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MEDIA RELEASE
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Habitat for Humanity Selects New Partner Families for Affordable Rent-to-Own in Bala
Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North welcomes 22nd and 23rd Partner Families in the District of Muskoka



Pictured (L-R): Jacey and Darius and H el ene and Simona

Bala, ON - Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North (HFHOGN) has announced the selection of its newest homeowners in Bala, Ontario. Located at 1016 Elm Street, the semi-detached, affordable, energy-efficient, and universally accessible homes are scheduled for occupancy in July 2023.

After a rigorous selection process that included a review of more than 90 submissions, criminal and financial background checks, reference checking, interviews, and home visits, two families were given the news this week that would shape their futures.

Originally from Quebec, H el ene is no stranger to Muskoka. Before her current position at Clear Lake Village Resort in Torrance, she worked for 12 years in Bala. After the breakdown of a long-term relationship, H el ene knew she had to find a new living situation for herself and her 14-year-old daughter, Simona.

“We’ve looked at 20 apartments since January,” says H el ene. “Everything in our area is in the \$2500 range. That’s half of what I make. And that only covers rent - not utilities, food, car expenses, or any hope of saving for Simona’s college fund. Last week we saw a place in Gravenhurst that was \$2000 for a basement apartment with one door, one window, and one bedroom. It feels like it’s impossible.”

Neighbours to H  l  ne and Simona will be Jacey and Darius. They were living in student housing while Jacey completed her Bachelor's degree in Education. They faced similar challenges in finding an affordable place to live. The couple has been sharing a house with three roommates in a neighbourhood recognized as a 'high crime area' in the town in which Jacey attended university. Their biggest worry was not having a place to go after graduation when Jacey would no longer be eligible to live in student accommodation.

"Our options were limited," says Jacey. "Our lease ending on May 31st meant there was a big unknown for us moving forward. Finding housing isn't easy, and it's so expensive. We'd looked at apartments throughout Muskoka, and we'd applied to the District of Muskoka for social housing. Our Plan B was to move in with Darius' parents in the Haliburton area, which would mean we were closer to Muskoka, but that would create a very overcrowded living situation."

Says Kimberley Woodcock, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North, "The statistics are shocking. According to the Canadian Rental Housing Index, Muskoka residents spend an average of 60% of their household income on rent and utilities. This puts Muskoka in the 'severely unaffordable' category. So, the work we do to provide opportunities for affordable housing is critical. We would like to express our gratitude to the volunteers of the Muskoka Lakes Adopt-A-Home Committee for their partnership in this project. Their support has been invaluable."

For both families, Bala is exactly where they would like to put down roots. H  l  ne can see a future for herself and her daughter here. "I love Bala. I have lots of friends here – people who understand and can listen in tough times. Simona can stay in the same school. I can go to work knowing she's close enough to walk to the store or to see her friends. And instead of putting money into rent, I can put money towards a home that I can grow old in and can actually afford on the salary I make. It will change my life. It will give me a life. You have given me a life."

For Jacey and Darius, small-town living and the chance for Darius, an apprentice plumber, to live closer to where he works would be a dream. Moving to Bala means a huge reduction in an almost four-hour-a-day commute and an increased work-life balance. Jacey has been accepted as a substitute teacher in the district, and the couple can't wait to set up home in the area. Long-time volunteers, they look forward to continuing this tradition in their new community.

At hearing the news that they'd been selected, Jacey was at a momentary loss for words. "Through all our struggles, this means we can grow together. And we do not take for granted all the hard work you at Habitat for Humanity have done. You're amazing people. Thank you so, so much for this opportunity. We will not let you down."

To date, Habitat OGN has served 59 families since 2002, including approximately 124 children. The organization is currently planning more affordable housing projects for the region, with details to be announced shortly.

About Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North

Amalgamated in 2014, Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North is a not-for-profit organization working toward a world where everyone has a safe, suitable, and affordable place to call home. Habitat for Humanity brings communities together to help families build strength, stability, and independence through affordable housing. With the help of government organizations, charitable foundations, local businesses, individual community members, volunteers, and other Habitat partners, we provide a solid foundation for better, healthier lives in our service area, in Canada, and around the world.

Our region serves communities across central and northern Ontario, including North Simcoe County, Muskoka, Parry Sound, Nipissing, Greater Sudbury, and Cochrane. Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity Canada, which was established in 1985. To date, across Canada, Habitat for Humanity has helped thousands of families in need of a hand-up. Across the globe, Habitat for Humanity has grown to become a leading global not-for-profit working in more than 70 countries. For more information, visit www.habitatgatewaynorth.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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