

[Previous Story](#)
[Next Story](#)

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Islamic School students volunteering at NLRHC

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Today staff

Students from the Fort McMurray Islamic School are learning compassion, empathy and the benefits of volunteerism by spending a little time this weekend at the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre.

Samra Ilyas, a secretary of the FMIS school council, says six students between grades 7 and 8 will volunteer their time Saturday with patients in the continuing care unit at the health centre.

The volunteer effort, Ilyas says, was an important issue for members of the school council.

"One thing we had on our list of priorities this year was to get students involved in some volunteer work in the community or to find ways to get them involved," Ilyas said.

"We're all volunteers — we work with the school in our own time — and we feel that it's really important for kids at a young age to understand the importance of giving back to the community and the satisfaction you can get from volunteering."

Ilyas says volunteering in the community is important for students because it teaches them about the interconnectedness of residents, the value of elderly citizens and numerous other values, many of which she says are reflected in Islamic culture.

"Respecting and caring for elders is a huge part of what our faith promotes. We feel that the elderly are the heart and soul of every community and have given so much to the community throughout the years," Ilyas said.

"This is our way to make them feel special and to highlight their importance by spending time with them. It will be a change for the patients, and for our students, it will give them the opportunity to understand what it means to put someone else's needs before your own, (and) to value and respect the elders in our community."

The students talk and socialize with the patients as well as play games and read books.

The continuing care outing is not the first of its kind for the school, but Ilyas hopes it will find its legs this year and become a regular event.

She says she'd like to see it expand to include members of Rotary House and the Golden Years Society.

While not directly part of the school's curriculum, Ilyas says it plays into the school's community-minded spirit, similar to participating in food drives and Jump Rope for Heart.

"Our community thrives on volunteers, so I think it's really important to give that to the kids from a young age," Ilyas said.



"When (the students) are in school, they're working towards something, and working towards a career, but we want to teach them it's not all about the money."

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Previous Story

Next Story