

## Help, Hope and a Future Without Fear

**It starts with the courage to say, “Enough.”**

When 37-year-old Aamiina met her second husband she thought, *“This is good.”*

They shared a similar culture and belief system and when they married she was confident that she was creating a safe and stable home for her two children. (She and her first husband are still on good terms.)

But she soon discovered that shared culture played a role in the relationship she hadn't anticipated.

Her husband was the youngest in a household of women – his dad had passed away – and his family expected a traditional marriage, that Aamiina would cook and clean for them, as well as for her husband and kids.

*“I wasn't going to do that – and they told him again and again and again that I was not the ideal woman for him,” she says. “He would visit his mom and sisters, and they would tell him how awful I was, how unwilling I was to be a proper wife, and he would come home mad.”*

There were always words. *“He thought I should be submissive and be at his beck and call.”*

But one Thursday, he struck out with more than words.

Aamiina had picked up the children from swimming lessons and when she arrived home, her husband started a volley of verbal abuse – and then punched her square in the face and into the closet.

That was more than enough.

Aamiina called the police, who arrived, took pictures and arrested him. The case is still in the courts.

Aamiinah had heard about Intimate Partner Violence and promised herself, *“This will not be me.”*

She called for help and was referred to Red Door. Staff listened and told her to pack some clothes for herself and her children – now – and come.

Because of the kindness and commitment of people



like you, families find the resources they need at the Red Door to heal and rebuild their lives.

*“I got out of the taxi, and as I walked to the door, the intake worker greeted me with a huge hug,” Aamiina remembers.*

*“She unravelled me. I cried and let out everything I had held in and thought, ‘Maybe this won't be so bad.’”*

Staff helped them secure a safe and affordable home, with the household things they needed for a fresh start on the life they deserved, violence-free.

Then, Aamiina was ready to take the next big leap to becoming her authentic self: she's studying for her Early Childhood Education diploma at George Brown with plans to follow with an Early Childhood Studies BA at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University).

Aamiina and her children continue to receive support from Red Door – the kids especially enjoy the art program – and today, she says, she is a whole and happy woman.

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What has her lived experience taught her?

*"Lots of things!" Aamiina laughs. "It's not your fault. Men who do this are manipulative, cunning and narcissistic. They'll tell you, 'You made me do this'. Not true. They choose to abuse you. And take it slow. Look hard at his family. When you marry a man you marry his family, too. So ask yourself, 'Will they bring me happiness?'"*

Aamiina's story is not unique. In the past year, you helped Red Door offer shelter and healing to more than 70 women and children fleeing abuse. Thank you for supporting some of Toronto's most vulnerable reimagine themselves, and experience what it means to be valued.

May is Mom Month at Red Door! You can honour more courageous moms like Aamiina with your special gift today and help support families take the first step towards a new beginning.

**[reddoorshelter.ca/  
mothers-day/donate](http://reddoorshelter.ca/mothers-day/donate)**



## Welcome Maritza

We're delighted to introduce you to Maritza Sanchez, Red Door Family Shelter's new Executive Director.

Maritza has been supporting vulnerable communities with passion and commitment

for more than 20 years; her professional and lived experiences give her a unique understanding of the impact systemic barriers have on physical, emotional and mental health.

"I am excited about the opportunity to be part of this excellent organization," Maritza tells us. "As Executive Director, I will work with the staff, managers, and

board of directors to ensure that the Red Door remains a safe refuge for women and children fleeing violence and families in a housing crisis and, at the same time, advocating for systemic change so that one day organizations like the Red Door are no longer necessary."

Since 1982, Red Door Family Shelter has been providing emergency shelter and support to women and children fleeing domestic violence, families experiencing a housing crisis and refugee families with nowhere else to turn for help.

Our mission? To end family homelessness, one family at a time.

And with Maritza at the helm, we will continue to do just that.



## Please Meet Debbi

Debbi's passion is creating meaningful volunteer opportunities – most recently in healthcare and community settings – and supporting and celebrating those volunteers every step of the way.

"Volunteers make every good thing even better! Volunteer engagement is a dynamic partnership between organizations and volunteers that benefits everyone involved. Volunteers share their time,

talent and skills in exchange for the chance to make a meaningful contribution to their community. They may like the opportunity for personal growth, a sense of fulfillment or having an impact on the lives of others and the world around them. The organization in turn benefits in so many ways from volunteers' unique perspectives, as well as from their support of clients and staff. At its core, volunteering is about establishing relationships based on trust, respect and shared goals and I am committed to tapping into any resources needed to ensure their success."

Interested in joining Red Door as a volunteer? Visit our website to learn more: **[reddoorshelter.ca/volunteer](http://reddoorshelter.ca/volunteer)**





## The Magic of Birthday Parties Thanks to Red Door Volunteers

### Cake, candles and lots of love

Birthdays are memory makers, aren't they?

Especially for kids. When a child feels celebrated, they also feel loved.

That's why birthday celebrations for the children staying at Red Door Family Shelter or our Violence Against Women Shelter are extra important.

### Celebrating at our Violence Against Women Shelter

Amazing volunteers, Molly Keays, Agnes Saulewicz and their group of force-to-be-reckoned-with friends have been hosting birthday parties at our Violence Against Women Shelter since February 2019.

The duo knew that birthdays are important, but kids in shelters don't often have a celebration - and Candles & Cake ([www.candlesandcake.org](http://www.candlesandcake.org)) was born. But some years, they can't have the party of their dreams so Candles & Cake brings the birthday party to them complete with food, cake, entertainment, loot bags, decorations - all the goodies - and, of course, music and dancing.

*"Having their birthday marked offers a sense of normalcy," says Molly. "A birthday party reminds the child that they are special, worthwhile."*

*"The parties are as much for the moms as the kids," says Agnes. "When they see how happy and excited the kids are, moms are happy, too."*

There is always a craft activity - it might be T-shirt painting, for example, or decorating picture frames.

And, of course, each party has special entertainment!

Candles & Cake found a supportive partner in Mastermind Toys in Etobicoke. Red Door staff provides the age and sex of the birthday child and Mastermind provides just the right educational toy.

*"I remember one birthday boy," says Molly, "who left his party. We were worried. But he soon was back, wearing his best clothes because it was a special party."*

### Celebrating at our Family Shelter

*"Some of my best memories are birthday parties when I was young," says Peyton Verhoeven, the 17-year-old behind Project Be Kind ([www.projectbekind.ca](http://www.projectbekind.ca)), a not-for-profit on a mission: inspire the world to embrace kindness, make it a mindset and change the world, one act of kindness at a time."*

Every month, Peyton and her team of volunteer magic makers bring the party to everyone at Red Door Family Shelter, complete with cake, party decorations, party hats, games, loot bags and a disco ball!

Peyton's dad, Sean, does magic tricks, and volunteers Virginia Dennis ([www.mabelmoon.com](http://www.mabelmoon.com)) and Wendy Dobrijevic, ([www.teamtwisters.com](http://www.teamtwisters.com)) step up with face painting.

Peyton's reward?

*"When the kids run into the room the day of the party and I see their smiling faces."*

# 40 Years of Caring

With your support,  
we became a  
sanctuary of help  
and hope



Most people would say that Red Door opened in 1982 and they'd be right.

But Red Door really began after World War II, when Reverend Ray McCleary, who had been a war minister, arrived at WoodGreen United Church.

Rev. McCleary had an enormous influence on the Church and the community, especially those in need. He lived nearby and his door was always open to those in need. People recognized his home because it had a red door. In 1931 Reverend McCleary painted the Church doors red, and they became a symbol of hope and help, then and today.

Sybil Longley came to WoodGreen United Church in the late 60s. She lived in Edmonton, and Norm Thomas, reverend at the church she attended there, accepted a position at WoodGreen and asked Sybil to work with him as a community outreach worker.

She committed to a year. And stayed till 2001.

This was a new job for Sybil, but she knew the community because of her five years working with them. They knew her and saw how much she cared. They trusted her.

Sybil developed and ran a number of programs for adults and children, including a young girl's group. At one meeting, she asked each girl to share what she wanted to be when she grew up.

"A prostitute," one replied. Concerned, Sybil went to the local school - Morse Street Public School - to ask for information and advice, and someone suggested she speak with Wilfred Longley, a Grade 6 teacher.

In no time, Sybil got Wilfred involved with her programs - and they married in 1970.

Red Door is celebrating 40 years of supporting some of Toronto's most vulnerable women, families and children. So we asked Sybil, Red Door's first Executive Director, and Wilfred, who taught in the local school and was involved in the community, to share their Red Door memories.

## Q&A

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**Q** When did Red Door come into being?

**A** In 1982, in response to increasing poverty and homelessness in the area, leadership at WoodGreen, including Sybil and Rev. John C. Hilborn, founded a 28-bed (24-person) shelter in the Church basement.

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**Q** Can you describe Rev. Hilborn in five words?

**A** Creative, committed, loyal, caring and discerning!

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**Q** How did you, Sybil, become Executive Director of the new shelter?

**A** I was just asked to take it on. I wasn't sure but Wilfred had so much confidence that I could do it well, I said yes.

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**Q** As Executive Director, what was your biggest challenge?

**A** Money! We didn't have a finance person or committee back then, so it became my responsibility. Dealing with government, businesses, donors and managing the fundraising activities sure took a lot of time and energy.

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**Q** How ground breaking was Red Door support and programming?

**A** I created the first training centre for people working in the shelter system. I sat on the police Victim Services Board, and the Board asked if I and Red Door would take on responsibility for Victim Services.

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**Q** Looking back, would you do anything differently?

**A** No. When things went wrong or I made a mistake, that was good because I learned. When things went right, that was also good because I learned.

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**Q** If you had only one word to describe your experience, what would that word be?

**A** Exciting! Meeting and helping people is really what I like to do. Serving more people was what the shelter was all about.



# Coldest Night of the Year

Yes – it was cold – but also lots of fun

February 25, 2023

Evening temperature: -7.7C, 18F – colder than your freezer - but 42 intrepid teams bundled up and braved the cold to support Red Door and offer hope to homeless families and families fleeing intimate partner violence.

Coldest Night of the Year was an in-person event after two years of virtual participation and despite the chill you felt the love in the air!

A BIG thank you to our sponsors for helping make this evening a resounding success.

**Lead Sponsor:** Tricon Residential

**Rest Stop Sponsors:** Burrison Hudani Doris LLP; Canadian Tire – Leslie & Lakeshore; Tek Savvy Solutions; Home Depot; Jolera Inc

**Route Sponsors:** Royal LePage Estate Realty; Wave; The Mortgage Coach

And a shout out to Jason Battiste of FIITco for providing the warmup exercises and Pilot Coffee Roasters for stepping up as our Rest Stop Host and offering yummy cookies, coffee and hot chocolate as well as forming their own team.

Cold weather calls for chili to warm you up, right? Devon, the cook at our Family Shelter, served up a specially spiced Vegetarian Chili - it was hard not to lick the spoon AND the bowl!

"Cooking and music are the two things that bring people together," says Devon. "I'm not a good singer but I'm a great cook! And I'll let you in on a little secret - roast the vegetables first and then add them to the pot."

After sponsoring Red Door in 2022 with both funds and two volunteer teams to sort toys during the holiday season, the TD NEW (Next Evolution of Work) Team was excited to link with Red Door for the Coldest Night of the Year in 2023. Standing behind the five person walking team were over 40 donors providing funds to push the TD NEW Team to the TOP fundraiser position. Team Captain, Evan Steed, was introduced to Red Door by a friend who has been volunteering at the shelter for many years. The TD team plans to be back for next year's walk and is hoping to see other groups challenge for the top fundraising spot.

***"Red Door's goals and mission align well with TD's culture and our desire to be a positive force in the communities where we live. And who doesn't love an afternoon jaunt filled with cookies, hot chocolate, and a warm toque?"***

- Evan Steed, Team Captain, TD NEW Team

## Coldest Night of the Year 2023

**42 teams – 211 participants**

**Goal: \$89,000**

**Raised: \$112,809!**

**coldest  
\*night**  
OF THE YEAR

**SAVE THE DATE  
FOR NEXT YEAR!  
February 24, 2024**



# Celebrating International Women's Day

When we empower women, we all win

A big shout out to the businesses in our community who went the extra distance in March and April to support the women and families who have fled violence at home and abroad to find safety and sanctuary at Red Door – and help them reimagine a new life of possibilities.

**Sagamore Spirit**, an award-winning rye whiskey distillery, together with **Roy + Co. Selections**, a national female-owned, female-led, Wine & Spirits agency, made the decision to support local women on International Women's Day and throughout the month of March. A \$1,000 donation from Sagamore Spirit as well as a portion of proceeds from every featured Sagamore Spirit cocktail served at Pure Spirits in the Distillery District will support families at the Red Door! [\) royplus.co/home-en](https://royplus.co/home-en)

To celebrate International Women's Day, real estate firm **Canderel** partnered with its tenant, **Farm Boy** at College and Bay St., to hold a spring flower market with all proceeds - \$1,196 - going to the Red Door. [\) canderel.com](https://canderel.com)

Throughout March, **COBS Bread Danforth** invited their customers to make a donation to Red Door, building up to Dougnation Day on April 1<sup>st</sup>, when \$2 from every box of hot cross buns sold was donated to Red Door – a total of \$5,194. [\) cobsbread.com/local-bakery/danforth-toronto](https://cobsbread.com/local-bakery/danforth-toronto)

Leena and Chris and the team at **F45 Yonge and Eglinton**, in collaboration with community partners, held an International Women's Day 2023 Sweat and Celebrate event with a total of \$895 raised for the Red Door. [\) f45training.ca/yongeandeglinton](https://f45training.ca/yongeandeglinton)

**Tre Mari Bakery**, a family-owned Italian bakery since 1960, held a mouth-watering International Women's Day fundraiser for Red Door, donating proceeds from the sale of their Vanilla Custard Cannoli – the design inspired by the mimosa flower – totalling \$500. [\) tremaribakery.ca](https://tremaribakery.ca)

**Ma'am You're Making a Scene!**, an all-female identifying improv jam show, hosted March Ma'amness, produced by Chrissy Sharma and Christine Da Re, in support of Red Door and raised \$727. [\) instagram.com/myamas.comedy](https://instagram.com/myamas.comedy)

Toronto photographer **Samuel Engelking** celebrated International Women's Day with mini portrait sessions; a percentage of proceeds went to support the Red Door. Total raised: \$1,500. [\) samuelengelking.com](https://samuelengelking.com)

Haley Waxberg, **Knit-O-Matic**, held a yarn swap on April 22, offering the yarn that didn't work out for you the chance at a second home – with the \$10 participation fee going to support Red Door. Total raised: \$400. [\) knitomatic.com](https://knitomatic.com)

Christina Gjiri, **Bright Candle Co.**, donated \$1 from every candle sold during March and April to Red Door. [\) brightcandleco.com](https://brightcandleco.com)

Spring is finally here! It's time to dig out your runners and lace up! Join us and run to raise money for the kids at Red Door at the Constantine Yorkville 5km Run!

**Sunday, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023!**

To register: [raceroster.com](https://raceroster.com)  
or contact Caitlin FitzGerald:  
[cfitzgerald@reddoorshelter.ca](mailto:cfitzgerald@reddoorshelter.ca)  
for more information



Red Door Family Shelter  
21 Carlaw Ave. Toronto ON M4M 2R6  
[www.reddoorshelter.ca](https://www.reddoorshelter.ca) | 416-915-5671  
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