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The transformative power of sport

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Ahmed El Ahmar runs and plays just like other boys his age. But at just eight-years-old, he has already lived a life more difficult life than many can comprehend.

Ahmed and his family are Syrian refugees, driven out of their family home after it was destroyed by a bomb. As a result, Ahmed was trapped under debris and lost his left leg at the upper-thigh.

Sport is helping Ahmed and other newcomers



Participants in True Sport's Community

adapt to life in Canada, and a grant to True Sport from the Community Fund for Canada's 150th is helping ensure they can participate.

Through True Sport's Community Connections: Welcome to Winnipeg program, Ahmed, his brother Muhammed, sister Sehid, and dozens of other newcomer children go swimming, play soccer and volleyball, and participate in other sports every Wednesday evening and Sunday afternoon at various locations throughout the city.

At a recent soccer practice, Ahmed's eyes light up when he chases the ball and passes back and forth with his brother. He yells and cheers after scoring a goal and getting assists, and if he falls, he gets right back up.

Ahmed uses a crutch on each arm to assist with balance and dribbling. He's very skilled and keeps up with the other boys. Plus, he's got a heck of a shot.

"I like to play. I like scoring goals and passing to my friends. I'm goalie... sometimes," Ahmed says. "But someone might hit you in the face [as a goalie]."



**Sport is a common language.
We can come together and
we can play a game.**

Carolyn Trono
Program organizer

As with many Syrian boys, as soon as Ahmed could walk he played soccer. Although he lost his leg when he was only three-years-old, he had already developed a love for the game by then.

When the family first arrived in Canada in early 2016, Ahmed's mother Fatma Cuhadar noticed he seemed unable to find happiness, even within the safety of their new Canadian home.

"When I asked him what was wrong," Fatma says through a translator, "he said he felt like

no one liked him anymore because he was different now."

Ms. Cuhadar noticed an immediate improvement in Ahmed's mood and energy levels when he started participating in True Sport's programming.

"When he comes to soccer, I feel relieved when I see him that happy," Fatma says. "My children, all three, make me very happy. But even [more so] when I see Ahmed playing and running again."

True Sport's Community Connections: Welcome to Winnipeg program aims to help newcomer athletes and their families by connecting them with quality sport programs, and by creating a sense of belonging and cohesion in our province.

Carolyn Trono is with the Newcomer Soccer and Multisport Academy, a volunteer-run organization that helps to coordinate the many volunteers and organize each event.

“We’ve noticed a big difference in [the children’s] ability to cooperate, to work as a team, to communicate effectively, and to follow rules and procedures,” Ms. Trono says. “The kids are happy. They have friends. The kids are able to follow the instructions of the coach. It’s ‘unstructured structure.’”

The values of True Sport are: ‘try everything, play fair, respect others, keep it fun, stay healthy, include everyone, and give back.’ And thanks in-

part to the **Canada’s 150th** grant, True Sport was able to translate its supplemental materials into Arabic to help pass along these values to the newcomer children as they learn and play.

In addition to the structure and friendship that sport has established for the kids, they’ve been able to improve their English and social skills as well.

“Sport is a common language. We can come together and we can play a game. If we have these skills we can play together, and then we get to know each other a little bit differently,” Ms. Trono says. “It doesn’t matter where you’re from, if we have this common element.”



Ahmed El Ahmar playing soccer.

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1350 - One Lombard Place
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0X3, Canada
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+1 (204) 944-9474
+1 (877) 974-3631
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