

## Talk about Developmental Assets every chance you get

### Connect Developmental Assets to media coverage in your community

#### Sample article

No longer a stranger in a strange land  
Photography project helped new students bond with school

Martina Al Kubba vividly recalls her first day of high school in Canada. It was the fall of 2009 and she had arrived in Hamilton just two weeks earlier from the Middle East.

“To be honest, going to school for the first time here was so scary,” said Al Kubba, now 19 and in her final year at St. Jean de Brebeuf Catholic Secondary School on the Mountain. “I didn’t speak English and I had no friends. I tried to be strong but I wasn’t. I felt so alone.”

Al Kubba, who grew up in Iraq, knows something about fear. At the age of 14 she was awakened by a masked man holding a gun to her head and ordering her family to leave their home forever.

“Three men had come into our house,” says Al Kubba, whose family is Syrian Catholic. “They said that they didn’t want to see us living there anymore. I still can’t believe what happened. I remember feeling so scared.”

That night Al Kubba and her family fled to Syria.

“We left right away. We didn’t take anything.” She says they drove for 48 hours with few stops along the way because they were terrified of being killed en route. The family settled in Syria before arriving in Canada.

Luckily for Al Kubba, St. Jean de Brebeuf was well-prepared to welcome newcomer students and help them adapt, with supports that included ESL teachers and settlement workers.

The Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) program — funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada — places YMCA settlement workers in Hamilton public and separate elementary and high schools with large numbers of newcomer students. These workers help students and their families with a wide range of settlement needs, from homework help, to communicating with school principals, to understanding report cards and accessing local services for newcomers. Settlement workers also support newcomer students as they make new friends and adjust to life here.

“It’s important for all students — including newcomer students — to feel a bond with their school,” says Lily Lumsden, senior regional manager of career development, learning and settlement services for the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford. “We want students to feel connected to their school and know that their teachers, settlement workers and classmates care about them.”

At St. Jean de Brebeuf, settlement workers recently organized a photography project for newcomer students, where they were invited to use Photoshop as a way to share their thoughts and feelings about settling in Canada and adapting to life here.

Ten students — including Al Kubba — took part. They are from countries including Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Colombia, the Philippines and the Congo. They photographed everything from treasured items from their homeland to themselves at school and in the community.

Al Kubba appears alone in photos to illustrate how isolated she felt when she first arrived in Canada.

“Without SWIS workers and ESL teachers I don’t know what I would have done,” says Al Kubba, who is now happy at school, feels connected, is fluent in English and plans to attend college and work in the insurance field. “And I have friends now — a lot.”

### **Asset: Bonding to school**

The American-based Search Institute offers lists of 40 Developmental Assets aimed at helping children and youth develop into caring, responsible, successful adults. Bonding to school is listed as an asset. YMCA Canada is among organizations recognizing the value of Developmental Assets and building them into programming. To view asset lists, visit [search-institute.org](http://search-institute.org)

### **Tips to encourage bonding**

Participating in clubs and sports can help students feel more connected to their school, says Lily Lumsden, senior regional manager of career development, learning and settlement services for the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford. Taking part in service projects such as school-run food drives for a local community food bank is another great way for kids to develop a connection. Wearing school clothing such as T-shirts, hats and sweatshirts helps youth show pride in their school.

*Lise Diebel is communications specialist for YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford. Connections appears every other week. The stories explore how YMCA Canada is helping local youth feel connected to their communities.*

Hamilton Spectator Article - January 31, 2013