

MAKING AN IMPACT

Through HCF Grants

Tackling Poverty Together Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club A Story of Change

Mohammed first walked in the doors of the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club on a Friday afternoon in January of 2005. Having arrived in Canada a year previously, he now had a good grasp of the English language, but was still struggling at school, both academically and socially. He lives in an isolated neighbourhood on the industrial edge of Hamilton's inner city. The school Mohammed attends is surrounded on three sides by steel mills and heavy industry and on the fourth by a sewage treatment plant.

That Friday afternoon involved a lot of firsts. It was the first time in Mohammed's ten years that he had been in a recreation facility. It was his first time swimming, his first time using the Internet and the first time in years that he was able to feel completely at home to simply experience the joys of childhood. Not coincidentally, it was also Mohammed's first exposure to the Boys' and Girls' Club.

On his first day in the building, Mohammed probably tried everything. He arrived that afternoon as part of a project started by the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club, and funded by Hamilton Community Foundation, to provide transportation to and from their facility after school. A recent analysis had revealed that transportation was one of the main barriers to accessing Club programs for many under-served and economically distressed neighbourhoods in the city, including Mohammed's.

The solution has come from an innovative community partnership whereby a local Drum and Bugle Corps receives free practice space at the Club, in exchange for the use of their touring bus each day after school. Funding received from Hamilton Community Foundation allows a driver to pick up 44 previously disengaged children from a different neighbourhood every day of the week at absolutely no cost to their families beyond the \$3 annual membership.

Mohammed was nervously excited the first time he saw the "K-Shuttle" pull up to his school. When they arrived at the Boys' and Girls' Club, some of Mohammed's classmates made a beeline to the Games Room to play pool, ping-pong and air hockey. Others went directly to the Creative Room to make kites, kaleidoscopes and papier maché volcanoes. The staff first met Mohammed with his nose pressed up against the window to the pool and a wide grin on his face.

After an orientation to the change rooms and the pool, one of the lifeguards went into the swimming pool with Mohammed to help him get over his nervousness. Less than a year later, he is much more confident in the water and has signed up for swimming lessons at the Boys' and Girls' Club. He also regularly helps the lifeguards to put in the buoy line and clean up equipment on the deck.

How HCF is Helping

- *Hamilton Community Foundation supported the Kiwanis K-Shuttle program with a grant of \$56,636 over three years to cover the cost of a bus driver.*
- *This project is an example of how a new, innovative partnership can open doors for disadvantaged children.*

Perhaps the most extraordinary development for Mohammed, however, has come from his involvement with the Homework Club.¹ University students and retired teachers volunteer each day after school to help Boys' and Girls' Club members with their homework at no cost. At first, Mohammed was hesitant to ask for assistance and generally disinterested in school and his homework. But once he started to form relationships with the staff and volunteers at the Club, he began to be more proactive with his education and can now frequently be found assisting younger members with their work, as well as completing his own assignments. After just six months, teachers commented on the change in Mohammed, both in the classroom and on the playground. And he is openly talking about his goal of winning the Boys' and Girls' Club award for community volunteerism at his Grade 8 graduation.

Mohammed is almost unrecognizable from the shy, awkward young boy of a year ago and now actively participates at the Boys' and Girls' Club by holding doors for others, helping to clean up the craft room and leading by example for his peers. His brief time at the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club has proven to be a catalyst in his young development and, with the help of a grant from Hamilton Community Foundation for the K-Shuttle Transportation project, is providing quite a return on the investment of \$3 for annual membership.

Who Wins with the K-Shuttle Program?

- *Hamilton Youth Performing Ensemble (HYPE), a local drum and bugle corps receives free practice space at Kiwanis Boy's and Girls' Club in exchange for the use of their touring bus each day after school – a win/win situation for both organizations.*
- *Hundreds of children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods can now participate in a wide variety of programs at the Boys' and Girls' Club. As a result, they have developed new skills, met new friends and have increased self esteem.*

¹ The Homework Club is sponsored in part by the McCallum, McBride Fund of Hamilton Community Foundation.