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Nurturing tutors help kids realize academic potential

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Jameeka Murdock is an aspiring author in the throes of completing her first novel.

But before she sits down with Oprah on a book tour, the 14-year-old needs to master Grade 9 math. Every Saturday, she gets one step closer to that goal.

Jameeka is among 80 students in the Increase Your Success tutoring program at Tropicana Community Services.

Since tutoring started in the '80s, thousands of children from grades 1 through 12 have benefitted from the Saturday morning classes where the intricacies of math are demystified and report card marks improved, said Bernadette Hood, Tropicana's manager of youth and education.

Students also get tutoring in language arts. Dedicated volunteers — college and university students, professionals and retired teachers — help students get over academic obstacles. Tutors identify potential and help them reach it, said Hood. "When students feel the fire, they go beyond expectations."

Students and tutors build strong relation-

ships and develop mutual respect. It's like being part of a family and is a key to the program's success, Hood added.

After each tutoring session, Jameeka walks away with a sense of accomplishment. "I get it," she says with a big smile.

Kiono Khalifeh, 22, a management and public policy student at York University, recently returned to Tropicana to tell students how he benefitted from the program.

Khalifeh was in Grade 10 when he signed up to improve his marks, which were already solid. He wanted to do better and the tutoring helped. "It was so much more than just regurgitating the material," he said.

But it was Tropicana's nurturing environment that made the biggest difference, Khalifeh said.

The program opened doors for Khalifeh who came in as a shy teen and graduated as confident young man who became a member of the United Way speakers' bureau, telling donors how the Tropicana program and support have made a huge impact on his life.

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