

December 12, 2020



Dear Mayor Ferguson,

I am writing this letter as a demonstration of my support for the initiative led by Mr. Brian Hart of Kate's Rest, which I regard as essential community initiative in Prince Edward County. In fact, after spending time with the residents at Kate's Rest while conducting a one-year long case study of this approach, I was even more convinced that such an initiative needs to be replicated in other rural communities.

I am a faculty member in the School of Occupational Therapy at Western University whose program of research pertains to intersections among poverty and mental health. My program of research to a large extent focuses on the issue of homelessness among individuals living with mental illness and substance use difficulties in middle to high income countries internationally. Until recently, homelessness in rural Canada has been an underacknowledged problem in research, policy, and practice. For this reason, little is known about the phenomenon of homelessness in rural contexts, and this is exactly why when I met Mr. Hart, that I became very interested in the permanent supportive housing community that he has established on Big Island. This interest led to applying for a \$25,000 Partnership Engage Grant, which was awarded on our first application from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. We believe that this success was due to the importance ascribed to this initiative by SSHRC, which was very validating for us, and represents the importance developing a range of approaches to address the complex problem of homelessness in rural communities across Canada.

The case study that I led and conducted in collaboration with faculty members at Queen's University, Mr. Hart, and the residents of Kate's Rest community, focused on describing this initiative, and identifying possibilities for future development. This study is complete, and a manuscript is currently under review for publication in an international housing journal. For this reason, I cannot share the manuscript with you as of yet. I would, however, be pleased to share it with you once it has been published. In lieu of that, I will share some of the key findings of our study.

1. We used a case study design, which is an approach used to simply *describe* a program or initiative. We chose this method so that we could fully understand what Kate's Rest "is" and offer some recommendations for revising and standardizing it to support replication and future evaluation efforts.
2. We interviewed 13 residents, and 12 community members. We acknowledge that the community members were a biased sample in that they were people who had been involved with the community in a range of ways prior to the initiation of our study. *If we could have replicated this study, we would have loved to have heard from community members who were not in support of this initiative so that we could have provided helpful recommendations to Kate's Rest following our analysis.* That said, we did generate information shared below that you might find helpful as you grapple with the issue of how best to support this community.

Interviews with residents consisted of a range of standardized measures, and qualitative interviews:

- ***In quantitative interviews with residents***, we found that residents at Kate's Rest had greater mental well-being, lower drug use, and a greater sense of belonging than individuals with experiences of homelessness in other studies. This means that the residents at Kate's Rest are benefiting from this model in a way that has been difficult to achieve with other models of support in urban areas.
- ***In qualitative interviews with residents***, we found that a sense of belonging was of primary importance to residents and was achieved within the Kate's Rest community. This was not the case when they recalled living in their own apartments in Picton or other urban and rural contexts. This is a key finding because individuals with experiences of homelessness often struggle to be included in their communities due to the stigma of mental illness and/or homelessness. Belonging is essential to mental and physical health, and the fact that this was described in-depth by residents in our research is critically important in the literature on homelessness. It points to the value of communities like Kate's Rest in helping to achieve this critical outcome. In conducting interviews and analyzing our data, *it was clear to our research team that the residents had created a unique community that was addressing some of the shortcomings of other models of support for individuals with experiences of housing precarity in previous research.*
- ***In qualitative interviews with involved community members***, they emphasized their initial criticisms of Kate's Rest. Once they sought involvement in the community and came to know residents, however, their prior preconceptions were dispelled. By coming to know residents, the fear that residents could cause harm or presented risk in the community was gradually lessened with ongoing exposure.

Given that homelessness is a growing issue in Canada, and is increasingly acknowledged as a rural problem, I believe that it would be a mistake not to support Kate's Rest to continue to thrive on Big Island. Housing affordability is decreasing in both urban and rural areas across Canada, and it is likely that homelessness will continue to grow in rural communities in the near future. For this reason, initiatives such as Kate's Rest are desperately needed. *All too often individuals who experience homelessness in rural communities are forced to migrate to urban centres in search of supports, and I am of the perspective that this is a human rights violation. When individuals lose their housing, they should have the option to remain in their home community and receive supports that are relevant to their needs there.*

My impression of Kate's Rest is that it is a "diamond in the rough," and represents a model that could be replicated and managed in other rural contexts with some revisions. I understand that physical improvements to Kate's Rest are underway, and I am pleased to hear that this is the case. By supporting this initiative in Prince Edward County, such improvements can continue, and greatly enrich the lives of the residents of Kate's Rest and the surrounding community. Kate's Rest is a place of belonging for many individuals with histories of housing precarity, and a place that is enabling them to thrive. Though I recognize that there are tensions in the broader community about this initiative, I would suggest that they can be resolved through mutual working, and greater integration of Kate's Rest residents with members of the broader community.

I hope that this letter will help your Town Council to recognize the value of Kate's Rest, and the unique contribution that it can make in your community. I would suggest that the issue of homelessness will continue to emerge as an issue in Prince Edward County, and that it will be an ongoing topic of discussion among your Council in the coming years. I advise that you consider what Kate's Rest and other such models might offer to address this issue without forcing individuals who are living in poverty in your community to move to urban centres in search of housing and supports. Kate's Rest is an example of an approach that is working to avoid this from happening and may offer an opportunity for Prince Edward County to address the issue of homelessness locally.

Please do not hesitate to reach out should I be of assistance in any way, or if you have any questions about what I have presented in this letter. Thank you for your consideration.

Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carrie', followed by a long horizontal line.

Dr. Carrie Anne Marshall, PhD., OT Reg.(Ont.)
Assistant Professor
Western University, Occupational Therapy
Director, Social Justice in Mental Health Research Lab
Faculty of Health Sciences
Elborn College, Room 2533
1201 Western Rd.,
London, ON, Canada
N6H 1H1
Tel: 613 329-1215
carrie.marshall@uwo.ca