



Find the most empowering relationships close to home

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 Julia's story below and start thinking of more ways that you can be a part of the sum of success for youth.



For someone growing up with the Internet and a washing machine, the past can seem like a foreign country.

But for Julia Buffam, a

15-year-old who volunteers at the St. Albert Seniors' Centre, the biggest revelation from her conversations with seniors wasn't the difference in material wealth in the past, but learning about the family dynamics and relationships.

"We learned a lot about how they used to live and how their families were treated by their parents," Julia recalled. "It was very different."

Over the past year, the City of St. Albert has been promoting positive life skills in youth as part of an Asset Development initiative, which focuses on the value of all community members building relationships with youth. Two of the assets speak to the need for youth to have empathy and competence with people of different cultural backgrounds.

"A lot of the older people don't have grandchildren, so they don't have a lot of young people to come visit them," Julia went on to say. "It's important that young people come and talk with the senior citizens to form a friendship with them."

Julia explained the amount that the seniors value her time makes her realize how much she has to offer the community.

"She's a very caring individual, you can tell that she's truly interested in what our seniors have to say," Leslie MacEachern, Executive Director of the Seniors' Centre, said. "You can see the warmth exuding from the conversations that she has with them."

Although Julia has volunteered at the Seniors' Centre previously, some of her more recent visits to the centre have been through the Grandfriends program, in which students from a local junior high school spend time with seniors learning about history and doing arts and crafts.

"I was just so impressed with the young people that we had," remembered Ruth Cripps, who runs the Grandfriends program at the Seniors' Centre. "I had the good fortune to be able to stand back and watch, without interfering in any way. I was just totally amazed with how they handled situations with the seniors."

Along with the other students in the Grandfriends program, Julia learned about how different life had been for the seniors; but, the experience was a learning one for the seniors as well and helped to dispel fears in both directions.

"If you look at the young ones now, there are 10 generation gaps between you and them. And the way they are clad and the way they are handling those gadgets," 77-year-old participant Kathy Smolny said. "But we met them and these kids are so nice and normal. It's heartwarming."

Kathy adds that, over the course of several weeks, everyone became much more comfortable with each other. She was pleased to be able to share her photograph album and to tell some of the teens what it was like in the 1930s.

"We did hand crafts together. They talked. They told us about their lives and how it was in school and we talked about our lives," Kathy recounted. "I hope they know that they gave us some happy hours with them."

While a lot of seniors might not have grandchildren living nearby, even those seniors who have grandchildren who visit them said that the Grandfriends program was valuable.

"My grandchildren are quite young and getting a visit from teenagers was interesting," said Bonnie Dechene, one of the seniors at the centre. "I think we did bond together. They were very helpful and considerate. They seemed to enjoy themselves as much as we enjoyed them. The first day we weren't certain what we would do or say to these strangers. By the end, they were part of the community and part of us."

Leslie noted that youth who volunteer with the many intergenerational opportunities once

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often keep coming back and she's constantly impressed with the way they all learn and grow through the experience.

"What I've seen with Julia is that she came in looking to volunteer, but didn't realize how valuable the opportunity really is," Leslie said. "What I've seen her evolve into is a young woman who is comfortable, approaching all kinds of situations and people."

Julia's story is truly a testament to the power of building relationships with youth across the community. Young or old, everyone benefits.



Top from L to R: Leslie MacEachern, Julia Buffam and Ruth Cripps **Bottom from L to R:** Kathy Smolny and Bonnie Dechene

Positive
Identity

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 four assets that speak to the **POSITIVE IDENTITY** that our young people need.

37. Personal Power: Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."

38. Self-Esteem: Young person reports having a high self-esteem.

39. Sense of Purpose: Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

40. Positive View of Personal Future: Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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