

## **A Most Remarkable Little Girl**

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When someone shows you who they are...believe them. That's what ran through my mind as I watched a dear friend and colleague, Mr. Danielle Zanotti, Chief Executive Officer of United Way of York Region as he announced this year's proud achievement of a nine million dollar campaign last Thursday evening.

The theme of this year's campaign?

REMARKABLE! PEOPLE. NEIGHBOURHOODS. IMPACT.

Those of us who know him well, know well enough to believe him. When he chose the word REMARKABLE to describe the social landscape of York Region...he must have done so with good reason. One should not pin a 9 million dollar campaign to the word REMARKABLE without good reason.

His challenge - to encourage the people of York Region to embrace a word that is not commonly used, to use it with pride, to use it with understanding and to use it with a sense of authenticity.

Remarkable.

This year's United Way achievement is proof that the word remarkable is indeed a fitting descriptor of our communities, our people and our impact. The story I would like to share with you this evening is about

### ***A most remarkable little girl***

Jamie is 8. I met Jamie long before she ever set foot in our Newmarket office. I met Jamie for the first time - on paper. Our clinical team had asked me to review a psychological report and I was delighted – you see I spend much of my time reviewing financial reports, funder's reports, statistical reports, community development reports, program outcome reports, ministry reports – I'm not often asked to contribute a clinical opinion to our staff, although I am a clinically-trained professional.

And so I cleared my desk and waited. The Clinical and Program Directors came, we closed the door, and they sat in silence while I read. My heart sank as Jamie, a most remarkable girl, emerged from the document through the eyes of a clinical psychologist. The report described a little girl who was significantly delayed in all aspects of her development. The other documents in Jamie's file were summary

notes from an investigation that detailed one of the most horrific cases of child sexual abuse we have encountered...this year.

And yet, if one looked carefully between the lines of these reports and past the statistical significances, standard deviations and outliers there was the description of an energetic little girl with a warm smile, an open heart and a genuine sense of eagerness about life.

Although I had yet to meet her, I spent a great deal of time with Jamie over the next few months in my conversations with YRAP's clinical team about how to adapt an approach to meet the specific needs of this little girl. How to communicate when reading and writing wouldn't be possible? How to speak when spoken language and attention would be fleeting? Before I met Jamie in person, this remarkable little girl taught me the difference between and importance of the words "we haven't" and "we haven't yet...". And it was clearly the "yet" that we were preparing for.

The next time I met Jamie she was on television – or at least her story certainly was. Known to us, but unbeknownst to the broader community, this gentle child had been living for several years in the care of a parent who was grossly incapable of providing a safe and nurturing environment for her child. In a drug induced state, a child had become a commodity – something to be sold or traded instead of someone to love and protect. When I dropped my briefcase on the couch and turned on the television that night, I was confronted with a "top of the hour" national media account of unprecedented charges laid against an unforgivably long list of offenders.

And then the calls came – from our community and from as far away as the west coast of Canada. Angry calls "what kind of community are we living in?" - Indignant calls "how could this happen?" followed quickly by calls expressing compassion and concern "what can be done and how can we help?"

Of course, I couldn't share the details of Jamie's story with them then any more than I can with you now, but what I can share, I hope you will take away with you when you leave here tonight.

Jamie is a remarkable little girl and yet she is not unlike the dozens and dozens of children who come to YRAP each year having experienced the serious physical and psychological trauma related to child sexual abuse. She is her own little person with her own distinct needs, interests and opportunities that stretch out before her. What makes her remarkable is her unique way of coping, her sheer determination to communicate, and her capacity to engage and show deep affection to others in spite of her past experiences.

What makes her most remarkable, I think, is the fact that when she chose her bravery bear during her first visit to YRAP – she chose two...one for her, and one

for the relative who brought her to YRAP. And when we asked her why she would like to give a bravery bear to this caregiver – she was able to explain that this person had stood up to some very bad people in order to keep her safe...and that she thought that was very brave, indeed, and deserved a bear, too.

Jamie is remarkable because she was determined that there were some other people who live and work in our community who deserved to receive bravery bears, also. Every day the men and women of York Regional Police and their child protection and justice colleagues work tirelessly to investigate child sexual abuse, to apprehend offenders, and to participate in the metting out of justice for children like Jamie. They show wisdom in their duties, strength of character in their actions and compassion in their work with children and caregivers. They serve TO protect – especially the most vulnerable in our community. They are remarkable, and for that I am eternally grateful.

There is another group of very special people who deserve bravery bears and they are with us tonight. It is my privilege to introduce you to the phenomenal staff, consultants and students of York Region Abuse Program:

Kerrie Kortis – Clinical Director  
Kerry Hodgson – Coordinator Child & Family Program  
Stephanie Watson – Therapist, C&F Program  
Cathy Jo Coonley – Coordinator Adult & Adolescent Program  
Brent Diaz – Therapist, Adult & Adolescent Program  
Pandora Yee – Intake Coordinator  
Jolene Stowell – Coordinator Abuse Prevention Program  
Ashley Woolhead – Practicum Student  
Kim Shanahan – Book-keeper  
James Patterson – IT Consultant

Who else deserves a bravery bear? You do. Why? Because each and every one of you is a member of Jamie's remarkable community - the community that steps in to love, cherish, shelter and nurture when hope needs to grow.

It's you. It's you who gives community the capacity to respond, to reason, to organize and take action. It's you. Tonight, your generous support of York Region Abuse Program puts you on the doorstep with us as each child crosses the threshold – and for that gesture of love and support - for that bravery - I say you are truly remarkable – and I join my Board and staff to say thank you from the bottom of our hearts.