

# Youth set good example by giving back

Nega Jalal was 11 years old when a civil war in her home country of Iraq forced her and her family to flee to a refugee camp in Turkey.

With hopes of a better future in a new country, life, she says, it did not get any easier.

She remembers struggling to learn a new language, a new culture and dealing with bullies at school who ridiculed her because she couldn't speak English.

## PART 4 OF 6

She had to watch as her her parents, who were once esteemed professionals in Iraq, deliver newspapers in order to support the family.

"I was in Grade 6 and I had (school) counsellors telling me that I couldn't go to university and that I had to learn more English skills," she reveals.

At 22 years old, Jalal has improved her English and is currently studying to become a lawyer, but admits it wasn't easy overcoming those early challenges.

"For (immigrants), it takes three times the work to get where we are. That's why the immigrant youth don't do well," she explains.

"These kids come from large families and they have to work to support their family. You go to school all day and work all evening."

When Jalal was 15 years old, she decided to take action in order to find ways to support immigrant youth who, like herself, struggled to

adapt to life in Canada. With the help of her family, Jalal and her older sister Ewar developed a variety of informal programs and services geared toward young girls.

"None of them had ever thought of going beyond where they were. We focused on getting these girls together and getting them thinking about going to university. There was no one there to tell them they can do this," she says.

Eventually, Jalal's father formally

established the Canadian Kurdish Friendship Association in 1999.

Under the association, Jalal and her family began providing peer support, organizing soccer teams and creating girls' clubs for the Kurdish community and for other immigrant community groups.

"My parents empowered us to do what we were doing," she explains.

With the help of volunteers, the association currently also offers resume-building services, a homework club to help tutor students and intercultural language classes. While Jalal's

volunteer role includes organizing and co-ordinating the many services and programs, her main role is fundraising.

"One of my responsibilities is to do outreach. Funding is a huge issue because immigrant communities are so small, it's difficult to get help.

"Without money and support, we can't do this," she says. Her hard work recently paid off - her presentation to city council resulted in more than \$350,000 in annual

funding to immigrant and refugee communities in Edmonton.

Jalal hopes to see others taking on leadership roles to better the community.

"One of my goals is to see other people do the kind of work we do," she says. "Try to find out what's happening in your community. There's lots of help needed, and you can make a huge difference in someone's life."

To learn more about the Canadian Kurdish Friendship Association, contact Nega Jalal at barzanji86@hotmail.com.

Over the next two weeks, Volunteer Edmonton will be examining how immigrants in Edmonton are making a huge impact on our communities.

For information about volunteerism, visit [www.volunteeredmonton.com](http://www.volunteeredmonton.com).

*Look to this space to see the work that the city's volunteers and non-profit organizations carry out and what it is Volunteer Edmonton is involved in. To suggest story ideas, contact Evelyn Pham, at [epham@volunteeredmonton.com](mailto:epham@volunteeredmonton.com), call 780-732-6655 or check out [www.volunteeredmonton.com](http://www.volunteeredmonton.com).*



## Letters to Santa...

**Dear Santa,**  
I am a real good boy, and have been all year long. I want a new red bike like my friend Jimmy has. I'm excited for Christmas and I am excited to see you at the mall on Tuesday.  
Thanks,  
Adam, Age 7

**Dear Santa,**  
My mommy told me to write you. How are you? How is the North Pole? Is it cold? How's Rudolph? Tell him and all the other reindeers that I said hi.  
Love,  
Darla, Age 8

**Dear Santa,**  
How are you? I hope you are well. I'm so excited for Christmas! I really want a new doll that looks like me. My little brother wants building blocks.  
Thank you.  
Love,  
Moriah, Age 8

**Dear Santa,**  
Is it really cold on the North Pole? It is pretty cold here too. And yesterday it snowed! I love snow. I've been good all year, and I really want a bear sword this Christmas. I promise I'll be nice to my little brother Sam if I get it.  
Thanks Santa!,  
Jin, Age 7

It's almost that time of year again. Not only to start your Christmas shopping but to write your Letters to Santa! Send us your picture and letter with a maximum of 60 words and we will publish them in this year's 4 week Christmas feature starting November 25th and ending December 16th. Get your letter and photo into us by November 16th for your chance to be in the Edmonton Examiner!

\* Due to space limitations not all letters will be published\*

For more information please contact Jennifer Waugh at 780.444.5469 or email at: [jwaugh@edmontonexaminer.com](mailto:jwaugh@edmontonexaminer.com)



**The Fifth Annual**  
EDMONTON **Examiner** Feed Edmonton's **FOOD BANK**  
**Christmas Auction**

Once again the Edmonton Examiner and Edmonton's Food Bank have teamed up for the Fifth Annual Christmas Auction.

Be the first to call in December 14th to bid on fabulous items such as this beautiful **Wing Back Chair**, generously donated by **Sundee Furniture**. Great selection of packages such as Pilates, Fine Dining and much more!

If you would like to donate or support this event, please have your items to us by Friday, November 16th, 2009.

To receive recognition for your support, please contact Jennifer Waugh at 780-444-5469 for more information.

[www.edmontonsfoodbank.com](http://www.edmontonsfoodbank.com)

*Thank you in advance for your support*