

## **Press Release: Sakeenah Partners With SMILE Canada To Open First Shelter for Muslim Women and Children with Disabilities in Milton, Ontario**

This also marks the first transitional shelter for Muslim women and children in the Regional Municipality of Halton.

MILTON, January 24, 2023 – Sakeenah Homes and SMILE Canada are proud to announce that the doors to the first shelter for Muslim women and children with disabilities in Ontario is now open, making a more inclusive and accessible housing option available for families. Sakeenah and SMILE Canada have partnered to ensure key access features throughout the home for clients with various disabilities. The Milton shelter marks Sakeenah’s seventh home in Canada and is also the first shelter for Muslim women and children in the Halton region.

“Our goal at Sakeenah is to provide safety, serenity and strength to all women and children—especially to those escaping domestic abuse, trauma and violence—and that includes those with disabilities. We want to do our best to be certain that there are no gaps or barriers for women and children who need our help,” explains Zena Chaudhry, founder and CEO of Sakeenah. “We partnered with SMILE Canada, an organization that has done so much to support racialized children and youth with disabilities, to help us with our newest shelter. We are grateful for their support and expertise.”

The Milton shelter is a one-level living space to accommodate those with disabilities and will house five women and children. Key accessibility features include:

- Accessible bathroom features such as a commode with handles and bath chair, moveable shower head and walk-in shower
- Safety items such as electrical unit covers, floor transition strips for safer mobility and additional door handles
- A sensory toolkit with self-regulatory items to help with sensory processing needs, such as theraputty, noise-canceling devices, and fidget toys
- Fire alarms with both visual and audible warnings

Sakeenah will continue to work with SMILE Canada to ensure that our clients and children with disabilities are comfortable during this transitional period of their lives.

“For over a decade, SMILE has provided services and support to racialized children and youth with disabilities and their families. Many of our families are single mothers seeking shelter and safety. Finding a home that is inclusive and accessible is often near-impossible. Partnering with Sakeenah brings us one step closer to creating more inclusive and safer spaces for families of children with disabilities,” says Nida Khan, Director of Research and Education at SMILE Canada.

SMILE Canada will further support clients in the home by providing culturally responsive therapeutic and respite services. SMILE will connect families with healthcare professionals in

the community to address the immediate needs of their children and connect parents with community and government support and funding resources.

Sakeenah was founded to fill a gap in the system; Muslim women were looking for refuge and safety, but mainstream shelters do little to address their religious and cultural needs. While most of our clients and residents identify as Muslim, Sakeenah does not close the doors on anyone.

Sakeenah recently announced that we will be opening a shelter in Regina, Saskatchewan early this year. There are also plans to expand to Newfoundland and Labrador.

### **About Sakeenah**

Sakeenah, a national charitable organization, was founded in 2018 in response to a gap for culturally and religiously sensitive services for women and children facing domestic violence and homelessness. Since then, our services have expanded to include mental health therapy and counseling. Sakeenah has also started The People's Market, a food program that helps combat food insecurity and most recently, Sakeenah became the first licensed foster care agency for Muslim children in all of North America. We currently operate 7 transitional homes across Canada: Toronto, Brampton, Milton, London, Montreal, Ottawa, and Winnipeg.

### **About SMILE**

SMILE Canada - Support Services is a registered charity that provides support to racialized children and youth with disabilities and their families, with a focus on diverse Muslim families. SMILE Canada was formed to address challenges in accessing and navigating healthcare, education and social services sectors and the gaps in service delivery. We provide specialized and innovative community-based programming and events to over 600 families across Canada.

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