Turning Ideas into Innovations through Learning and Collaboration

Written by Kristian Partington

Without collaboration, innovation stalls. It takes more than just a big idea to ignite change, it requires a platform to spread knowledge and a sense of contagious momentum to inspire others to take up the mantle. When people are supported to develop the skills and processes that help knowledge transfer thrive, great things can happen.

The 3rd Annual Innovation Summit, hosted by the RIA and Schlegel Villages in mid-June, offered just the right environment for the sharing of knowledge. Between a keynote speech by Dr. Robert Bell, Ontario’s Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, 10 separate concurrent sessions and five separate collaborative knowledge-exchange sessions, there was plenty of information to captivate the nearly 200 people in attendance.

Attendees were RIA researchers, village team members, community partners, industry leaders and a few residents and family members. They’re champions of research and innovation, eager to try out and scale up ideas that will enhance quality of life for an aging population.

Two of the main organizers of this 3rd annual summit, RIA Research Application Specialist Lora Bruyn Martin and Schlegel Villages Director of Quality and Innovation Jaimie Killingbeck, challenged the audience during a session on Day 2 to consider what it takes to translate the many great ideas into tangible innovations.

“Innovations aren’t ideas,” Lora points out; “they are the actions that follow the ideas in order to make it real.”

In order to start, spread and evaluate innovative solutions, Lora and Jaimie suggested several key points for consideration.

There must first be a “recognition of need and a willingness to constantly improve,” Lora says, and a “willingness to be transparent and share failures as well as successes.”

People must also push aside the notion that true innovation must create large-scale change; a simple idea or a small improvement can have a positive impact on life quality.

“We want to think big but we also need to start small,” Jaimie says. “We can’t do everything at once and we can’t make changes everywhere.” It can start in one corner of one neighbourhood in one village, she adds, and when the idea proves worthy, it can then be scaled up through collaborative knowledge exchange.

This is what the annual Summit is all about. In the knowledge exchange sessions, for example, attendees discussed how to reduce the use of antipsychotic medication; the monitoring and reduction of preventable emergency room transfers; falls prevention; wound care; and the enhancement of dining experiences and nutritional intake for residents.

“The 3rd annual Innovation Summit offered a platform for researchers, team members, families and residents to fuel the transformation of ideas into innovations.”

Perhaps the summit’s greatest potential can be seen in the network that is being created. Researchers, residents, family members and direct care partners are becoming true collaborators and are starting to lean on each other as they strive to continually do better. This budding network allows us to work through short-term challenges and realize the potential for long-term improvement.

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“It was fantastic, the ideas that were coming out of the knowledge exchange sessions,” Jaimie says, “and I think it really sparked some thought on how to create opportunities to spread the learning.”

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