



STEPHEN LEWIS SECONDARY SCHOOL

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September 15, 2009

Dear Steven,

Words cannot adequately convey our gratitude for the incredible experience you and your team provided for us at the 2009 Best Buddies Gala! The two students with whom I work and who won the *Spirit of Friendship Award*, Alvin Lee and Alham Fakhry, will remember this night for a long time to come. Stephen, you were so gracious and welcoming that you made all of us feel instantly at ease. In fact, your entire staff and volunteers emulate these same ideals which are a testament to both the integrity and the importance of the Best Buddies organization. Your warmth and sincerity went a long way toward reinforcing confidence in both Alham and Alvin prior to reading their speeches before such a large crowd. As you know doubt witnessed these two young men really are exceptional in every sense of the word. The fact that Alvin chose me to accompany him to the Gala, (what student would not want to have a parent attend something so special), attests to his selflessness and moral character. I was beyond touched by this, and not surprised to hear my family respond, "Wow, the right kid sure won didn't he". That Alham's mom did not attend because she had to work, foregrounds why the Best Buddies Program is so crucial for students like Alham.

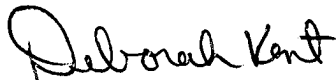
For me personally, the evening was one of the most memorable moments in my teaching career. In part, because these two young men were so deserving of their award, but also because the warm reception we received by everyone at the Gala reinforced my belief in the innate goodness of the human spirit. You know, on the evening of the Gala, Alham's brother told me Alham's speech was too long. I'd spent all of Tuesday morning working on that speech with Alham. I asked Alham's brother to take a leap of faith and to trust me that his speech was not too long: Alham was telling his story, and people make connections when they understand the story. Thankfully he trusted me on that. Afterward, so many people approached us saying that they've been long time supporters of the Best Buddies Program, but for the first time they "really got it". Alvin and Alham's stories really touched people and that is an achievement in itself.

Steven, your entire staff and volunteers were incredible. Please extend my sincere gratitude to all of them for making the entire evening such a wonderful experience. In particular, I'd like to thank Caroline Szkolka, our Program Coordinator, without whom our Best Buddy chapter would never have gotten off the ground. Like Alvin and Alham, Caroline is exceptional! Her undying support was invaluable. There were times when frustration, the aches and pains of beginning a new chapter nearly got the better of me, but Caroline was always there encouraging, helping

and ultimately modeling simply by doing. The latter is the best teaching tool and one all kids relate to. Although Caroline was unable to share this special evening with us, she was with us in spirit. As a teacher, governed by the Ontario College of Teachers, one of the Standards of Practice regulating our profession, a fundamental, core belief all teachers strive to maintain is, "commitment to students and student learning". Caroline epitomizes this ideal of commitment to students. Her commitment to the Best Buddies Program is evident in all she does: her "leap of faith" with Alham and Alvin's *Spirit of Friendship* nomination speaks for itself. I'm certain that all those in attendance at the Gala who heard Alham and Alvin speak were touched in ways that give meaning to all you do, and personify the ideals of Best Buddies.

One of my favourite quotes, (author unknown) is this: "***Life is not measured by the number of breaths you take, but by the number of moments in life that leave you breathless***". Many such special moments will remain permanently etched in the memories of Alvin, Alham, and myself from our amazing collective experience at the 2009 Best Buddies Gala. Thank you so much for helping make those memories so special!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Kent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah Kent
Special education teacher
Stephen Lewis Secondary School