaders place on the relationships they have with the volunteers that are a part of their system and not on the administration or new volunteers. The conversation café questions were designed to gather information for the future (see Appendix G). The data gathered during this exercise also reflected the relationship-centric focus of the program leaders, with 37% of the comments focused on enabling others to act and 34% focused on encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 26).

**Summary of study findings**

By having questions designed to look to the past, the current, and the future, the resulting data created a multipronged perspective. Data from the interview matrix focused predominantly on relationships, support, training, and communication. There were no references to the development of a vision, collaboration with other program leaders or programs within YUNY or YUGTA, or the environment outside of YUNY in the interview matrix data. During the conversation café, the data generated broadened to include cross-program references and recruitment outside of the established YUNY environment. In summary, a broader, systems-based approach to create a more robust environment for volunteer recruitment and management organization arose from the data gathered in the conversation café. In both the interview matrix and the conversation café, the data suggested that development of an environment to increase volunteer engagement is essential to YUNY.
Five themes and one metatheme resulted from the synthesis of the data collected from both the interview matrix and the world café. The analysis of this data, a review of academic literature, and some YUNY organizational literature resulted in four conclusions, which are described in the next section.

**Study Conclusions**

The people who participated in the interview matrix also participated in the conversation café. The following six conclusions were drawn from the data analysis and are summarized and explained in reference to relevant academic literature sources:

1. Participants focussed on maintaining and further developing strong, inclusive, equal partnerships and relationships with the volunteers.

2. Participants understand and act on the importance of appreciating the contributions and commitment of the volunteers.

3. Participants identified authentic, open, two-way communication as a fundamental element of the program.

4. Increased learning and skills development for both the program leaders and the volunteers was identified as an important area of long-term focus.

5. Participants understand the importance of a well-managed volunteer recruitment process and highlighted the possibility of separating volunteer administration from the program leaders’ responsibilities of managing and leading volunteers.

6. Participants identified the opportunity and understand the benefits of expanding their reach into the greater community.
Table 3

*Correlation of YUNY Research Project Conclusions to Other Research Models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Conclusions</th>
<th>Climate for Engagement</th>
<th>Psychological climate related to employee engagement</th>
<th>Climate of employee involvement</th>
<th>Inventory Process</th>
<th>Nexus Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong supportive relationships</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Supportive Management</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Leaderful Organization &amp; Customer relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition &amp; Appreciation</td>
<td>Reward</td>
<td>Recognition for Contribution</td>
<td>Reward</td>
<td>Open &amp; trusting work culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Self-Expression</td>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>Communicatioin &amp; Confidence of goals &amp; outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Confidence how a job is done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Clarification</td>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarity of job/role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary Expansion</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nexus Effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These six conclusions can be summarized as (a) strong, supportive leadership relationships; (b) recognition and appreciation; (c) open communication; (d) learning environment; (e) role clarification; and (f) boundary expansion. These conclusions are reflective
of the six areas of Bakker et al.’s (2011) sustainable “climate for engagement” (p. 12), namely “workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values” (p. 12). The first five research conclusions listed above are also strongly allied to Brown and Leigh’s (1996) operational definition of psychological climate related to employee engagement, namely supportive management, recognition for contribution, self-expression, challenge, and clarity (p. 359). The first four conclusions are reflective of Lawler (1992) and Riordan, Vandenberg, and Richardson’s (2005) “climate of employee involvement” (pp. 472–473), which includes participation, reward, information sharing, and training. Five of the six research conclusions are linked to the seven scales of McCormick’s (2007) inventory process (pp. 27, 508). The sixth conclusion of expanding into communities beyond where YUNY operates reflect what Ernst and Chrobot-Mason (2011) termed the “Nexus Effect—the limitless possibilities and inspiring results that groups can achieve together above and beyond what they can achieve on their own” (p. xvi).

Each one of the six conclusions is further discussed in the section that follows. In summary they form a foundation for an environment of sustainable engagement (see Table 3).

**Conclusion one: Participants focussed on maintaining and further developing strong, inclusive, equal partnerships and relationships with the volunteers**

Participant data evidenced that inclusivity and equality of the volunteers in all aspects of YUNY’s programs are highly valued. The best or most positive experiences with volunteers were described as those in which there was a “strong relationship between [the] leaders and volunteer” (IM). The study participants also described the way in which they supported and encouraged volunteers, and affirmed that building “relational connections/build solid
relationships with the program leader/volunteer” (IM). Participants also shared the program leadership with the volunteers by providing volunteers with the “opportunity to lead” (IM). Participants listed including individual volunteers as co-leaders, caring for the volunteer, and building relationships with the volunteers and volunteer team, sharing decision-making authority as all important to the participants when describing how they would like to replicate the best environment for effective volunteering.

Bakker et al. (2011) supported the aforementioned relationship-building actions and stated that high engagement with work tasks is directly correlated to the provision of “support, inspiration and quality coaching from the supervisor” (p. 13). In addition, Bakker et al. posited that it is the “sustained effort” (p. 20) on the part of leaders and not the “statements of good intentions, lofty values and brief periods of cheerleading” (p. 20) that had a sustainable effect on a worker’s work, identification, and energy. Further support was found in Hustinx and Handy’s (2009) conclusions that an “affective sense of belonging” (p. 218) is an important factor in generating a sense of attachment.

Participants also shared it was important to “build [the] volunteer base as much as the participant base” (IM), include “volunteer comments and feedback when program planning” (CC), and ensure the volunteers’ “ideas are heard and implemented” (CC). Participants also suggested inviting volunteers to prayer meetings, day-long retreats, a portion of the annual retreat, and the annual Canadian Youth Unlimited national conference. Vecina et al. (2011) supported this organizational focus on commitment with the statement that both a “commitment of time and effort, as well as responsible behaviour within an organization” (p. 131) are required
to develop engagement amongst volunteers. Further, Vecina et al. stated, “It is essential that volunteers experience a feeling of engagement or an energetic and affective connection with their work” (p. 131).

Vecina et al. (2011) found that “volunteer satisfaction is the key variable in explaining the intention to continue” (p. 130), and indicated engagement significantly predicts both volunteer satisfaction and the intention to remain with the organization (p. 140). More specifically, Vecina et al. concluded, “Volunteer satisfaction explains the intention to remain with the organization in the sample of new volunteers while organizational commitment is the basis for intention to remain in the sample of veteran volunteers” (p. 144).

### Conclusion two: Participants understand and act on the importance of appreciating the contributions and commitment of the volunteers

The participants continually highlighted the importance of showing genuine appreciation and gratitude towards the volunteers. Ideas they suggested included thank you notes, cards, gifts, appreciation events, shared meals, as well as encouraging words and actions. From the data collected during the interview matrix it was evident that acting on and expressing gratitude and appreciation is a core value of the program leaders at YUNY.

Shin and Kleiner (2003) emphasized the importance of appreciation and recognition of volunteers and stated, “Recognise, Recognise, Recognise. Volunteers need recognition. They need to know that they are appreciated and that they make a difference” (p. 70). Shin and Kleiner further detailed ways of acknowledging volunteers and provided examples that mirrored those provided by the YUNY research participants, such as “volunteer appreciation dinners, gifts,
certificates, thank you cards, writing reference letters, or recognition in a newsletter” (p. 70). Shin and Kleiner also noted the importance of intangible rewards, specifically “saying thank-you” (p. 70), and also recognizing staff’s work. Shin and Kleiner concluded that the showing of appreciation “satisfies the volunteer’s need for self-fulfillment and self-esteem” (p. 70).

Goldsmith et al. (2010) also noted the importance of showing appreciation and stated, “The task is to regain the perspective that people are a major asset and we must behave in ways that tell employees they are valuable and important” (p. 116). Goldsmith et al. concluded that when commitments are made to and gained from the people in an organization, and when most people share this value and are in agreement with this goal, many ways to “reinforce commitment and engagement will be generated” (p. 116).

**Conclusion three: Participants identified authentic, open, two-way communication as a fundamental element of the program**

Participants described environments with good channels of communication in which volunteers and program leaders openly share their triumphs and struggles as being the best. Additional attributes of this type of preferred environment included a safe place for volunteers to speak and for program leaders to hear volunteers’ voices. The development of clear, open, and honest communication to facilitate the ability to deal with tough and challenging issues was also desirable. Bakker et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of “an open, effective communication strategy” (p. 21) when senior management wishes to endorse “engagement as a core value” (p. 21) and make this a part of their human resources developmental plan.
Important elements of a supportive environment for fully engaged volunteers included the sharing and communication of the organization’s core values, mission, and vision. Participants suggested regular email updates and team conversations to review the vision, and also recommended the provision of a clear understanding of the program to all existing volunteers, as well as those showing an interest in volunteering.

Participants identified maintaining open channels of communication, especially those that support the provision of 360-degree bidirectional feedback between program leaders and volunteers, as key components of volunteer support, involvement, and engagement. Additional ideas to support this goal included creating a newsletter containing updates and stories and that “volunteers be included in all work functions to hear their opinions and thoughts” (CC). Participants also documented maintaining regular check-in sessions with the volunteers via phone or email to see how they are doing and to communicate about the highlights of the program events, as well as any challenges they face, were also documented as being important. Participants also stressed the importance of exit interviews for volunteers to get full feedback about what they liked, disliked, and what they would change, as well as gather suggestions for improvement.

In summary, throughout the research process, participants highlighted the importance of authentic, open, two-way channels of communication as a fundamental element of a sustainable environment supporting volunteer engagement. Adams, Schlueter, and Barge (1988) noted, “It becomes critical that managers of volunteers utilize work protocols and communication
strategies that reinforce [the volunteers] desires for recognition, duty and self-accomplishment to maintain or increase intrinsic motivation (p. 78).

**Conclusion four: Increased learning and skills development for both the program leaders and the volunteers was identified as an important area of long-term focus**

Participants suggested the creation of a learning environment that presents an opportunity for leadership growth as well as being a learning place space for both the program leaders and the volunteers. Participants highlighted the following three focus areas of learning: (a) volunteer management and leadership for staff; (b) mentorship, spiritual mentoring, and leadership for the volunteers; and (c) understanding how to keep the programs moving towards the established goals.

Equipping staff in volunteer management included increased “knowledge about volunteer procedures and policies” (CC) by training staff to work with volunteers and understand what resources are available to them. Participants saw providing skills development programs for the volunteers at their program location as a way to successfully provide accessible training. Andreadis (2009) supported this idea of in-the-field training and stated, “Sophisticated managers realize that measurable benefit is achieved when work and learning are integrated” (p. 9).

The participants also suggested the idea to “create a ‘Volunteer Scholarship’ to allow YUNY volunteers to attend [annual Canadian YU] National Conference” (CC) where a specific training program for volunteers would be held, which underlies the importance placed on training. Added to this was the idea that volunteers should also attend the new staff and coaching training and all YUNY workshops should be made available to volunteers.
Weerawardena et al.’s (2010) research supported these endeavours and noted the need of becoming a learning organization to improve practices on a continual basis (p. 353). Kouzes and Posner (2007) also stated, “The more you’re engaged in learning the more successful you are at leading—and just about anything” (p. 203). Andreadis (2009) stated, “The degree to which learning is rooted in the day-to-day functioning of the organization determines its performance and sustainability” (p. 9). With a focus on learning, NPOs further support their sustainability by retaining “their relevance and reputation with clients and position themselves to be consistent recipients of donations and grants” (Andreadis, 2009, p. 9).

**Conclusion five: Participants understand the critical role volunteers play at YUNY and the importance of a well-managed volunteer recruitment process and highlighted the possibility of separating volunteer administration from the program leaders’ responsibilities of managing and leading the volunteers**

Throughout the research the participants voiced how important volunteers are to the YUNY programs. They stated that a “volunteer can make or break the program” (IM) and the “caring, supporting, challenging and training” (IM) of volunteers “will highly strengthen” (IM) the programs. Participants also noted how important it was to “ensure recruitment steps are fully and well completed” (CC) and to place volunteers where they can be effective.

The roles volunteers can play at YUNY are many and varied; by adding additional volunteer leadership resources, the volunteer-led activities at YUNY could expand. The participants noted that there is an opportunity to “develop roles for volunteers that are needed in a support capacity for program administration, resourcing and development/training. Not just
volunteers with mentoring skills but people to plan events, raise money, do paperwork etc.” (CC). In summary, the tactical aspects of the program activities and related volunteer management were differentiated from the management of volunteer recruitment and administrative care.

The opportunity to dialogue about the creation of a new staff or volunteer position focussed on volunteer recruitment, follow-up, training, care and feedback, as well as a volunteer board to oversee volunteer engagement, management, and recruitment issues, was highlighted by the research discussions. The participants recorded this as “a volunteer to help orchestrate and operate the volunteer training and recruitment apparatus that YUNY has for ALL its programs (i.e. an overarching volunteer recruitment/management apparatus)” (CC).

Hustinx and Handy (2009) suggested, “Managers of volunteer resources in complex organizations take heed of the complex and differential nature of recruiting and retaining volunteers, and avoid applying a one-size-fits all approach” (p. 217). More specifically, these authors concluded that attention should be focussed on the “attractiveness of programs and local specificities that impact volunteers” (Hustinx & Handy, 2009, p. 217) and cautioned against recruiters “using overarching mission statements to attract volunteers” (p. 217). Hustinx and Handy’s study concluded that “it is only through longer-term service that volunteers appreciate the organization’s mission and principles and find their allegiance to the organization as a whole” (p. 202) and that the “affective attachment of the volunteer is fostered through local volunteer experiences” (p. 217).
The YUNY research participants also noted that an assessment of needs on both a personal and program level should be conducted to create the best environment for effective volunteering. Hustinx and Handy (2009) support this idea by stating the necessity of analyzing the organization’s programs to assist in assessing each program’s impact on the individual volunteer’s attachment (p. 217). Hustinx and Handy concluded their study by stating, “Organizations should thus work on enabling positive local volunteer experiences and on strengthening integration of the different activities into the organization as a whole” (p. 218).

In conclusion, the research literature showed that this area of volunteer recruitment is complex (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). The information provided by the participants provides evidence that YUNY has the opportunity to further dialogue this critical area.

**Conclusion six: Participants identified the opportunity and understand the benefits of expanding their reach into the greater community**

During the conversation café exchanges, the participants shared a far broader perspective of what they could jointly achieve in creating a sustainable environment versus their reflections and recounting of past activities as recorded during the interview matrix. These perspectives included an expansion of activities, a greater network, and a broader systems approach of connecting with the larger team of YUNY volunteers and program leaders as well as developing stronger interconnected relationships with the community. To this end, participants suggested expanding and improving volunteer recruitment by approaching new churches and other Christian circles and tapping into volunteer networks. Participants also suggested that the organization reach out by increasing its online presence.
Eccles et al. (2012) and Weerawardena et al.’s (2010) research supported the expansion of an organization’s network in pursuit of a sustainable organization. Eccles et al. stated, “Companies that thrive with a sustainable strategy realize the importance of reaching beyond their own internal boundaries to a variety of external stakeholders” (p. 4). Weerawardena et al. (2010) outlined the unique operational model of NPOs and how they are dependent on “multiple stakeholders for the resources needed to deliver services to their constituents” (p. 346). More specifically, participants stated how NPOs “address a more complex and challenging multistakeholder environment and strategic process” (p. 348). Weerawardena et al.’s (2010) research evidenced that some NPOs see “the importance of forming alliances with others to overcome resource deficiencies” (p. 353). Weerawardena et al. also noted that complexity and changes in NPOs’ sources of revenue and government funding as well as NPO intrasector competition for financial support requires them to become adept at multiple stakeholder management (p. 348) in the pursuit of achieving their social mission (p. 346).

Scope and Limitations of the Research Inquiry

The purpose of this research was to understand how the program leaders at YUNY could develop a sustainable environment supportive of engaged volunteers. The research questions were designed to gather information from the program leaders past experiences as well as their thoughts and ideas for the future.

There are a number of limitations to this study. These include the fact that although all of the program leaders were invited to participate and seven of the eight did participate, this is a small sample size of research participants. In addition, all of the participants are well educated.
Sustainability Supporting Volunteer Engagement

(i.e., all participants have undergraduate degrees), and three of the participants are pastors in mainstream Christian denominations. All of the participants are Christians from a variety of denominations with their faith being fundamental to their lives. In addition, the data research was limited to two group activities - the interview matrix and a conversation café. This study was also limited to the North York branch of Youth Unlimited. YUNY is also within the boundaries of the Greater Toronto Area, a fast-paced North American city with a population base of 5.5 million people (City of Toronto, 2012).

Summary

The research conducted via an interview matrix and conversation café with the seven program leaders in the role of research participants focussed on what program leaders can do to create a sustainable environment for engaged employees. Analysis of the data resulted in five themes, one metatheme, and six study conclusions. These five themes are: (a) inclusive and supportive team environment; (b) supervision, communication, and feedback; (c) opportunity for leadership and learning; (d) relationships based on care, encouragement, and appreciation; and (e) a coordinated and well-managed volunteer recruitment process. Prayer is the metatheme.

The analysis of the data and themes resulted in the following six conclusions:

1. Participants focussed on maintaining and further developing strong, inclusive, equal partnerships and relationships with the volunteers.

2. Participants understand and act on the importance of appreciating the contributions and commitment of the volunteers.
3. Participants identified authentic, open, two-way communication as a fundamental element of the program.

4. Increased learning and skills development for both the program leaders and the volunteers was identified as an important area of long-term focus.

5. Participants understand the importance of a well-managed volunteer recruitment process and highlighted the possibility of separating volunteer administration from the program leaders’ responsibilities of managing and leading volunteers.

6. Participants identified the opportunity, and understand the benefits, of expanding their reach into the greater community.

The factors contributing to the scope and limitations of this research project included the small participant group of seven well-educated program leaders. All participants were Christians and managed youth development programs for a nonprofit, nondenominational, Christian-faith-based organization. In addition, data collection was restricted to an interview matrix and a conversation café. Drawing from the six described themes and conclusions, three recommendations and their implications for YUNY are described in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER FIVE: INQUIRY IMPLICATIONS

This research project was centred on the inquiry question: How can the program leaders at Youth Unlimited North York develop a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of their ministry volunteers? The three subquestions that supported this question were:

1. What does a sustainable environment for engaged volunteers at YUNY look like?
2. How is volunteer engagement at YUNY defined?
3. How does leadership behaviour affect volunteer engagement at YUNY?

The research data were themed and resulted in six conclusions. The first three conclusions reflected the program leaders’ observations of their behaviours and most positive memories. The second three conclusions identified what the program leaders recognized as being important and what could be changed to increase organizational sustainability and volunteer engagement. The six conclusions are:

1. Participants focussed on maintaining and further developing strong, inclusive, equal partnerships and relationships with the volunteers.
2. Participants understand and act on the importance of appreciating the contributions and commitment of the volunteers.
3. Participants identified authentic, open, two-way communication as a fundamental element of the program.
4. Increased learning and skills development for both the program leaders and the volunteers was identified as an important area of long-term focus.
5. Participants understand the importance of a well-managed volunteer recruitment process and highlighted the possibility of separating volunteer administration from the program leaders’ responsibilities of managing and leading volunteers.

6. Participants identified the opportunity, and understand the benefits, of expanding their reach into the greater community.

In this chapter, the four recommendations that resulted from the six conclusions are outlined and explained in context of the selected literature. Further, the potential organizational implications for both YUNY and other YU chapters resulting from the implementation of these recommendations are discussed. In addition, the potential impact of this research for volunteer organizations and the community are commented on. The limitations of this research study and the implications for further academic research are outlined.

**Study Recommendations**

The research study resulted in four recommendations for YUNY’s consideration:

1. Strengthen YUNY’s volunteer recruitment and administration support structure.

2. Increase the capacity of staff and volunteers by intentionally focusing on learning, in-field training, and sharing of knowledge.

3. Investigate how the program leaders’ volunteer care related accountability could be improved.

4. Investigate how the boundaries of YUNY’s current community could be expanded and what affect this would have on the organization.
The four recommendations are interlinked. Figure 2 depicts the combination of the recommendations and their key features. Together these recommendations support the three defining elements of this research project’s main inquiry question and subquestions, namely sustainable organizational environments, full engagement of volunteers, and associated leadership behaviour.

Figure 2. Recommendations and outcomes.
Recommendation one: Strengthen YUNY’s volunteer recruitment and administration support structure

The data strongly indicated that there was a need to address the current volunteer recruitment and administrative management processes. These findings reinforced similar concerns expressed by both the associate director and area director during our early conversations (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012; S. Moore, personal communication, February 21, 2012). Data from the research activities also indicated that administrative tasks distracted from a program leader’s time to focus on attending to their strong, existing volunteer partnership relationships. The creation of a volunteer role to manage the recruitment and training for all YUNY’s volunteers was made during the conversation café.

Musick and Wilson’s (2008) analysis of volunteer recruitment concluded that inviting a person to volunteer and describing the need for assistance, not just asking for help, is critically important in getting the person to take the steps to volunteer. This is particularly important for volunteer roles, similar to those at YUNY, in which continuity and training are required; Musick and Wilson noted that invited volunteers commit to a greater number of volunteer hours compared to voluntary or walk-in volunteers (pp. 289–290). Musick and Wilson also found that the relationship the volunteers have with the organization’s recruiter is important, “close-ties” (p. 290) in these relationships positively affect successful volunteer commitment.

My recommendation is that YUNY assess the balance of local and centralized recruitment, and investigate the resources required by the program leaders at both the local and administrative level. YUNY has recognized this need for change, and in the weeks following the
research project, a new position of staff and community pastor was formalized. The initial two areas of focus for this evolving position are volunteer engagement, and the creation of new volunteer assessment tools (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013). Other responsibilities focussed on support for program leaders and volunteers were to be phased in. In addition, the services of a volunteer administrator to assist one of the program leaders had also been secured (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013).

**Recommendation two: Increase the capacity of staff by intentionally focussing on learning, in-field training, and sharing of knowledge**

Learning is at the heart of YUNY’s programs focussed on assisting youth to achieve their full potential in life (Youth Unlimited North York, n.d.a.). The research data recommended the development of an expanded learning environment for both the volunteers and program leaders and provided suggestions as to how this could be accomplished.

McHargue (2003) suggested the encouragement of individual learning and the development of “systems to capture and share learning” (p. 203) to prevent the loss of learning when volunteer turnover occurs. Yukl (2010) noted the importance of understanding the real learning needs and stated: “Decisions about what types of training and development to provide are often influenced by current fads and vendor hype rather than a systematic analysis of essential competencies that need to be enhanced” (p. 451). McHargue added, “Identifying simple and effective means to pass the knowledge [acquired by departing volunteers] on to others is probably one of the more important steps NPO’s must take” (p. 203).
Based on the research inquiry data and the supporting literature, my recommendations for both volunteer and staff learning can be divided into three areas of focus:

1. **Staff learning**, including (a) volunteer procedures and policies training (Shin & Kleiner, 2003, p. 91); (b) development of readily available resources accessible for staff to assist with staff training of volunteers; (c) advanced team leadership training; and (d) training in systems thinking to assist YUNY staff in guiding their thought processes related to program expansion.

2. **Volunteer learning**, including (a) volunteers scholarship—investigate the possibility of providing funding to allow volunteers attend the annual YU National Conference; (b) volunteers training—invite volunteers to attend the new staff and coaching training courses; (c) allow volunteers to attend YUNY’s training workshops; (d) development of one-day training retreats; and (e) attendance for one day at YUNY’s Annual Retreat.

3. **Joint staff and volunteer learning**, including in-field learning and training programs. This style of training supports Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) concept of a safe environment. The duration and frequency of these training components are to be developed by YUNY such that the program is not disrupted.

These three learning areas are intended to be supplementary guidelines for YUNY’s existing training initiatives. Over time, they can be integrated into YUNY’s staff and volunteer development plans in support of achieving their vision.
With the introduction of the new staff position with responsibility for the development of volunteer assessment tools, centralized volunteer knowledge will be developed. This will assist in matching tasks to a volunteer’s interests and encouragement of further development. Together with the recommendations listed above, a supportive of learning environment can be developed (Yukl, 2010).

**Recommendation three: Investigate how the program leaders’ volunteer care related accountability could be improved**

The recommendation to further investigate accountability at YUNY is based on the gap between the desire expressed by the associate director and area director for improvements in accountability related to program leaders and volunteer care (H. Wyse, personal communication, February 14, 2012; S. Moore, personal communication, February 21, 2012), and the recognition evidenced in the data that accountability related to volunteer care was very important, but there were no data to indicate how improved levels could be achieved. My review of current literature showed that accountability is a basic and important element, critical to the functioning of organizations. However, due to a lack of research, not much is known about this “multilevel construct” (Hall, Zinko, Perryman, & Ferris, 2009, p. 288) and its complex relationships with job performance and satisfaction (Hall et al., 2009; Rus, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2012). Lencioni (2005) noted the word accountability is “so overused and misused . . . that it has lost much of its power” (p. 61). Rus et al. (2012) cautioned that accountability “should not be seen as a panacea for all evils” (p. 22).
To be accountable is to be held responsible for one’s choices and decisions (Hall et al., 2009; Lencioni, 2005). Research has shown that without accountability there “would be chaos and the breakdown of organizations” (Hall et al., 2009, p. 381). With accountability, there is “greater participation in citizenship behaviour, which contributed to task performance and satisfaction through reputation” (Hall et al., 2009, p. 387). These research findings clearly underscore the importance of accountability.

Accountability and leader behaviour is a complex construct affected by the power and charismatic style of a leader; the amount of leader self-interest; the leader’s level of group identity; and the leader’s personality traits (Rus et al., 2012). Rus et al. (2012) added to the complexity of understanding accountability, concluding that there are (a) some significant advantages of increased accountability, (b) areas where no substantial evidence exists to create conclusions related to accountability, and (c) other areas of unknown conclusions (p. 23). Rus et al. (2012) presented additional findings of the advantages related to increased accountability, which included the moderating effect it has on a powerful leader’s self-serving behaviour and the improvement of the social responsibility displayed by leaders (p. 22). Rus et al. (2012) reported that there was no conclusive evidence associating felt accountability and responsibility, and also commented on the unknown linkage between “personality traits that increase an individual’s susceptibility to accountability constraints” (p. 23).

Rus et al. (2012) noted that the relationship between organizational structure and accountability is not conclusive but suggested that flattened organizational hierarchies support increased accountability as the number of constituencies an individual becomes accountable to
also increases. Peer groups in well-structured work environments can provide motivation for individuals to do their best in meeting the organization’s standards and be accountable (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Lencioni, 2005; Rus et al., 2012). However, Rus et al. (2012) noted that additional research is required to provide conclusions regarding these relationships.

There are significant differences between outcome accountability and process accountability. Outcome accountability “may paradoxically lower exactly those outcomes its implementation was intended to increase” (Rus et al., 2012, p. 22), as the leader is focussed on the end goals and may defocus from the human relationship aspects of their activities. Leaders focussed on process accountability may increase the care, perspective, alternative options, and consequences when making decisions (Rus et al., 2012, p. 22). Rus et al. (2012) suggested a combination of both outcome and process accountability as the best strategy (p. 22).

Guided by the information from YUNY and the reviewed literature, the following seven-step recommendation regarding increased accountability at YUNY is focussed on the organization developing the meaning of accountability and the process of achieving and maintaining this in a manner that is specific and meaningful to the organization:


2. Research and understand the gap between senior leadership’s desire for accountability and YUNY program leaders’ understanding of accountability. This could be accomplished through an anonymous survey.
3. Conduct a collaborative group data gathering exercise (e.g., a conversation café) focused on accountability and how the YUNY team will achieve both individual and team accountability.


5. Determine the level of accountability for program leaders that balances “creativity and conformity” (Hall et al., 2009, p. 389) in the approach to effectively adhering to the rules of engagement at YUNY.

6. Gain commitment from each program leader and the team as a whole (Lencioni, 2005, pp. 51–53).

7. Maintain a focus on tracking accountability during regular team meetings (Lencioni, 2005, pp. 67–68).

**Recommendation four: Investigate how the boundaries of YUNY’s current community could be expanded and what affect this would have on the organization**

McHargue (2003) and Austin (2000) highlighted the importance of NPOs expanding outside of their current boundaries. McHargue (2003) stated, “NPOs need to embrace the idea of building teams and encouraging collaboration not only with the organization and with volunteers but also with other NPO’s, stakeholders, and society as a whole” (p. 203). Austin (2000) highlighted the strategic importance of alliances and cross-sector collaboration for NPOs, especially for assisting in mitigating the effects of political, social, and economic forces that

The data from this research study supported the exploration of other areas, networks, or technologies for expanded volunteer recruitment. These ideas included both tapping into physical areas outside of the area where YUNY currently recruits volunteers, but also expanding the number of volunteer roles in the organization and using technology (e.g., the YUNY website and social media) to reach out to people who may want to fill these new, nontraditional administrative or technology support roles.

My recommendation is that the YUNY leadership team dialogue about the possibilities of an expanded recruitment and collaboration network, what this would look like for them, and how this would assist in achieving their organization’s vision. In tandem, embark upon a learning exercise focussed on systems thinking (Senge, 2006) and boundary-spanning leadership (Ernst & Chrobot-Mason, 2011). Thereafter, research how this expanded reach could be practically implemented. Once this is accomplished, identify the new volunteer roles or new programs and then determine where or how the new volunteer recruits can be attracted.

In considering these four recommendations, it is important to note Goldsmith et al.’s (2010) words of caution:

Don’t try to create major change unless you feel strongly that achieving change is of vital importance, because the effort will be much harder and take much longer than you expect. In other words, you really have to care. And you mustn’t begin a change effort before you’re convinced that at least some success is possible. In the majority of change efforts, the program is announced with great fanfare and then, as other things become more important, executives lose interest. Repeated fizzle of change efforts are about as dispiriting as outright failure. (pp. 114–115)
Goldsmith et al. (2010) concluded that core change only occurs when there is an alignment of leadership throughout the organization and that success can only occur when the majority of people are involved (pp. 114–115).

**Summary of recommendations**

The four recommendations are intended to assist YUNY in developing a sustainable organization with fully engaged volunteers. In turn, this will support the organization’s vision: “By 2030, our dream is to see the youth we serve experience God and His love as they create 75 communities of hope in 25 North York neighbourhoods” (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013).

**Organizational Implications**

The recommendations, presented to the area director of YUNY, reflect the four conclusions. These recommendations are not quick fixes. They will all take time to implement and can assist in (a) the development of a support structure for strengthened volunteer engagement, (b) the building of systems to increase the capacity of staff and volunteers, and (c) increased accountability of program leaders. These outcomes can positively impact the sustainability of the environment, volunteer engagement, and leadership behaviour at YUNY. Shin and Kleiner (2003) noted that volunteerism has contributed significantly to the financial and social improvement of people’s lives and to improved organizational efficiency. Additional organizational benefits include innovation, economic efficiency, and social cohesion (Shin & Kleiner, 2003, p. 63).
Once the volunteer recruitment and care management changes resulting from the appointment of the staff and community pastor are fully established, YUNY can determine their ongoing impact. This strengthened support structure has the potential to streamline volunteer administration processes and may result in more volunteers and program leaders being drawn to being a part of YUNY.

Increased learning for the program leaders and the volunteers, as well as the inclusion of volunteers at off-site staff learning, retreat, and conference events will further equip and strengthen YUNY’s leadership team. A number of benefits may result from this, including increased confidence of volunteers and program leaders. Ultimately, “better-equipped program leaders and volunteers will result in their increased satisfaction and potentially in increased financial stewardship” (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013) and support strengthened and expanded programs. Strategically planned collaboration and expanded areas of recruitment, supported by a strengthened organization, can also assist YUNY to achieve their 2030 dream of program expansion and impact.

If the changes implemented by YUNY result in a strengthened organization and strengthened relationships, other YU chapters could conduct similar research, implement similar recommendations for their chapter, and potentially result in organizational growth. If more chapters follow the same recommendations and share knowledge across the chapters, the ultimate results could be a greater knowledge base throughout the whole organization. Ultimately, YUNY could “contribute to YUGTA enhancing its ability to be a charity that is an influencer and not just a performer” (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013).
Impact for the Community

Increased effectiveness at YUNY could result in the achievement of the organization’s vision. As such, the lives of many more youth would be transformed. A stronger YU organization would provide more support in priority neighbourhoods, positively impact youth development, and provide an overall improvement in the lives of youth who live in vulnerable circumstances that are typically devoid of support and opportunity.

Shin and Kleiner (2003) noted that improved health and self-esteem, greater levels of energy, lower rates of depression, and “healthier attitudes about aging” (p. 64) resulted from volunteerism. In addition, the coming together of community members from different backgrounds to assist in bettering their community resulted in social cohesion, interpersonal understanding, community cohesion, and harmony. If the implementation of the study recommendations assists YUNY in realizing these outcomes, their ability to support additional programs will increase. Ultimately, if YUNY achieves their 2030 vision, “75 communities of hope characterized by wholeness, mentorship, service and opportunity in 25 North York neighbourhoods” (S. Moore, personal communication, February 11, 2013) will exist.

Implications for Future Inquiry

Handy and Hustinx (2009) concluded that current volunteer sector research has proven to be “rich and versatile yet highly complex and contradictory. Prevalent theories and perspectives compete” (p. 557). Most significantly for this research project, research findings are not universally applicable and vary by country, culture, and organization type (Hustinx & Handy,
2009; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Handy and Hustinx also concluded that there is also no one known management theory for managing volunteers (p. 558).

These conclusions suggest that the most applicable research for YUNY will be found within their own organization. In addition, conducting similar research in other faith-based NPOs will add to the body of academic research and knowledge and perhaps define organizational groups that behave similarly. Conducting a similar research project to this one with the program leaders in other YU chapters may provide a greater understanding of the applicability of the research finding from this project across the YU organization.

Further research could include gaining an understanding from the perspectives of both current and past volunteers and potentially prospective volunteers who have never committed to volunteering. A second opportunity for research is with the current and past program participants who could also provide a set of unique perspectives, and the third opportunity for research is in the area of NPOs’ learning and engagement.

Summary

In summary, the participants in this research study presented a very clear picture of what a supportive environment for fully engaged volunteers could look like. Their assessment of the current environment reflected a vibrant and caring organization. Onto this already firm foundation, their input has highlighted the importance of strong, inclusive, appreciated, and acknowledged equality relationships with volunteers. In addition, a strong culture of open, bidirectional communication between the organization and volunteers, as well as focus on increased learning and skills development for both volunteers and staff, were described as
important contributing elements. All of these factors underscored the importance the program leaders placed on volunteer recruitment and administration.

The four recommendations proposed in this paper are designed to assist YUNY in achieving their long-term vision by closing the gaps they have identified related to volunteer recruitment management, learning, expansion through collaboration, and volunteer care accountability. If the conclusions and implementations of the ideas put forward by the team at YUNY are successful, the impact of the work the staff and volunteers do on a daily basis could have an indelible impact on the communities they serve. If the findings presented in this research document are found to be useful and adopted by other chapters of YU, or similar volunteer-dependent nonprofit organizations, the valuable work they do and the communities they work in may be positively impacted by their sustainability, strength of their leadership, and engagement of their volunteers.
REFERENCES


Youth Unlimited. (n.d.d). *Who we are.* Retrieved from http://youthunlimitedgta.ca/aboutus/who-we-are


APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION

Date: [Date]

Dear [Prospective Research Participant]

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting as a part of my thesis requirements towards a Master of Arts in Leadership degree through Royal Roads University (RRU). My name is Andrea Leven-Marcon and my RRU credentials can be established by calling Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head and Associate Professor, MA Leadership Program at [telephone number]. The objective of this research project is to explore how a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of volunteers can be developed.

My research project will consist of a team-based interview matrix exercise lasting approximately 95 minutes and a conversation café lasting approximately two hours.

The team-based interview matrix will include four preset open-ended questions. The research participants will be divided into groups of four or five and will each interview one another asking the preset questions. The exercise will consist of six rounds of interviews, with each individual interview lasting approximately five minutes. Groups will then be formed to summarize and categorize the information and present their findings via a flip chart to the entire group. This research event will last 1½ hours.

The conversation café will consist of three rounds of 25-minute long conversations during which groups of four people will provide input related to a specific question relating to the main topic of this research. The total time required for this event will be 2 hours.

All research data gathered during the interview matrix exercise and any identifying information gathered during the conversation café will be coded to guarantee your anonymity. The nature and methodology of a conversation café is that information gathered does not typically identify the originator of information. All original information gathered in this research project will held in complete confidence and will ultimately be destroyed. Any quotations or detailed data contained in the final report will also be anonymized unless you explicitly provide your permission or request to be quoted by name in the report.

A copy of the final thesis or summary report will be made available to Youth Unlimited North York. A copy of the thesis will be electronically archived on RRU’s Digital Archive, ProQuest, and Library and Archives Canada. I may develop white papers based on a summary of the results of this research that will be shared with other interested researchers or published in professional journals or publications.
Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you are not compelled to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw without prejudice, at any time. If you choose not to participate or wish to remove yourself from the project at any time, your decision will be held confidential. Any data, if it can be identified as coming from you, will be immediately destroyed.

If you would like to participate in my research project, or have any questions, please contact me, at any time, via my personal email at [email address or at [telephone number]. Both my email and voicemail message systems are password protected and I have sole access to both systems.

Yours truly,
Andrea Leven-Marcon
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT – INTERVIEW MATRIX

Date: [Date]

Re: Research Project: How a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of volunteers can be developed.

Dear [Prospective Research Participant]

My name is Andrea Leven-Marcon, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head and Associate Professor, MA Leadership Program at [telephone number].

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project that will be conducted on Monday 10th September at Youth Unlimited North York’s annual retreat location in Muskoka. The objective is to explore how a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of volunteers can be developed. No preparation or materials are required by the participants and no costs will be incurred. Refreshments and all materials for the event will be provided.

The research will consist of a team-based interview matrix that will include four preset open-ended questions. The research participants will be divided into groups of four or five and will each interview one another asking the preset questions. The exercise will consist of six rounds of interviews, with each individual interview lasting approximately five minutes. Groups will then be formed to summarize and categorize the information and present their findings via a flip chart to the entire group. This research event will last 1 ½ hours.

As this is a research study based on your experiences and opinions, no right or wrong answers exist and there is no requirement for any pre-meeting preparation. Participants are at liberty to share the information they choose to share.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Youth Unlimited North York. I may also produce summary articles for publication as journal articles or white papers and potentially utilize some of the information for a book.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. The interviewer and interviewee’s names will not appear on any of the interview documentation. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential in a locked cabinet. All raw data will be kept in a
locked cabinet and destroyed five years after acceptance of the thesis by Royal Roads University. All information gathered from any participants who choose to withdraw from the study will be destroyed immediately.

A copy of the final thesis or summary report will be made available to Youth Unlimited North York. A copy of the thesis will be electronically archived on RRU’s Digital Archive, ProQuest, and Library and Archives Canada. I may develop white papers based on a summary of the results of this research that will be shared with other interested researchers or published in professional journals or publications. A copy of the thesis or a summary of the research can, upon request, be made available to all research participants.

Even though this research project will be conducted during Youth Unlimited North York’s annual retreat, you are not compelled to participate in this research project. Even if you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in complete confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: ________________________________________________________________

Date: _________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT - CONVERSATION CAFE

Date: [Date]

Re: Research Project: How a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of volunteers can be developed.

Dear [Prospective Research Participant]

My name is Andrea Leven-Marcon, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head and Associate Professor, MA Leadership Program at [telephone number].

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project that will be conducted on Sunday 9th September at Youth Unlimited North York’s annual retreat location in Muskoka. The objective is to explore how a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of volunteers can be developed. No preparation or materials are required by the participants and no costs will be incurred. Refreshments and all materials for the event will be provided.

The conversation café will consist of three rounds of 25 minute long conversations during which groups of four people will provide input related to a specific question relating to the main topic of this research. The total time required for this event will be 2 hours.

The conversation café event will consist of an introduction to this research method and an explanation will be provided as to how the research process will be followed. The event will consist of three rounds of interactive group conversations held in a “café style” environment. There will be four or five people per group. The discussions will centre on two main question related to the main research topic and the participants will share their opinions and ideas. Participants will handwrite write their contributions onto the paper tablecloths and on moveable sticky notes. Individual’s names will not be recorded or associated with any of the shared input. During the second round the groups will have the opportunity to expand on the previous group’s input and during the third round the groups will return to their first table to review the development of their initial ideas and will have the opportunity to further expand on their ideas and contributions.

Following a break after the conversations have concluded, the groups will spend time consolidating the information and theming the discussion ideas. The event will conclude with each table presenting a brief summary of the information to the larger group.
In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Youth Unlimited North York. I may also produce summary articles for publication as journal articles or white papers and potentially utilize some of the information for a book. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand.

All documentation will be kept strictly confidential in a locked cabinet. All raw data will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed five years after acceptance of the thesis by Royal Roads University. All information gathered from any participants who choose to withdraw from the study will be destroyed immediately.

A copy of the final thesis or summary report will be made available to Youth Unlimited North York. A copy of the thesis will be electronically archived on RRU’s Digital Archive, ProQuest, and Library and Archives Canada. I may develop white papers based on a summary of the results of this research that will be shared with other interested researchers or published in professional journals or publications. A copy of the thesis or a summary of the research can, upon request, be made available to all research participants.

Even though this research project will be conducted during Youth Unlimited North York’s annual retreat, you are not compelled to participate in this research project. Even if you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in complete confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): __________________________________________________

Signed: _____________________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D: INQUIRY TEAM MEMBER LETTER OF AGREEMENT

Date: [Date]

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Andrea Leven-Marcon (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study at Youth Unlimited North York to explore how a sustainable environment that promotes full engagement of volunteers can be developed. The Student’s credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Program Head and Associate Professor, MA Leadership Program at [telephone number].

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, or analyzing data, to assist the Student and Youth Unlimited North York’s organizational change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

Bridging Student’s Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict

In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gather method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview or focus group, conduct the interviews (usually 3-5 maximum) or focus group (usually no more than one) with the selected participants (without the Student’s presence...
or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and questions worked out previously with the Student, and producing written transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants with a direct reporting relationship will be assured they can confidentially turn down the participation request from their supervisor (the Student), as this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the selection criteria range (they might have been a participant request coming after the number of participants sought, for example, interview request number 6 when only 5 participants are sought, or focus group request number 10 when up to 9 participants would be selected for a focus group). Inquiry Team members asked to take on such 3rd party duties in this study will be under the direction of the Student and will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry with the Student’s direct reports, and will be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with [Your name here], the Student.

**Statement of Informed Consent:**

I have read and understand this agreement.

________________________  _________________________  ________________
Name (Please Print)       Signature               Date
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW MATRIX QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about the best or most positive experiences you have had with your volunteers over a project season?

2. How do you support and encourage your volunteers through the duration of a project?

3. Thinking back over your experience as a project leader for Youth Unlimited North York, what circumstances would you like to replicate to create the best environment for effective volunteering?

4. Based on your experience what advice would you give to a newly hired program leader regarding volunteer support, involvement and engagement?
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW MATRIX PROCESS

1. Introduction an understanding of the interview matrix process - 5 minutes

2. Overview of the process that will be followed - 5 minutes
   a. Participants were divided into one group of 4 and a group of 3 people.
   b. Each person in the group will count off and be identified as 1, 2, 3 or 4.
   c. Each person took the matching #1, #2, #3 or #4 question card.

3. Individual Interviews - 40 minutes
   a. The process of interviews followed the process outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Round</th>
<th>Group of Three People</th>
<th>Group of Four People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 interviewed 2</td>
<td>1 interviewed 2 3 interviewed 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 interviewed 3</td>
<td>2 interviewed 3 4 interviewed 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 interviewed 1</td>
<td>2 interviewed 4 3 interviewed 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 interviewed 2</td>
<td>3 interviewed 2 1 interviewed 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 interviewed 3</td>
<td>4 interviewed 2 1 interviewed 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 interviewed 1</td>
<td>2 interviewed 1 4 interviewed 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Each group member interviewed re Question 4 by three of the people from the other group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Consolidation of the information - 20 minutes
   a. Participants moved to flip charts 1, 2, 3 or 4 according to their number.
   b. Each flip chart group summarized trends, ideas or themes onto sticky notes and placed them in groupings on the flip chart.

5. Presentation of the research findings - 20 minutes
   a. Each flip chart group presented their finding to all of the participants.

6. Wrap Up - 5 minutes

   Total - 95 minutes
APPENDIX G: CONVERSATION CAFÉ QUESTIONS

Question for Table One
What does a supportive environment for fully engaged ministry volunteers at Youth Unlimited North York look like?

Question for Table Two
What initiatives could we do together to support an environment that promotes fully engaged ministry volunteers?
APPENDIX H: AGENDA INTERVIEW MATRIX

AGENDA

Youth Unlimited North York Interview Matrix Research Event

9 September 2012

1. Welcome - 3 minutes
2. Agenda Overview - 2 minutes
3. Introduction to the Research Project - 4 minutes
4. Interview Matrix Activity Introduction - 3 minutes
5. Break and movement of groups to interview areas - 2 minutes
6. Interview Matrix Event – 3 Rounds of Interviews - 40 minutes
7. Break and movement of participants to flip charts - 2 minutes
8. Group Consolidation of Information - 20 minutes
9. Group Presentation of Information - 20 minutes
10. Wrap Up - 5 minutes
11. Notification re Conversation Café - 2 minutes
12. Meeting Close - 2 minutes

Total: - 105 minutes / 1⅓ hours
APPENDIX I: CONVERSATION CAFÉ EVENT

AGENDA

Youth Unlimited North York Conversation Cafe Event

[Date]

1. Welcome - 2 minutes
2. Brief summarization of relevant Interview Matrix findings - 2 minutes
3. Introduction to the Conversation Café - 3 minutes
4. Settling of groups at the tables - 2 minutes
5. Round 1 – Conversation Café - 25 minutes
6. Movement of groups to the next table - 2 minutes
7. Round 2 – Conversation Café - 25 minutes
8. Movement of groups to the next table - 2 minutes
9. Round 3 – Conversation Café - 25 minutes
10. Break - 5 minutes
11. Summarization of themes - 20 minutes
12. Presentation of themes – Table 1 - 5 minutes
13. Presentation of themes – Table 2 - 5 minutes
14. Meeting Close - 2 minutes

Total: - 120 minutes / 2 hours
APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW MATRIX QUESTION 1 – NOTES SHEET

1. Can you tell me about the best, or most positive, experiences you have had with your volunteers over a project season?
2. How do you support and encourage your volunteers through the duration of a project?
APPENDIX L: INTERVIEW MATRIX QUESTION 3 – NOTES SHEET

3. Thinking back over your experience as a project leader for Youth Unlimited North York, what circumstances would you like to replicate to create the best environment for effective volunteering?

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4. Based on your experience what advice would you give to a newly hired program leaders regarding volunteer support, involvement and engagement?

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APPENDIX N: INTERVIEW MATRIX QUESTION 1 – SUMMARY NOTES

1. Can you tell me about the best, or most positive, experiences you have had with your volunteers over a project season?

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APPENDIX O: INTERVIEW MATRIX QUESTION 2 – SUMMARY NOTES

2. How do you support and encourage your volunteers through the duration of a project?

Question 2
Summary Notes

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3. Thinking back over your experience as a project leader for Youth Unlimited North York, what circumstances would you like to replicate to create the best environment for effective volunteering?
APPENDIX Q: INTERVIEW MATRIX QUESTION 4 – NOTES SHEET

4. Based on your experience what advice would you give to a newly hired program leaders regarding volunteer support, involvement and engagement?

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