

# SWEAT EQUITY: 500 HOURS

The mission of Habitat for Humanity is to provide affordable housing for families in need. Unlike a construction firm, however, Habitat does not “build a house for” a family. At Habitat, there is no divide between the construction crew and the purchasing family; they are just two parties who, together, build a house. In this partnership, Habitat supports the family by planning and building a house, and the family supports Habitat by putting in hours on Habitat houses and giving of their time and energy. Habitat requires a minimum of 500 hours of sweat equity to be performed by the family. The family will complete the 500 sweat equity hours before moving into their home.

The distribution of the 500 sweat equity hours emphasizes work on the construction site. This is not accidental. Families not only support Habitat when they work at the construction site but also benefit in other manners as well:

- When families have actively worked on their own homes, they often have a heightened sense of ownership on its completion.
- When families see how houses are constructed, they can better understand and respond to their own houses’ maintenance concerns.
- When families work on other families’ houses, they create a sense of community.

## Sweat Equity Policy

### Each family must complete 500 hours of sweat equity

1. Each family must complete a minimum of 333 hours of sweat equity, of which at least 300 hours must be spent in construction.
2. Family and/or friends must complete an additional 167 sweat equity hours in either construction or non-construction.

### Opportunities in non-construction include:

- Work at the Habitat ReStore
- English as a Second Language Classes (up to 40 hours)
- Mandatory Habitat homeownership classes - utility, budgeting, banking, and credit
- Habitat office work
- Babysitting for other families who are performing sweat equity
- Work at HfH fundraising and other public events

### Family Hours versus Friend Hours

A Habitat family does not exist in a vacuum; they are often supported by caring friends and relatives who encourage the family’s growth. Therefore, friends and relatives are welcome to help the Habitat family complete up to 167 hours.

#### *Definition of “Family” and “Friends”*

Family—Three types of people can fall under the Habitat definition of “family”: (1) anyone listed on the Habitat for Humanity application, (2) a babysitter for the family’s young children, or (3) the Family Partner.

Friends—Included in this category is anyone personally acquainted with a member of the Habitat family, including the family’s extended relatives.

### *Arranging for Friends Hours*

Habitat families must arrange for friends hours *before* they show up to a worksite, i.e., a Habitat family member can't go to the construction site, meet someone, and then have that individual donate his/her hours. The donation of hours has to be prearranged. Those families without strong familial ties in Tacoma are encouraged to seek donated hours from organizations of which they are a part. However, families are discouraged from bringing large groups to the site, and they must know, at minimum, the names and a little bit about the people who will be donating hours. Habitat is about intentionally building community, not merely fulfilling requirements.

### **Flexibility**

Sweat equity hours are created to facilitate a family's participation and should never cause an undue burden or render a family wholly ineligible for a Habitat home. In cases where a family anticipates great difficulty in accomplishing the 500 sweat equity hours in the manner set forth above, the family must submit a proposal detailing the reason they are requesting an exception and the exact plan they suggest for replacement. The proposal will then be considered and approved by the Habitat staff and interested volunteers on the Family Partner Team. The Habitat office will report to the Family Partner Team at its June and December meetings regarding any flexibility (alternate methods) cases.

### **Sweat Equity Worksheet**

Within a month of signing the Letter of Intent, the family and Family Partner must meet to come up with a strategy for accumulating 500 sweat equity hours. The Sweat Equity Worksheet is to be filled out and delivered to the Habitat office. If, upon discussion with the family, the Family Partner recognizes that a family has special needs that the traditional distribution of the 500 hours does not accommodate, then it would be at this point that the family and Family Partner would request flexibility and suggest a viable alternative. Throughout the year, the Family Partner will track and record the family's progress towards the completion of the 500 sweat equity hours.

Families do not *have* to stop when they reach these limits. Rather, families are encouraged to continue to partner in building Habitat homes, especially until the construction of their own home is completed. Because the intent of Habitat is not merely to build an individual home but to foster a sense of community and contribute to the greater Habitat mission, families will benefit from continuing to participate in their Habitat partnership.