



August 17, 2022

[REDACTED]

Dear Erin,

Thank you for your well-articulated letter addressed to the Habitat Victoria Board, and my apologies for the delay in responding.

We, as a Board, were dismayed to hear about your negative interactions with the former CEO, Y. Meijer, and I can assure you that we take these matters very seriously. Should you have any concerns with leadership moving forward, please do not hesitate to reach out to us again.

Second, as a result of the issues identified in your letter, we have committed to reviewing the volunteer service policy to determine if we can make it more equitable, consistent, and transparent for our partner families. The situation you described regarding the potentially inconsistent application of delivery hours is regrettable, and we will ensure that we look at that issue specifically as we examine the policy more broadly. I appreciate that these changes may come too late to assist you, but I wanted to let you know that we heard your concerns, and are committed to improving things moving forward.

I understand that your letter was not specifically about the hours for the tiling project to install a backsplash at your home, but we wanted to address that as well. The Board has reviewed the history, and has concluded that the hours should not be counted, for the following reasons:

1. In accordance with our policies, volunteer hours are to be approved in advance; and
2. More importantly, backsplashes do not meet the category of volunteer service outlined in the policy (even had approval been sought in advance).

It is the mandate of Habitat Victoria to provide entry level homes. Backsplashes are unfortunately viewed as an upgrade, and upgrades have never been permitted to qualify for hours under the policy. While in your case, the lack of a counter lip required additional caution, the lip had been left off the counter at your request. The situation was different at [REDACTED]'s houses, as their work was to bring the homes to minimal-accepted standards.

Installing an irrigation system for your home is also not approvable as it was not a municipality-based requirement accompanied by conditions to build the home, and was therefore similarly an upgrade. It appears when you approached the Family Services Director and Facility Coordinator they misspoke and were corrected by the former CEO who ultimately has the discretion to approve or not approve requests for changes to Habitat homes prior to purchase.

We offer our sincerest apologies for the inconsistent messaging and misinformation that was provided to you. I hope you can appreciate the need for us to stick to the policies in place, as if we grant you permission to go outside the policy, this would not be in furtherance of equity and consistency with our other families.

Each Habitat Family will have a unique experience as they navigate through our expression of interest, application, approval, letter of intent, occupancy agreement and ultimately the purchase of their Habitat home. While it is the desired outcome, and we will strive to do better in this respect, there is no way to eliminate all inequities/situational differences amongst Habitat families. For example, some families, such as [REDACTED], may receive buy-back homes that require a bit of additional work.

What is consistent between all Habitat Families prior to the purchase of their Habitat home is the requirement to complete of 500 hours of Volunteer Service within two years of signing their letter of intent. All families are given access to hours in the ReStore six days per week. It is not guaranteed that families will have access to build site hours. At times when ReStore hours are not possible for families (due to childcare, health issues, work schedules), we do rely on the Family Services Director to get creative. There are times where at home projects are offered or special event hours become available. It is 100% preferable for families to complete their volunteer service hours for Habitat Victoria, however at times there are other circumstances where the Family Services Director or Volunteer Coordinator will approve families to complete volunteer hours for another not-for-profit. Whenever creativity is involved, there is a "human" element that can lead to errors, and this is something we will look at when we examine the policy.

Upon moving into the Habitat home at [REDACTED] you had completed the pre-requisite of half of your volunteer service hours. An occupancy agreement was signed on your move in day by you and Habitat's Representative, former CEO Y. Meijer. The occupancy agreement outlined the requirement for your 500 volunteer service hours to be complete by May 23, 2022.

As a result of our previous discussions in January and February of this year surrounding your requests for the backsplash hours, we agreed to offer you a three-month extension to complete your hours, and we are willing to work with you to ensure that the remaining hours are completed in a timely fashion. At present you have completed 434.5 volunteer service hours. The Family Services Director indicates you may have completed further hours working on a special project but have not yet submitted your volunteer hours sheet. We are willing to consider an additional extension; however, we would require you to submit a work plan indicating when these hours will be completed. Please connect with the Family Services Director, Tiffany.

Lastly, we apologize for the delay regarding the new mortgage model. The model is quite innovative, and we believe that it will result in benefits for our partner families as well as Habitat Victoria. Unfortunately, when we deal with federation-wide changes, things do often progress slowly, but there has been a considerable amount of work completed now, and group presentations are starting to be made to families. We thank you for your patience with us.

In short, we thank you again for raising these issues with us. We wanted to again let you know that we have heard you, and will work to ensure that our policies and procedures are as equitable as they can be, both in terms of the wording and the application, and that homeowners are given accurate information. We also thank you for making efforts to take care of your home for yourself and future owners to come.

It is wonderful to hear about your son's achievements and the ways the Habitat Home is providing your family with strength, stability, and independence. I speak for the HFHV Board and the Team at Habitat Victoria in wishing your son well on his journey pursuing sport, and in wishing your family well as we move forward in partnership together.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra Raath". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and stylized.

Sandra Raath  
President and Chair, on behalf of the Board  
Habitat for Humanity Victoria