



## Mentoring is a gift that keeps giving

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



Students look up to Kelly Lajoie.

The school counselor and phys-ed teacher at V.J. Maloney, who coaches the girls' volleyball team, is a role model for her students and athletes.

"She's taught me a lot about life and how to keep a positive outlook," said Lindsay Cox, a volleyball player who just graduated from V.J. Maloney. "She's great to talk to about anything and she boosts up your confidence and really gets you going."

Some of the foundations for Lajoie's success are rooted in the fact that, 20 years ago when she was a student in St. Albert, there were good role models for her to look up to. Mentoring is a gift that keeps giving.

"When I was at Paul Kane, one of my teachers, Sue Leighton, was a major role model," Lajoie said. "She has continued to be a part of my life since the day I graduated. We are still friends and now we see each other on a professional level as well."

In 1986, Lajoie was a member of the 4A Provincial Championship-winning volleyball team that Leighton coached. She says she now passes along to her students the lessons she learned as a member of that team.

"When I see those things carried on with the students she's teaching, it touches me," Leighton said. "One of the things I said to them is that you are as strong as your weakest link, and I see that in Kelly's coaching."

Lajoie is known for making everyone on a team know that they are an important part of the group and helping each person find their strength.

"I wasn't one of the better players on the team, so I spent a lot of time off the court," Cox said. "But Kelly saw my potential for leadership. She told me that even if I wasn't on the court all the time, I was still part of the team."

For Lajoie, the real reward of being a coach and a role model is seeing the youth she works with carrying on to mentor others. Lajoie says that she's particularly proud to see the athletes on her volleyball team acting as mentors and role models for her eight-year-old daughter.

"When my daughter is around these girls, she's looking up to them," Lajoie said. "They're passing on those values and modeling honesty, loyalty and friendship and investing their time." It's important to tell youth the importance of these values, but it's even more important to show how positive engagement brings value to a community.

"If there's something that I've learned this year it's that our young people are watching us in everything that we do," Lajoie said. "We need to model the behaviours we want to see and we need to set a good example."

Positive role models and mentoring from people outside the family are important, even for youth who have positive family relationships.

"What good teachers, good coaches and good mentors do is help reinforce and solidify values from your family," Lajoie said. "When youth see those values in action, it gives them an opportunity to realize how important they are to the whole community."

Lajoie's efforts as a mentor can be seen in every aspect of how she interacts with people within the community, of any age group.

"The reason I think Kelly is a successful coach is because she's a successful human being," Leighton said. "Whether it's sports, theatre, arts or volunteerism, it comes from the same place - those essential truths of honesty, generosity, kindness and courage."

In autumn, 2008, the City of St. Albert launched the Asset Development initiative, which examines ways that everyone can foster positive

life skills in youth. One of the key features of Asset Development is offering positive role models throughout the community.

"Mentoring has been around for a long time, as I know from being on a volleyball team in 1986 and living in this community since 1979," Lajoie said. "But Asset Development is giving us a common language that we can all work from and build on."

Investing in this kind of philosophy, which puts emphasis on positive relationships, role models and community, will offer dividends for many years to come.

"A community that supports kids in a rich curricular life and extracurricular life benefits in a number of ways," Leighton said.

"The students have a sense of belonging and of responsibility instead of entitlement. They will give back to their community and that's what we want."



**Top:** Kelly Lajoie, Sue Leighton | **Middle:** Marc Lajoie, Isabelle Lajoie | **Bottom:** Charlotte Cuvilier, Katie Fenton (Kelly's children)

Support

## 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 kind of **SUPPORT** our young people need.

- 1. Family Support:** Family life provides high levels of love and support.
- 2. Positive Family Communication:** Young person and her or his parents communicate positively and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
- 3. Other Adult Relationships:** Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults.
- 4. Caring Neighbourhood:** Young person experiences caring neighbours.
- 5. Caring School Climate:** School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
- 6. Parent Involvement in Schooling:** Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

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