

# Habitat for Humanity, Community Living partner to build home for men with autism

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Come June, three Halton Hills men with autism will have a brand new place to call home, thanks to a unique partnership between Habitat for Humanity and Community Living North Halton.

The Bett-Knowlton build project, the first of its kind in town, is a testament to Habitat for Humanity's transformed vision and redefinition of family, amended in 2014 to reflect broader cultural change and the makeup of communities today.

"We changed the definition of family to be more aligned with our own values and our community values so that any individual seeking safe and decent housing could now apply to be a Habitat home owner," said John Gerrard, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Halton-Mississauga.

The initiative, which Gerrard says he hopes is the first of many in the area, is a response to a num-

ber of concerned parents who have reached out to Habitat in recent years, asking for a safe and secure housing solution for their adult children who are on the autism spectrum.

"They do not want to leave their child in an environment where they're not sure that their security and safety in the long term is going to be looked after," Gerrard added. "I can't even imagine what that would feel like, but when I talk to these families and I hear their stories, it moves me greatly to know we can contribute our mission, which is serving more families and more individuals with safe and decent housing solutions."

To make this possible, Habitat for Humanity got to work, joining forces with Community Living North Halton and its executive director Greg Edmiston. They decided the Habitat team would be responsible for the construction portion of the project and Community Living would focus on the programming side.



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**The new home, located at 92 Mill Street West in Acton, will be move-in ready by June.**

The initiative officially began in February 2017 and was named after two of Habitat Halton-Mississauga's veteran volunteers, Charles Bett and Austin Knowlton.

On May 25, a dedication ceremony was held at the Acton Legion to celebrate the nearly com-

pleted home, followed by a ribbon cutting ceremony at the property, led by Mayor Rick Bonnette.

"It makes my heart very happy to be involved in a project like this, involved with everybody here and the families, and it's a fine example of making a difference in the lives of people who just

need a little helping hand," Bonnette said.

The three men, Deon, Craig and Nelson, will be moving into the home, at 92 Mill St. W. in Acton, within the next few weeks.

"The really cool thing about this is this house was designed for these guys," Edmiston said, addressing the crowd at the dedication. "The home is built to accommodate their unique needs, with walk-in showers and a wheelchair ramp at the front door. The home is also designed to provide some personal space, while at the same time providing common space for socializing together, entertaining family ... and providing the structure that Deon, Craig and Nelson need."

A fourth resident, who was expected to move in in June along with the other men, passed away earlier this year. Gerrard says Habitat plans to plant a tree on the property in his memory.

For further information about the project, visit <http://www.habitatbuild.ca/bett-knowlton-build>.



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