



Volunteering connects youth to community

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

Kaylah Zahara is challenging teen stereotypes.

The 19-year-old post-secondary student is an active volunteer who takes on projects big and small within the community of St. Albert.

"It's been fun being able to have a positive influence on the people around me in the community," she said. "It's

helped me gain knowledge of what I'm capable of. Contributing to the community is really empowering."

From a young age, Kaylah has taken on projects in the community, starting with her fifth birthday party, which involved cleaning up a neighbourhood park.

"When Kaylah came up with the idea of a park cleanup for her birthday, I was really proud," her father Trevor said. "Every kid was given gloves and a bag and we went and cleaned up a park near Robert Rundle School."

Over the years, Kaylah has masterminded a variety of community projects, from getting her elementary school to become an Emerald School and adopt a killer whale to organizing a recycling project called Paper for Trees.

"You don't have to go through a formal organization to be a volunteer or to be an asset in your community," Kaylah said. "It can just be having an idea and acting on it."

When Kaylah was cut from her junior high volleyball team because she was too short, her experience as a volunteer helped turn the setback into something positive. Working with other volunteers, Kaylah helped found the St. Albert Eclipse volleyball team.

"We put the word out, if you were cut from a team and still wanted to play, come join us," Kaylah said. "It went on for about four years and we put in a lot of effort and really developed strong volleyball skills."

"Contributing to the community is really empowering."

Currently, Kaylah coaches for the FOG volleyball team, a U-14 team that competes provincially. As a coach, she is responsible for everything from managing the fees and equipment to booking hotel rooms and co-ordinating with the umbrella organization.

"Of course we work hard on skills development," she said, but noted that part of her role is to be a calming influence when tensions flare up among the players. "I've had to carry a fire extinguisher from time to time."

Because she had positive role models during her youth, Kaylah said that it's important to her to be a mentor for kids in her neighbourhood.

"When Kaylah was younger, there was a teen a couple of doors down who was a bit of a mentor, and took the time to hang out and help out," Trevor said. "Now Kaylah is a teenager and getting to the end of her teenage years, she makes the time for some of the kids in the neighbourhood."

Kaylah and her father take the gang — who call themselves the "Sombrero Squad" — out on trips to various events, like the opening of the St. Albert Grain Elevator Museum, or to work on their plot in the St. Albert Community Garden.

"They're seven, eight and 11 and they're all going to be taller than me in the next couple of years," Kaylah said with a laugh. "We try to do things that are fun and participate in the community."

Over the last six months, Kaylah has been working at Elmer Gish School

five days a week as a teacher's assistant in a kindergarten class, and then going to Grant MacEwan College in the afternoons three days a week and coaching two evenings a week.

"It's pretty busy, but worth it in the end," she said.

Since autumn 2008, the City of St. Albert has been part of an Asset Development program that examines the ways that the community can foster positive life skills in youth. One of the key features of Asset Development is encouraging youth to get involved in the community through volunteering.

"A lot of kids look for that sense of self and may not find it in the right places," Kaylah said. "For a lot of teenagers, getting involved can give them that sense of belonging, it means they have a way to be a part of the community."

Since Kaylah's mother works in a treatment facility, the whole family is keenly aware of the importance of a stable childhood and a positive family connection.

"We've seen the tough side of when things go bad for children," Trevor said. "I try to promote the idea that there's something good in everyone and the way to find it is positive growth through positive participation in your family and in your community."



The Sombrero Squad from L to R: Aurora Davis, Valerie Schlottke, Cara Schlottke, Taylor Brown, Kaylah Zahara and Trevor Zahara

Boundaries & Expectations

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 **BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS** our young people need.

- 11. Family Boundaries:** Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
- 12. School Boundaries:** School provides clear rules and consequences.

- 13. Neighbourhood Boundaries:** Neighbours take responsibility for monitoring young people's behaviour.
- 14. Adult Role Models:** Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour.

- 15. Positive Peer Influence:** Young person's best friends model responsible behaviour.
- 16. High Expectations:** Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

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To learn more about the other assets and how you can be a part of the sum of success for youth, please visit www.stalbert.ca/40-developmental-assets or call 780.459.1756.