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—Photo courtesy of Rick Grant.

COTTONTAIL RABBIT

Mindful Gala fundraiser coming soon

True Experience seeking new home in Dunnville for clients

By Kaitlyn Clark  
The Haldimand Press

DUNNVILLE—True Experience is seeking to purchase a home to offer additional supportive housing beds for their clients and a Hamilton group has stepped forward to host a fundraising gala to support the effort.

True Experience currently has seven beds for their housing program and have been at capacity “for a very long time,” said Sandie Heirwegh, Executive Director of True Experience.

They currently have their “eyes on a couple of properties in Dunnville” that would only require minimal modifications and could double their capacity for their Opportunity House program.

“Living at Opportunity House is not simply a roof over your head, it is so much more than that,” said Heirwegh, noting that residents have responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, and support is provided, such as for medication compliance and medical appointments.

“Hands-on life skills training happens daily ... We advocate for the residents' best interests at all times,” continued Heirwegh.

Kate Rigby Pipan, co-owner of Westview Events & Florals, who will be organizing the fundraising gala, said that they wanted to start the gala to highlight

programs within the area that help those with mental illness. For Rigby Pipan, this is a cause close to home.

“Just over two years ago, I lost my mom, my best friend, and what feels like my everything to mental illness,” she said. “While I feel so much emotional pain about my loss, I know that her battle and death needs to serve a greater purpose in improving the mental health system and stop other preventable losses.”

While the business is in Ancaster, a past employee of True Experience told Rigby Pipan about True Experience, which is a non-profit organization in Dunnville.

“We were looking for an organization that supports those who suffer from mental illness, and who do amazing work, and True Experience is just that!” said Rigby Pipan. “True Experience's work, housing and social programs are so wonderful, it was an easy choice. They are doing so much within the community for those who suffer which blew us away.”

On the name of the gala, Rigby Pipan said, “The definition of the word mindful is to be conscious or aware of something, which is what we are hoping to achieve with the gala. It also symbolizes that people who suffer from mental illness often feel that their minds are constantly full.”

True Experience is about to launch a capital campaign themselves. Heirwegh noted that “purchasing and renovating the property are not the only financial requirements to operate a home like this. We need staffing dollars and funding for ongoing operating costs.”

“Stable housing is the first step to living a better life,” continued Heirwegh, noting that with so few rental properties available in Dunnville their “team is always on high alert for ‘For Rent’ signs” for their clients to transition to.

As to when they purchase the home: “The sooner the better! The need is high. People don't need a wait list, they need a safe, secure and supportive place to live.”

The gala will take place on Friday, August 17, 2018 from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Lincoln Alexander Centre, 160 King St. E., Hamilton. Tickets are \$120, which includes an open bar, hors d'oeuvres, live music, speeches and a silent auction. For more information on the fundraising gala, visit [westviewevents.com/the-mindful-gala](http://westviewevents.com/the-mindful-gala).

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