

Stacey Karels, Director
Monarch Heights Group Home
501 Burdick Avenue
Ortonville, MN 56278

Dear Ms. Karels,

My sister-in-law, Carol Tate, asked me to send you this letter in support of possible expansion of financial support from the state. My other sister-in-law, Kay has been a resident there for sometime. From the information and feedback we receive, you have truly done wonders in providing the care and support she needs.

There have been vast improvements in her level of comfort and function during your leadership[at Monarch. Appropriately caring for someone with such intensive needs takes a great deal of skill and understanding of all staff involved. This cannot be achieved consistently without adequate funding.

There is a moral and ethical responsibility to provide the needed care for individuals like Kay. My fervent hope is that there will be improvements in funding you receive to adequately do your job. It sounds like you have been somewhat successful in hobbling together grants and other unstable sources of funding on your own from a variety of resources, I'm sure this pressure has divided the attention and efforts that you directly provide to those you serve.

I would be glad to speak to anyone in support of your efforts.

Sincerely,

Ken Breeding &
Tom Schumacher
(Brother of MH resident since 1995)

Dear Stacey (and whom it may concern);

I would like to tell you how blessed we are to have our family member, Lyle, at a home like Monarch Heights. As the older sister I can remember when he went there to live at 21 years old and it has been his home for 38 years!

Monarch Heights has cared for, challenged, and supported Lyle to be as independent as he can be with his disability, given him jobs to feel good about himself and a sense of purpose while being part of a family there.

Our family feels thankful for Monarch Heights and ask the cares support and opportunities they have given Lyle over the years. May this home be able to be there for all of the residents with continued opportunities for a long time.

Sincerely,

June Golden Dahlgren

Sister Monarch Resident since 1983

Stacey (and whom it may concern),

Monarch Heights has been Lyle's home for almost 40 years. It's where he can enjoy things, go places, and do things, that I could not do for him. He has friends and he has his work which is very important to him as handicapped as he is, his work seems to be all that more important to him. He always seems glad to see his family, but always wants to be with his Monarch Family. He seems to be attached to some of the workers. I never worry about Lyle getting the best care. He's happy, content, and that says it all for me.

Lyle's Mom,

Inez Golden

To whom it may concern;

My older sister was never institutionalized, and my parents strived to give her the same life experiences they gave all of their children. Her personal care was different but truly nothing else. She shared a room with me, she fought with her siblings, and loved unconditionally as she was raised in a loving and caring family home. She was baptized, attended church, went to school and at 18 moved out. She moved two blocks over into Monarch Heights. Just like any college freshman, she moved into her room with new bedding, new decorations and began her new adventure. She attended school, church, sporting events, movies and went shopping with her friends and roommates. When she ran into her family she would introduce her family to her friends/housemates and staff as all were important to her.

She did all this with grace, compassion, and dignity without any knowledge, she was a trail blazer. She was "main-stream" before it was conceptualized and most certainly accepted at large. This all happened in the late 60's through the early 80's.

She (Jeanie) has a way of humbling everyone she meets as she makes it look easy to stop sweating the small stuff to practice gratitude, and show appreciation towards others regardless of their thoughts, words, or deeds. However, we all know today's society could use more of this and it is anything but easy to do. These values and morals were nurtured in our family and I completely credit our parents and extended family. But it's been 38 years since she moved into Monarch Heights.

However, she has not changed in the past 38 years. These values and morals are now nurtured by her new family and I completely credit the staff at Monarch Heights. They have turned a building into a "home" and created an environment where housemates are "family". She washes up each day to go to work, has chores to do around the house, has errands for personal care and needs, eats meals with her "family" and spares special events/holidays with her new family. Most of society would think her life has not changed at all. . Same house, same job, same...same...same. On the other hand, I'm jealous because she has the "American Dream". She has built a life, has the liberty to be herself and she has found happiness at Monarch Heights with their staff and her housemates.

For being a people person, Jeanie has few words (including any language card), but she has a voice and will let you know what she thinks, feels, wants, and needs. She understands the tasks she is told and with prompts will navigate through her daily routine. We just need to learn her language so that communication is affected and have patience with her "moods". This can only be accomplished with time and exposure to Jeanie. She is an individual and like everyone else does not fit into a cookie cutter. So, what works for others might now work for her and vice versa.

The staff at Monarch Heights takes the time to know my sister and perfect communication with her. They have patience with her "moods" while challenging her to use her learned skills, to express her emotions in a socially acceptable manor using positive rewards and negative consequences. The later has always evolved and adapted with social norms. However, the disruption in the pandemic is having on social norms could have been devastating. It would have been the perfect excuse for regression in Jeanie's behaviors and her mental health could have been devastated. However, the staff at Monarch Heights faced this pandemic with creativity ingenuity, and compassion for their residents (not the job).

Jeanie has the cognitive ability of a two year old. I don't know many (if any) two-year-olds with their own phone let alone a social media account. They use their parents or their caregivers. The staff at Monarch Heights has always maintained Jeanie's privacy, but they have taken to social media to give the families/friends updates. Such a normal interaction with family and friends and so out of the ordinary for her and her housemates. With a little coordination the Monarch Heights staff has even accommodated my requests for phone calls and video calls for birthdays and holidays. I provide my information and they work the magic. I know this is not easy, but the meet it with enthusiasm to surprise Jeanie and bring her joy on her day.

Monarch Heights now has a store so Jeanie and her friends can still go shopping. But it's not a play store. It's a real store. They must earn the "currency" based on guidance staff has coordinated. The store has set hours but must be staffed when open. This is all extra-duty, creative and even tedious but has brought such joy to Jeanie. She has crafts to decorate her home for the holidays or a costume party. Parties which need games, food, costumes, entertainment and so much more. The Staff reaches out through social media for the needs to supplement these events and they are creative with coordination to maximize their resources (within the

confines of the law of course). This all takes extra-effort and a level of coordination to bring personal touch to the lives of Jeanie and her housemates.

They have an outside area which allows them to wave and greet neighbors passing from afar to provide the community interactions the pandemic had all but eliminated. They have encouraged our family to coordinate mail delivery weekly to Jeanie so she will continue to have “things” to share with her new family at Monarch Heights and provide an additional means to have personal interactions and maintain distant relationships. This is above and beyond the job of an essential worker.

Jeanie’s personal care assistant(s) is an extension of Jeanie to our family. They have always stepped in for us in her daily life but through the pandemic they have also stepped up. They are now seeking the funding for resources not just meet the growing needs of the residents as they age, or to meet the challenges of the pandemic and that of inflation, but to continue providing a living and caring home to my sister, Jeanie, and her new family (housemates). Please continue to allow my sister to have her side of the “American Dream” and the staff to continue being the “angels amongst us.”

Respectfully,

Gwen Zimmerman,

Sister & Co-Guardian of Jeanie Anderson

(resident of Monarch Heights since 1982)

Dear Stacey (and whom it may concern),

It was wonderful to see you again and have some time to spend with Kay-Kay. I want to express my gratitude for all you and your wonderful staff do for "Lady Bug." My family has felt for years that this has been the best home for Kay-Kay. I can tell from the way she interacts with you and staff how much you have meant to her well-being.

It is my understanding that Monarch Heights is in great need of an increase of funding. I am here to state to whomever and your representatives. You are truly worthy of an increase.

I am so happy that you are there to plead the case on behalf of your residents. It is a wonderful home. As always, thank you for what you do.

With Love and Respect,

Carol Tate

(Kay's sister, MH resident
Since 1995)

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter on behalf of my sister, Jeanie Anderson. She is a resident of Monarch Heights, and perhaps is the longest tenured resident of the home! She moved in during its inaugural year and has resided there ever since. This has been her entire adult life.

Monarch Heights has been integral in helping Jeanie become the person she is today. Our gratitude and respect can scarcely be expressed into words. Her daily physical needs are obviously met. Her social-emotional life encompasses her and her co-residents to create a community within a community. She is nurtured and loved by staff and friends.

I remember a time in her first year when we picked her up for holidays, she would be emotional and even cry when it was time to bring her back to Monarch. She missed our house as her home and her family. The very next holiday, she stomped her feet and crossed her arms when we went to pick her up, and she refused to come home with us at first, for fear we were taking her from her new home! As hard as this was for us as a family, it was so reassuring that she was fully acclimated and that this is her new home. This experience speaks volumes about the nurturing environment sustained by Monarch Heights. It is now a part of her soul.

Monarch Heights continues to help Jeanie become her best self. I support any and all additional funding sources available to this residence and its staff. Lives are changed here.

Sincerely,

Cory Anderson – brother to Jeanette Anderson

(Resident of Monarch Heights since 1982)

Dear Stacey (and whom it may concern),

We received the letter you sent a few days ago to us as parents alerting us of the need at Monarch for the per diem increase. We want to make sure that our local representatives and our legislators know of the real need for these very special people, one of them being our daughter, Leah, to receive a per diem increase to ensure her continuing care at Monarch.

In all honesty, Monarch does a surprise job in caring for this special population of vulnerable adults. (And Stacey, as director there, is the wheel that keeps everything turning in the right direction!). Thus the integrity of her directorship and the great care by the staff she hires and leads, are known and felt by all who live and work there.

Our daughter, Leah, is autistic and severely mentally handicapped. She deals with sensory issues, anxiety, brutish, Raynaud's syndrome, and scoliosis which have developed a problem with one leg being longer than the other and she requires braces to keep her feet and legs going in the right direction.

Leah used to have very difficult behaviors and sleep issues. Due to the calm environment and loving care that she gets on a regular basis, she is doing so well. I wouldn't want to see anything change in her care plan. Monarch Heights does an awesome job of meeting Leah's daily needs. She is happy, healthy, and loved at Monarch Heights.

As parents, we ask that a per diem rate increase happen for each client, including our daughter Leah. How sad is it that they would need to operate at a loss each year and be pulling back in any way. We understand that alternative options have had to be used to keep Monarch Heights from going under.

We sincerely ask our representatives to fight for these consumers and for the others who have high needs cares in other group homes. These special special people deserve the best of care.

Sincerely,

Marsha and Mark Schutte

Parents of MH Resident since 2015

Dear Stacey & Staff (and whom it may concern);

I am Kay's sister, #7 of 9, Kay being #9. I've seen K.K. In several living arrangements in her 63 years. I have to say that Monarch has been the best. Since you, Stacey, have taken over as director, I've seen so much improvement in Kay's over all health and well-being.

As per your suggestion, her siblings have been writing to Kay on a regular basis. We are hearing from staff how she responds to them. In fact, she seems to respond to so much more these days; showing emotion, caring and feelings we didn't realize were even there. I believe she's finally being understood for who she is for the first time in her life.

My husband and I were there 2 years ago. We both had a very good feeling about you Stacey. We also spent time with K-K and (staff) who gave her the utmost care and devoted attention to her every need.

I can't get there to visit as often as I'd like but I do hear all good things from Carol (my sister) who keeps in close contact on behalf of our family.

Thank you for caring so much. Thank you all for what you do for Kay and all the residents on a daily basis.

You are all very much appreciated by Kay, me, and our entire family.

Thank you,

Thank you,

Thank you,

Patty Webster

(Sister of Monarch Heights
Resident since 1995)

God bless you!

To whom it may concern,

Kelley (our daughter) has been at Monarch Heights for over 20 years and it has been the best decision we have ever made. We wanted to find a group home that was away from the big cities. At the time, we were living in Maple Grove, MN which was not the area we were interested in for her.

I would like to thank you and your staff for everything that you have done to make our daughter, Kelley's life easier. Our main concern was that Kelley would have a permanent home if something happened to us. Kelley has two brothers but we wanted Kelley taken care of so her brothers would not have to make any decisions regarding her care. I visited Monarch Heights and was very impressed with the location and the staff. There were no openings at the time, but our daughter's name was on the list when there was an opening.

I am so glad that you took the job Stacey, you are so good with our daughter and the other clients. You are always available when I have a question or concern. It is amazing that you can get everything done on the budget you are allotted for the clients. I never worry about Kelley. I know that if she has a seizure you are always at the ER when the ambulance brings her in. You always keep us informed about what is going on and how we can help. It is quite a job having staff on hand just in case a client gets sick and has to come home. It is very hard to find the right kind of person who is willing to work at Monarch with the different hours and pay. There are so many rules and regulations concerning running of a group home. You go above and beyond the job requirements, you consider these clients family and you are very good at sharing your family with the clients.

Our son Robert and his wife visited his sister, they were impressed with the facility and the staff. They were so glad that Kelley was there and so well taken care of.

I know it is quite an expense running Monarch Heights. I know from our own expenses how much they have gone up quite a bit.

I hope that this legislation will understand that Monarch Heights is a home for these clients and not an institution. This per-diem is needed to help Monarch stay out of the red. I do not want to see our daughter or the other clients have to suffer if there is not enough money.

Please remember that this is their home and it is the only place they know. Thank you for trying to eat this proposed bill passed (Stacey and the local representatives).

Peggy Jonson

Mother of Monarch Heights Resident Since 1995

Dear Ms. Karels (and whom it may concern),

I just heard from my sister Carol Tate, who recently visited our sister, Kay, and what a good job you are doing with Kay. Carole said Kay looks better than she has ever been. We're all so grateful to you and your staff for caring for Kay; none of us would be to.

It was hard on our mother to have to place Kay in care. She, too, would be relieved to hear how well Kay is doing under your care. Thank you for everything.

Sincerely,

Ms Rita Auer

(Sister of Monarch Heights Resident
Since 1995)

My statement regarding Jeanette's residence at Monarch Heights group home:

My daughter, Jeanette, is the oldest of three children. She left home in the same time frame as someone leaving home to start their own life away from parents. She has a home life, a work world, and social events. All is orchestrated by Monarch Heights staff. These are all pieces in the structure of an adult life.

The fellow residents are her family on a daily basis. Her blood relatives are her connection to her original family. She has our love and support, but she has her life. This is important to me because she needed to learn how to live without me in her everyday life. Monarch Heights provides everything necessary to live a complete and happy life. I am extremely satisfied with her current home at Monarch Heights Group Home. She loves her home.

Of course, there are several different personalities, ages, and handicaps all living in one home. Monarch Heights plans events and activities that each resident can take part in according to their level of function. No simple task. The residents are given the responsibility of completing their assigned chores and at the end of the week, they can shop at the in-house store which was established during the pandemic lock-down to ensure their protection from the outside contacts, but keeping some kind of normalcy. This also gave the opportunity to teach money, value, and use. It takes talent, understanding, and financial support. I feel Monarch Heights Group Home is focused on providing a smooth and safe running facility to give the residents an opportunity to live their best life.

My Sincere Expressions,

Gayle Anderson

(Mother of resident since 1982)