

COVID-19 closes door on families waiting to move into Habitat homes

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After years of dreaming of a house to call her own, Buffy Molleson will have to wait a little longer thanks to COVID-19.

When she first applied to move into a Habitat for Humanity home, Molleson was sharing a room with her two kids in her parents' house in Bobcaygeon. With no debt and a full-time job, she was a good candidate for the program, and was approved in March of last year. Having completed sweat equity hours and all the paperwork, they were scheduled to move into a newly-built, 1050 square-foot, three-bedroom bungalow in Bobcaygeon this summer. With construction shut down thanks to COVID-19, that plan has been delayed indefinitely.



While the family, including Molleson, her son Ashton, 11, daughter Ocean, 9, and partner Brian Wood, are now living in a more space-appropriate three-bedroom apartment, it presents practical issues of its own.

Ashton, for example, has autism and global development delay, which causes him issues with co-ordination, muscle tone and balance, making the stairs at the

apartment “a big problem.”

“He’s fallen down the stairs a few times. It’s not very accessible, but we’re trying to make it work.”

Also making it work is Jennifer Maides, whose family is hoping to move in to a Habitat home on Hamilton Street in Lindsay this summer. Although the home is already built, the COVID-19 shutdown has affected how she can accomplish the required 200 sweat equity hours to become a Habitat homeowner.

In addition to cleaning up garbage left by the previous homeowner at the home, Maides was going to be volunteering weekends at the ReStore in Lindsay for her remaining hours, before it was shut down to the public.

The mother of five, who has been laid off from the Omemee Children’s Centre daycare where she has worked for a dozen years, started making masks for front line workers at Ross Memorial Hospital.

“I just do it for fun,” she says, adding that she has always enjoyed sewing.

Her kids Jimmy, 19, Ethan, 18, Damian, 16, Maya, 10, and Chase, 6, help out when they can, cutting and ironing material.

When her contact at Habitat found out what she was doing they decided to make it a part of her sweat equity hours, to get her family of six into their new home faster.

“It’s a great example in our community of organizations paying it forward and coming together to help each other out,” says Christina Skuce, director of philanthropy and communications of Habitat for Humanity Peterborough and Kawartha Region.

The Maides family was approved for home ownership in February.

“This is probably the only way I can become a homeowner,” says Maides.

“It’s pretty amazing, it’s a great feeling, but it’s kind of scary too. Being a homeowner is a big responsibility.”

Waiting and working for their new home will help her kids really appreciate what they have, says Maides, who is looking forward to pride in ownership for the whole family.

“I think it will change our sense of self-worth. My kids, all their friend’s parents have always owned their own homes and my kids have never had that.”

Maides is working toward the hours, but doesn’t feel desperate about it, given that her current living situation is stable. The planned move-in date was July 1.

“That was before, but now, I just don’t know. Nobody knows if we are going back to work, so everything is just up in the air.”

And while waiting can be hard, Molleson agrees that, for a home of her own, it is worth it.

“With this all going on, I prefer to wait, I want everyone to be healthy.” says Molleson, who feels fortunate to continue to work full-time at Dvine Laboratories Inc. in Lindsay which produces hand sanitizer and vape juice.

For now, she is happy to save some extra money, enjoying the anticipation of the freedom of home ownership.

“The kids have never had a place with a backyard. They’re wanting a swing set and a trampoline and I’m going to plant a garden,” she says, adding she is looking forward to painting the walls whatever colour she wants, unlike apartment living.

Two detached homes were scheduled to be built this spring in Bobcaygeon, as well as a 41-unit condo unit in Peterborough, according to Skuce.

Though delayed, financially, the existing projects are in good shape. However, fundraising continues to be vital for Habitat to push forward with additional projects when they can.



“It’s going to be needed more than ever once this crisis is over,” she says, adding that Habitat continues accepting home ownership applications and host virtual information sessions.

“After this pandemic is over, more and more people are going to be looking for that affordable housing because they are going to be in trouble financially.”

ReStore sales have moved online, including contactless drop offs, while scheduled donation drop-offs of household items and clothing can be arranged by contacting [ReStore in Lindsay](https://www.mykawartha.com/news-story/9961427-covid-19-closes-doo...) at [705-880-4663](tel:705-880-4663).