

## Moving into Habitat for Humanity home ‘very surreal’ for Welland’s Mills family

By **Kris Dubé** Tribune Reporter  
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At the Mills family’s former four-plex apartment on King Street, 14-year-old Christian often had to be carried upstairs and couldn’t get his wheelchair through the bathroom door.

The Grade 9 student at Notre Dame College School and his three younger siblings, raised alone by their father Steve, are moving into their new Habitat for Humanity Niagara Home Friday.

A ceremony took place Thursday afternoon to welcome them into the abode on David Street in the south end of the city.

“It’s very nice. All the light switches are my height,” said Christian, who was born with cerebral palsy.

He’s much more relaxed knowing that going to the bathroom won’t be a major hassle anymore as he can get inside his new one with ease.

“My old bathroom was like a narrow hallway,” he said.

As guests and dignitaries arrived Thursday, Steve said being able to move into the fully-accessible home that includes a wheelchair lift and five bedrooms still feels “very surreal.”

“Even though it’s become a reality today, it doesn’t seem real,” said Steve, who is employed with Community Living Welland.

The other Mills children — Presley, 13; Kylie, 11, and Gavin, 9 — attend St. Mary Catholic School. All four kids will remain at their schools after the move.

Christian recently underwent surgery on his legs to allow him to use a walker, but had to travel to St. Catharines for therapy sessions as there wasn’t ample room for him to do his exercises in the family’s apartment.

There is plenty of space for him to do what he needs to do in his new bedroom.

Being a single father to four kids, the family “gets by day to day,” and owning a new house always seemed a distant dream, said Steve.

“I certainly never would’ve thought we’d have a home like this,” he added.

Habitat’s home ownership program provides working families an opportunity to purchase a safe and decent home with no down payment and an interest-free mortgage that equates to 30 per cent of the family income.

Families commit to completing 500 volunteer hours and attend workshops on the responsibilities of home ownership.

The land where the home sits was donated by Welland Hydro.

Habitat for Humanity Niagara executive director Mark Carl said the Mills family is a perfect fit and was chosen by the organization’s selection committee for all the right reasons.

“We really look for the need, families and their living conditions,” he said.

This is the first Habitat home to be unveiled since 2019 as programming has been impacted by the pandemic. The last benefitting family before the Millses was from Niagara Falls.

A home in Port Colborne is nearly complete and construction of two more in Welland will start soon, said Carl.

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