

# THE BROWN HALL PROJECT

2018 marked not only 100 years of women at William and Mary, but it was the year we welcomed our first female president, Katherine Rowe, and opened the doors to our new McLeod Tyler Wellness Center, a state-of-the-art resource facility to affirm wellness throughout the community. President Rowe has challenged those dedicated to wellness to take action, by creating new initiatives to affirm wellness throughout campus. Residence halls are the heart and home of William and Mary, and the perfect place to start. The Brown Hall Project was initiated by Residence Life staff who recognized the stress that comes with everyday life, particularly as a college student, and the importance of a safe space to recuperate. William and Mary is known for its aged, small-spaced dorms, that typically house two to three students in a room. Because of this, students seldom

have a personal, safe space to unwind or cool down in times of stress that are quickly accessible.

The Brown Hall Project is a new and innovative project in process at William and Mary that is reconstructing old kitchenettes that were being unused in the dormitories, starting with Brown Hall, into “safe spaces,” known as Wellness Rooms. The room will consist of furniture to relax in, along with items to enhance meditation such as aromatherapy supplies, salt lamps, lava lamps, and more. Additionally, the rooms will consist of soft lighting and blackout curtains to create a calming experience. Taking advantage of these spaces is an effort from the William and Mary community, and particularly the Wellness Committee in Residence Life, to bring wellness throughout campus, in creative and accessible ways.

The project also hopes to create a similar space outside of residence halls, consisting of sitting rocks, Adirondack chairs, gazebos, as well as with essential herbs and blooms such as lavender in a garden. This project is an effort to make self-care more accessible throughout campus, as well as normalize the need for such structures to help destigmatize mental health, particularly in such a stressful environment.

Aside from a safe space, William and Mary hopes that this room will also be accessible for students as a prayer room, as similar concepts in the Wellness Center have been often used for these purposes. As the Brown Hall Project goes into motion, we are hopeful to expand it to more living spaces, becoming one of the first schools in the nation to have meditation halls in residence halls, and later academic buildings as well.



## FAST FACTS:

- These will be the first rooms to introduce therapeutic and massage chairs in a student space.
- William and Mary is one of the only schools in the nation that has “Wellness Rooms” in Residence Halls.
- The colors being used for the spaces are all research-based: teals, grays, and golds.



**ANU GOEL**

 @wmreslife

**YOUNG ADULTS  
AND STUDENTS  
ARE THE FUTURE.  
A COMMITMENT  
TO WELLNESS  
PRACTICES AND  
MENTAL HEALTH IN  
ALL FACETS OF LIFE  
AS EARLY AND AS  
OFTEN AS POSSIBLE,  
IS A DEDICATED  
COMMITMENT TO  
A SUCCESSFUL AND  
HEALTHY FUTURE.**

## GETTING STARTED

Although often overlooked, Residence Life at William and Mary has filled in many gaps in terms of understanding and providing support for mental health on campus. Residence Life staff work tirelessly to support, accommodate, and direct students who are struggling to resources. As a Residence Life staff member, I was tasked to work with others in Residence Life to create a wellness committee. The Brown Hall Project came to be a program as almost a “happy accident.”

A parent of an incoming freshman student voiced concern about the aged structures in the Residence Hall, Brown Hall, and its safety. Upon inspection, staff found that updates were definitely required in order to maintain the safety of students and the building. At the same time, the Wellness Center had just opened its doors and was seeing a lot of success with students using their resources regularly. Residence Life had received a lot of feedback from students who said they did not have a quiet space in residence halls. Inspired by the need for change and the support that students were beginning to find on campus, the Wellness Committee devised to upgrade these spaces into Wellness Rooms by working closely with the Hall Council of the dormitory, a pillar of self-determination at the College. The students and the committee devised a plan for the outdated spaces and how to remodel them into useful and calming spaces for students to use. The Wellness Center was generous with offering materials, research, and support to help promote the project as well. As the idea evolved, it found support throughout the community, including our William & Mary President.

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS

The most prominent issue students might face when implementing a similar idea would be finding spaces to start this project. This idea originated from the necessary remodeling and removal of already existing, outdated spaces at William and Mary. The best way students can address this is to research and communicate with campus staff, as well as residents, about the spaces in residence halls, gathering information about usage, availability - and even if code requirements are being met - so if renovations are required, this idea can be a part of the conversation. Additionally, students can look to change the purpose or designation of a space. For example, they could take a dorm room offline, if they are unable to get creative with other spaces.

Another potential barrier would be budget and construction limitations. Due to the lack of code compliance, renovating the space was already a priority with regards to this project, so inspections of a space are a great place to start. Additionally, spreading the costs amongst departments is a way to dispersing the budget requirements. While Residence Life pays for the renovation, the Wellness Center offers materials, furniture, etc. to build the new spaces, and Hall Council (a student-elected group for each residence hall) funds the items in the rooms such as lava lamps, aromatherapy, etc. By rallying campus support, not only can a project like this be made a priority, but several departments can alleviate the burden of funding requirements.