



## Take pride in who you are

The 40 Developmental Assets® is a City of St. Albert initiative that calls on the entire community to support our youth. Together, we can ensure our youth receive the support they need to lead healthy lives and achieve personal success. Building assets is easier than you think. In fact, it's already happening all around us. Check out Ally's story below and start thinking of more ways that you can be a part of the sum of success for youth.



**A**lly Rovensky has learned that the beginning of wisdom is accepting who you are.

The 13-year-old, who is going into grade nine in September,

is finding success while coping with Tourette Syndrome. She explained that, although it was especially difficult at first, she has learned to accept the syndrome as part of who she is.

"It was like stages," she said. "Like in self-help books, at first it's anger and denial. But now, I see it as part of me."

Tourette Syndrome, which afflicts about one in 1,000 children, is a neurological disorder characterized by physical and verbal tics. For Ally, these tics sometimes took the form of jumping or nodding.

"I started showing the symptoms in grade three, but I had known everyone in that class since pre-school," Ally recalled. "But then, I transferred schools when I went into grade four and everybody acted like I was quite strange."

Because she couldn't explain her as-yet undiagnosed condition, and because she was often unaware of her own movements, Ally's classmates were unsympathetic and sometimes cruel.

"They think that if you're different or if you don't look a certain way, they think you're not cool or you're weird," Ally continued. "If you don't fit in, they label you."

Partway into the year, Ally was diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. In the beginning, she had difficulty accepting the diagnosis.

"At first, her tics and behaviours, she wouldn't acknowledge them," Ally's mother Jill said. "When something like this happens in your family, as a parent, your first reaction is denial. At first you just

don't want to believe it because you're so protective of your child. You don't want to believe that they are going to face these extra challenges."

The summer after Ally had finished grade four, 19-year-old Nancy MacPherson entered the picture. The post-secondary student was a nanny and helped the family through difficult times. Although several caregivers came and went, Nancy stayed around.

"She stuck by Ally even when Ally wasn't pleasant," Jill said. "With Tourette Syndrome come some very difficult behaviours and Nancy helped Ally turn things around. They still have a very positive relationship and it's commendable on both of their parts."

Although she didn't know much about the syndrome before becoming Ally's nanny, her calm, steady presence and acceptance made her a positive role model for Ally.

"She's younger, so she kind of understands," Ally explained. "But she doesn't judge like some people judge."

The family had a lot of support from the Edmonton Tourette Association, the St. Albert school system and from teachers in the classrooms, but Jill said that Nancy's efforts made an enormous difference. Now 23 and finished university, Nancy revealed that Ally's friendship inspired her to pursue studies in psychology.

"If you can't see a problem, a lot of people try to pretend it's not there and they don't try to understand it," Nancy said. "It seems like when they're dealing with someone with a neurological disorder, there's judgment rather than understanding."

Since autumn 2008, the City of St. Albert has been part of an Asset Development initiative that examines the ways that the community can foster positive life skills in youth. Of the 40 Developmental Assets identified by the program, one of the most notable is encouraging youth to be proud of who they are.

**"They think that if you're different or if you don't look a certain way, they think you're not cool or you're weird," Ally continued. "If you don't fit in, they label you."**

"Ally is doing really wonderfully now, but she's had Tourette Syndrome for five years and she's learned a lot and we've learned a lot," Jill said, noting that Ally has written about Tourette Syndrome for an essay competition and won a scholarship and a trip to Newfoundland.

Because of her experiences and how well she has coped, Ally was asked to speak at the Annual Edmonton Tourette Gala Fundraiser this year.

"She spoke in front of more than 400 people at the River Cree Casino during a fundraiser," Jill said. "There wasn't a dry eye in the place. She had them laughing and crying. She just told her story and what it's been like for her."

Thanks to her internal strength and the special people in her life, Ally Rovensky has a lot to be proud of.



From Left to Right: Nancy MacPherson and Ally Rovensky

## 40 Developmental Assets the sum of success for youth

The 40 Developmental Assets are divided into two sections that include four different categories each. This week, we discover the six assets that speak to the **POSITIVE VALUES** that our young people need.

**26. Caring:** Young person places high value on helping other people.

**27. Equality and Social Justice:** Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

**28. Integrity:** Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

**29. Honesty:** Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."

**30. Responsibility:** Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

**31. Restraint:** Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

The list of 40 Developmental Assets® is reprinted with permission from Search Institute.®