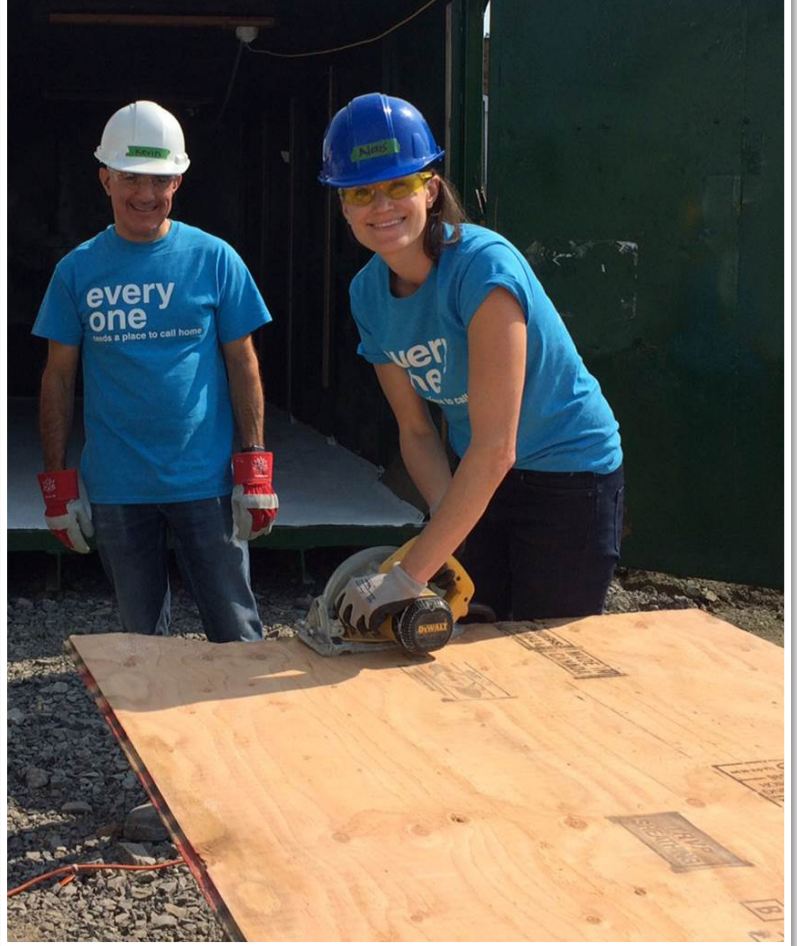


# Habitat for Humanity: Every Hand Makes a Difference

By Alexis Ashworth CEO,  
Greater Ottawa-Habitat for Humanity



**O**ne thing is constant for everyone in the world: No matter where we come from or how old we are, we all need a roof over our heads. But it goes even further than that. Owning a home in a safe and decent environment is the kind of strength and stability every family desires.

This year, Habitat for Humanity Greater Ottawa (Habitat GO) completed construction of two single-family homes in Perth and Carleton Place and began building four condominium townhouses, which are Phase 1 of Leacross Landing, a 16-home development. This is the largest housing initiative that we've worked on to date and our first condominium project. The development in Orléans is also located close to a future light rail station and will provide families with excellent transportation access.

Since 1993, Habitat GO has partnered with 72 families in need of affordable housing. With the help and hard work of our donors, volunteers and staff in the Greater Ottawa area, we have helped more families purchase affordable places to live. They now have spaces where they can live healthier, gather together, build memories and plan for a brighter future.

The first four townhouses of our condominium development in Orléans will be purchased by the Fitzsimmons, Moustabchir, Aningmuiq and El-Hajj families. At the Groundbreaking Ceremony for the homes this spring, Tereza Fitzsimmons expressed her gratitude to Habitat GO, our sponsors, donors and all of the volunteers who are helping make her dream of affordable housing come true.

"Being a single mother is not easy, but finally all of my hard work has paid off," said Tereza, who was accompanied by her three children as she saw that first shovel go in the ground. "Now we will have a home to create memories in and a place my children can look back in 20 years and say, 'That's the home we grew up in'."

For Abdellatif and Saadia Moustabchir, their future home will be a far cry from the Ottawa Community Housing rental unit they currently live in. Originally from Morocco, the couple will be purchasing their new home with their three sons.

"We want to ensure a better environment that is healthy and safe for our children," said Abdellatif. "This is only possible thanks to Habitat GO and to all those who are helping make this dream in reality."

Every Habitat for Humanity family is offered "a hand up, not a hand out" as part of Habitat's homeownership program.

All Habitat future homeowners help build their homes alongside volunteers and they pay an affordable mortgage with payments that are geared to their income. Families with two parents must complete a minimum of 500 hours in "sweat equity" before purchasing their home by helping build it and volunteering in the community, while the commitment for single parents like Tereza is 350 hours.

The culmination of all of this hard work takes place at the Key Ceremony when the dream of owning their own home comes true for our Habitat GO families.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of seeing a little girl's face light up with joy as she saw her new bedroom for the first time at our Carleton Place build.

Tamara had a simple wish – to have a sleepover with her friends. She was sharing a bedroom in a drafty rental unit with her siblings. I did a home visit with this family as they were applying to become one of our Habitat GO homeowners, and her room broke my heart.

The day of the Key Ceremony, Tamara was running around the upstairs of the four-bedroom home, thrilled that she could finally have a sleepover with her friends. It's those small things that mean so much to a child.

It's one of the small benefits that becoming a Habitat homeowner means for Tamara and her family.

"We want to provide a safe and happy environment for our children where we can offer them a future that includes better lives and less of a struggle," said Tamara's dad, Shane.

Their new home has also already meant improved health for their family. Tamara's sister, Holly, suffers from asthma, and just weeks after moving in, her symptoms had already improved.

Her parents are now able to raise their children in a home free from

drafts, without towels lining the kitchen floors to stop the cold air from coming in.

They will be able to build equity in their home instead of paying rent, and if they follow the trend of other Habitat homeowners, they will be able to send their children to higher education when the time comes.

I'm proud that Habitat GO's work has a positive impact on everyone, from participating families to sponsors to the people who help with construction. Every time one of our volunteers passes a home that he or she helped build, they recall the experience of raising a wall or installing a floor joist, of providing a hand up to a family in need of affordable housing.

That's why we're truly grateful to all the volunteers, sponsors and donors who continue to make our work possible. Every hand truly makes a difference. It's thanks to individuals, companies and organizations like the Canadian Condominium Institute – Eastern Ontario Chapter that we can continue to build quality homes and partner with families to help them build strength, stability and independence through affordable homeownership. ■

*Alexis Ashworth is the Chief Executive Officer of Habitat GO. If you'd like more information on becoming a volunteer, sponsor or donor of Habitat GO, visit [www.habitatgo.com](http://www.habitatgo.com).*

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