



RED TREE
STRATEGIC CONSULTING

* CASE STUDY *

How Aisha Khaja helped Nisa Homes win over **\$640k in grants**, stop relying solely on community donations and **kickstart** their grants program to expand and sustain their operations



“

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YASMINE YOUSSEF

Program Director,

Nisa Homes



Nisa Homes is a group of transitional homes for Muslim women and children fleeing domestic violence, experiencing homelessness or seeking refuge in Canada. Launched in 2015, Nisa Homes operates 10 homes across Canada and has been able to shelter over 1500 women and children.

HIGHLIGHTS

Challenges:

- Till 2019, Nisa Homes was 100% reliant on community donations
- Nisa Homes had tried applying for grants on their own but had not received a single one
- With the pandemic and the economic conditions, Yasmine and her team were worried about what would happen to their community donations and whether they would be able to sustain their operations.
- Constant fundraising was taking energy away from being able to focus on their services and operations

Solution:

- A grant writing consultant who understands the unique position and circumstances of Muslim organizations, has experience on the other side and knows what grant providers are actually looking for

Results:

- Going from 0 to over \$640k in grant funding within a year
- Building legitimacy, reliability and capacity to be able to access more funding
- Expanding services, introducing new programs, improving systems, growing teams and helping more people
- Developing internal capacity and systems to keep applying for and winning grants

The Challenge

Moving away from being 100% reliant on community donations to sustain charitable operations

When the pandemic hit and the subsequent economic conditions sent everyone down a spiral of financial anxiety, Yasmine Youssef and her team at Nisa Homes were worried about how they would sustain their organization, which till that point was solely reliant on community donations. They wanted to make sure they could continue to meet the demand for their services and continue to exist and grow.

“We know how integral this service that we provide is and especially at the start of Covid when we were seeing the numbers of domestic violence rise, we were seeing the numbers of calls we were getting rise,” said Yasmine. “The stakes were higher than ever before.”

As a charity, Nisa Homes was in a constant state of fear and uncertainty because of not having any grants.

“**You live in fear of 'What if I don't get the donations? I'm going to have to lay off people. I'm going to have to shut down a home.' You know, it really just puts you in this zone of you're constantly having to fundraise, you're constantly having to think 'OK what are donors going to say?' And thinking about donors more than you think about anyone or anything and it really does take away your energy from the actual programming. It takes away energy from the operations, from focusing on the services and then instead having to plan events.**”

Yasmine admitted that arranging events was vital for awareness. But moving away from that model of having to rely fully on community donations took a huge weight off the team's shoulders. Having another source of funding meant they were able to focus fully on the services they were providing without having to worry about the money and the fundraising.

“Especially for us, in the Muslim community, Ramadan for example is where we get most of our funding and you know that month ends up being an extremely stressful month for us. Because instead of focusing on your ibadah and your worship, you are focusing on how much can I fundraise? How many emails can I send? How many iftars can I plan? You know, it's all about that.”

Relying only on community donations also meant that the charity had to **pick and choose** what programs to focus on based on what was appealing to donors. For example, opening a new shelter was an exciting thing that most people loved to donate to but it was difficult to get donations for something like arranging an educational program or workshop.

None of the team members had any experience writing grants before, said Yasmine. They tried applying for grants on their own but did not have any success. Finding a grant writer who was a perfect fit for them was a difficult task. Yasmine quickly found that there were not many grant writers out there and the ones that were there were very busy and very expensive. Another hurdle they came across was the fact that most grant writers did not understand their needs and their community and the way their organization needed to be presented, especially as they were working with marginalized women and marginalized communities.

“Especially in this day and age when there is a lot of Islamophobia, the way everything is presented, has to be very thought out and very meticulously done and we didn’t have the expertise internally. We are experts at what we do, but having the expertise of explaining that to a grant provider and understanding what the grant provider wants to see and how he wants to see it and you know how we can measure it and all of that stuff is a different mindset, It’s a different way of thinking and approaching the work which we just didn’t have.”

THE SOLUTION

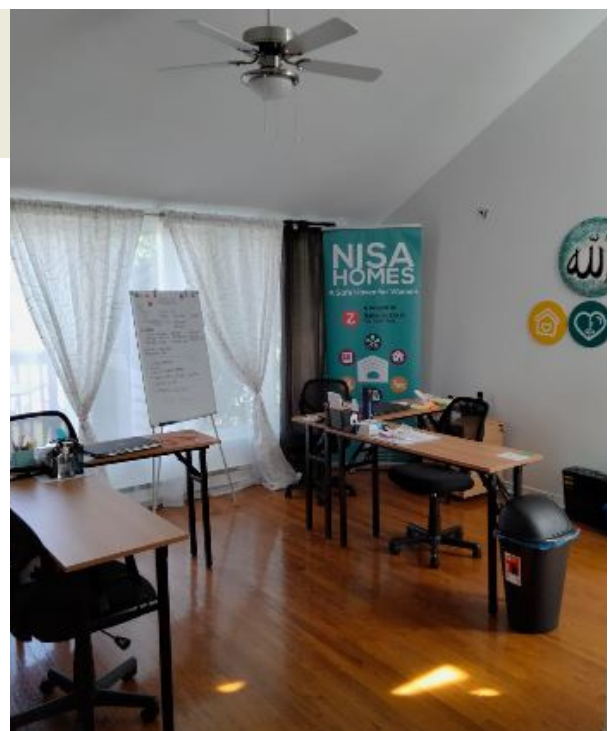
An expert grant writing consultant with a go-getter mindset who understands the unique position and circumstances of Muslim organizations and has experience on the other side

Yasmine knew Aisha from the community and heard about the work she was doing, so she reached out to her.

“Seeing a Muslim woman who has the experience, who has the ability, the resources, the information. It was very encouraging.”

Aisha was confident that she could help Nisa Homes and that gave Yasmine the confidence too.

A great working partnership was established where Yasmine’s team and Aisha worked on applying for the grants together. Yasmine and her team would search for relevant grants and share them with Aisha. They would discuss the grant and the relevant information and Aisha would do her research, come to Yasmine with questions and then she would write the application. Aisha would then send over the application to Yasmine and after Yasmine reviewed it, they would submit the application.





“It was very much like a collaborative effort. There were times when we were talking multiple times a day, every day just to get that grant and to get the information right.”

Because of the experience Aisha had, she was able to give insider tips and tricks and explain what grant providers were looking for and what they meant by particular questions and requirements.

“I love that she has experience on the other side, like she had worked on providing grants, so she understood how the system worked and what they were looking for. She had an inside view basically and I thought that was really important and really helpful. She understood how the system worked. She understood that you have to call them up, you have to speak to them, you have to ask them questions. We had never done that. We assumed that you just answer the question and that’s it, plain and simple. But there’s a lot more to it. You have to understand the vision of that agency or that foundation or whatever it was. You have to speak to them and ask them all your questions, run the idea by them before you apply. All these things, we had no idea of and she knew because she had experienced it. She had been on the other side so that was really, really helpful.”

Yasmine felt Aisha went the extra mile to make sure the grant application was the best.

“She cared, and it wasn't just about a job or wasn't just about meeting a certain metric or meeting a certain KPI. 'Well, I applied, it's not my problem what happens after that'. No. You could tell she was *invested* and she cared and she wanted the success of the organization. It wasn't just let's do the bare minimum. She went above and beyond in everything she did and in helping us set up this whole system of applying for grants and teaching us also.”

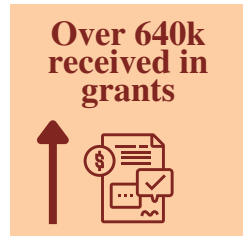
Yasmine credits Aisha for laying the foundations for their current grant writing team and practices. Aisha taught Yasmine and her team the tools and tricks to find and apply for grants. She would teach them what granters and funders were looking for in an application and the contexts behind different questions and requirements. All of this helped Nisa Homes build the capacity internally to be able to apply for grants and to continue to grow the program.

“We are standing on our feet. She was able to put this together and now we have our own team that is able to do it ourselves, alhamdulillah. It would not have been possible without her.”



THE RESULTS

Nisa Homes went from \$0 to over \$640,000 in grants within a year, allowing them to expand services, improve systems, grow teams and help more people



With Aisha's help, Nisa Homes was able to win multiple grants. The organization went from being 100% reliant on community donations to having received over \$640,000 in funding within one year.

"I think most of the grants we applied for - if not all the grants we applied for - with Aisha, we received...It was incredible," said Yasmine.

Winning the grants allowed Nisa Homes to move away from being focused on the day to day to now expanding their services and **improving** their operations. Through grants, the charity was able to focus on not just providing the service, but also ensuring that the service was of the best quality.

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“We were able to take a step back and think long term. and think growth and innovation. And how we can address these issues in a new way that was meeting the demands of the new society we were living in...whereas relying on donations really keeps you in that day to day.”

Since then and from all the additional grants Nisa Homes won even after they stopped working with Aisha, they were able to set up four new homes and introduce new programs like the remote case work program that allows them to serve clients that did not come to one of their homes; the childcare program providing support and education for children already within their homes; and the financial systems program that assists women who have moved into their own homes by supporting them with first and last month's rent and moving costs.

Yasmine and her team were also able to launch their community education program through which they arrange workshops in the community on topics like healthy relationships, domestic violence in the Muslim community etc in collaboration with other Muslim organizations and schools.

The funding also allowed Nisa Homes to improve their organization's own systems and services. They were able to get a grant that allowed them to upgrade all their files and data into a state of the art CRM (Customer Relationship Management software). Other shelters and organizations are now coming to them to learn how they were able to do that.

“Alhamdulillah, we are **setting the bar** for the standard of care, the standard of services even as a Muslim organization,” said Yasmine. “We are also breaking those barriers around providing services to marginalized communities.”

The organization was also able to improve its phone systems and security systems as well as grow its team. They were able to hire a case work supervisor, a mental health lead and a national operations manager. Having a source of funding apart from community donations also allowed Nisa Homes to invest in their team appreciation and training and professional development. This was an area they had not been able to invest in at all prior to getting grants.

Perhaps the most profound benefit of working with Aisha was the **momentum** this built for Nisa Homes in the grant writing sphere.

The success became the **catalyst** for the charity to be able to get even more grants.

“**It built legitimacy. It built reliability. It allowed us to access a lot more funding than we did in the past. It allowed us to grow a lot of our programs. It allowed us to introduce new programs.**”

“One success led to the other success, led to the other success and that kind of helped really propel things.”

Being able to get government grants gave the charity more legitimacy and helped establish those relationships with politicians and other organizations.

“It gives you that **foot in the door** that allows you to do so much and to connect with so many more people and now we have granters and foundations **reaching out to us** for funding, rather than us having to run after them for funding. So yeah, it’s really been incredible alhamdulillah on so many different levels.”

Aisha was able to support Nisa Homes in **understanding** the grant system so that they were able to **establish their own team** of grant writers.

“**What I appreciate so much is that she's made grants accessible for so many community-based Muslim organizations that were scared of applying for grants or that had just given up on that idea. She made it accessible. She made it possible. The impact she has had and the lives she has changed is far more than we can even keep track of.**”

Yasmine said she is certain Aisha’s services can benefit many community-based organizations.

“InshaAllah, I have no doubt that she would be able to get anyone grants.”

Want to learn more about grant writing and how you can access grants that can help your organization *break through* to new levels of *growth*?

Click [here](#) to find out how Aisha Khaja can help your business.

