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Subject: Support for Welcoming Streets Pilot
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To the Office of the Regional Clerk and Niagara Regional Council Members,

My name is Samantha McAleese, and I am an Assistant Professor of Critical Criminology in the Department of Sociology at Brock University. I moved to St. Catharines in August 2023 and am thrilled to be a newer resident of the Niagara Region. It has been such a wonderful experience settling into my new neighbourhood (downtown St. Catharines) and getting to know my neighbours, along with the services and resources that exist to keep people safe and well, such as REACH Niagara and Positive Living Niagara.

A couple of weeks ago, I was informed of the **Welcoming Streets Pilot Project**, and this is what I am writing to you about today. This peer-led outreach program, which has been successful in other cities like Guelph and Belleville, is a proactive approach to community engagement that focuses on building trust, respect, and safety. This compassionate approach to those who are made most vulnerable is essential to ensuring that people are connected to the resources they need to survive and thrive.

I request that the Niagara Region fund this initiative and support a pilot project in downtown St. Catharines. The need for the Welcoming Streets program in this area is obvious. There is a significant population of individuals living in poverty, experiencing homelessness, navigating food insecurity, and facing barriers to accessing services to help with these needs, along with difficulties accessing mental health and substance use resources. Furthermore, the high concentration of community-based organizations in downtown St. Catharines means that outreach workers can make immediate and safe referrals to these much-needed services.

My research focuses on the collateral consequences of punishment and the role of the non-profit sector in supporting people who come back to the community after being incarcerated. I also have several years of experience working and volunteering in frontline positions with people who are made vulnerable due to a lack of effective and compassionate support in the community. My observations and experiences bring me to support a pilot project such as Welcoming Streets. Any initiative that brings neighbours, social services, people with lived and living experiences, and business owners together to re-imagine safety and well-being is a worthy investment and should be a priority for the Niagara Region.

I have also offered to assist in coordinating evaluation support for this pilot project. In my capacity as a researcher at Brock University, I would be happy to work with the various partners on this project to design and facilitate a program evaluation to demonstrate the impacts and outcomes of Welcoming Streets in downtown St.

Catharines. Such a project aligns with my personal research agenda, which is grounded in my desire to conduct and disseminate research that is meaningful to individuals and communities in the Niagara Region. This evaluation would also support scaling the initiative to other communities such as Niagara Falls, Welland, or Thorold.

Once again, I want to express my support for the Welcoming Streets Pilot Project and I hope to see it supported by the Region as well.

Thank you for taking the time to read this message.

With care,

Samantha McAleese

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