

Re: Letter of Endorsement

December 3, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to express our strong support for the proposed pilot project, "*Welcoming Streets*," a collaborative initiative led by Positive Living Niagara and REACH Niagara (Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare).

Positive Living Niagara (PLN) is a community-based organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for individuals and families affected by HIV, Hepatitis C, sexually transmitted blood-borne infections, and substance use within the Niagara region.

PLN employs a client-centered approach, tailoring services to meet the needs of individuals living with or affected by HIV and/or substance use using a harm reduction approach of care. With comprehensive supports including case management, access to harm reduction supplies including naloxone, peer-led programming, and the consumption site, PLN has decades of experience supporting those who engage in substance use throughout the Region. With many partners including CASON, the Niagara Health Hepatitis C team, De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre, Niagara EMS, and REACH Niagara, PLN has consistently demonstrated a collaborative approach to supporting community members for over 30 years and is well-poised to facilitate "*Welcoming Streets*".

In recent months, safety concerns regarding the homeless population in St. Catharines have escalated, highlighting a growing divide between the general public and the unhoused community. This rift has led to further isolation and marginalization of those experiencing homelessness, exacerbating the social imbalance within our city. The "*Welcoming Streets*" initiative represents a vital opportunity to break down these barriers and challenge the negative stigmas that contribute to the alienation of this extremely vulnerable group. We understand this pilot is the first of its kind in Niagara whereas evaluation efforts has the potential to be expanded to other communities and fill a critical gap.

The model proposed for this project, which has proven successful in other Canadian cities such as Belleville, Guelph, Ottawa, Brampton, Kingston, and Sudbury, takes a unique peer-led approach to community engagement and redevelopment. This strategy focuses on fostering accountability and building connections on the streets, with the ultimate goal of linking more individuals from equity-deserving communities to essential services and making public spaces safe for everyone who uses them.

Moreover, the implementation of this program has the potential to alleviate some of the fiscal strain currently placed on regional and municipal first responders. Peer-led interventions have been shown to be more effective in addressing the needs of the homeless population, particularly in building trust with individuals who may harbor skepticism or fear toward law enforcement and other first response agencies.

The Board of Directors of Positive Living Niagara wholeheartedly supports this joint proposal from Positive Living Niagara and REACH Niagara, and we offer our full endorsement of the "*Welcoming Streets*" project.

Thank you for considering this important initiative. I welcome any further discussion on this matter should you reach out.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Deborah Richards".

Deborah Richards, M.A., RP  
Board Chair, Positive Living Niagara