

Real Communities' Connections Help Launch Clarkston School

It started with a personal purpose for Maha Al-Masoodi. The mother of four wanted to build a community that would help her assimilate to the Clarkston neighborhood and also help her son, Mohammed, who has disabilities, find the proper resources that would make him thrive.

She met Basmat Ahmed, a GCDD Real Communities community builder, who connected Al-Masoodi with a range of family support services for her son. It resulted in a friendship that inspired local action to better the community the women already live in.

First, it began with an accessible playground to make sure it's safe for not only her children, but also all the children in the community. Then, it became about Al-Masoodi's goals.

"She wanted to find a job, she wanted an opportunity for her son to socialize and make friends, and she also wanted to make friends," said Ahmed.

With Ahmed, Al-Masoodi started attending Clarkston Early Network meetings hosted by CDF Action: A Collective Action Initiative. The initiative connects and engages the residents of Clarkston, GA by helping them recognize and develop their assets to create activities and services that benefit the community.

The meeting brought together the community to discuss early learning projects, and after a few gatherings, "she (Al-Masoodi) asked 'where's the action?'" said Roberta Malavenda, director of education at CDF Action. "To me, that was a real parent advocate."

The simple question became a catalyst for change in the Clarkston community, which

has a large contingency of families from Sudan and Iraq, all of whom speak Arabic.

Through various connections from Councilman Dean Moore's office to the property management team of the apartment complex where Al-Masoodi lives, CDF Action received space on the apartment grounds to build a school for the families in the community to learn English and prepare the children for pre-kindergarten.

In May, the Clarkston READY School opened its doors to help children, with and without disabilities, learn English and continue practicing Arabic, their native language. Al-Masoodi now teaches at the school that currently has a class of 12 children where the curriculum is taught in Arabic and English.

"I wanted to find a place that would help children get familiar with the English language before they went to school," said Al-Masoodi. "It was a place where they could gain confidence, learn a new language and culture and also keep practicing Arabic."

The Clarkston READY School is a true representation of the Real Communities mission of designing intentionally inclusive activities throughout the State to create opportunities for all people – with and without disabilities – to work together as full partners in the social life and civic development of their communities.



REAL
COMMUNITIES
INITIATIVE

Yahyia Tammer, a student at the Clarkston READY School stands before bright posters of the alphabet in English and Arabic.

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Maha Al-Masoodi helped launch the Clarkston READY School in Clarkston, GA with CDF Action through connections made with GCDD Real Communities Builder Basmat Ahmed.

To learn more about the **Clarkston READY School**, visit cdfaction.org
To learn more about **Real Communities**, visit gcdd.org