

A portrait of Francis Atta, a Black man with short hair, smiling and wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and grey pants. He is standing outdoors with trees in the background. His hands are clasped in front of him, and he is wearing a watch on his left wrist.

FRANCIS ATTA

SPEAKER | AUTHOR | COMMUNITY WORKER

MEDIA RELEASE KIT

SPEAKER | AUTHOR | COMMUNITY WORKER

BIOGRAPHY

Francis Atta continues to be the most prominent and sought after speaker in Toronto in the past 5 years. Once homeless, failing in school, and in trouble with the law, he went on to post secondary studies and graduated with honours. He learned, and reminds others that we have to take the hands that we are dealt and make the most of it. Admired for his passionate and capturing approach, his thought provoking messages deliver an energy like no other.

Born in Kumasi, Ghana, Francis Atta immigrated to Toronto, Canada at 6-years old. Despite tremendous struggles, he managed to flip his life from negativity: failing in high school, and getting into trouble with the law, to: graduating from George Brown College ("GBC") at the top of his class, and embarking on a career as a Child and Youth Worker, and Motivational Speaker through his company, K.E.Y.S. (Knowledge and Effort Yield Success), founded in 2010.



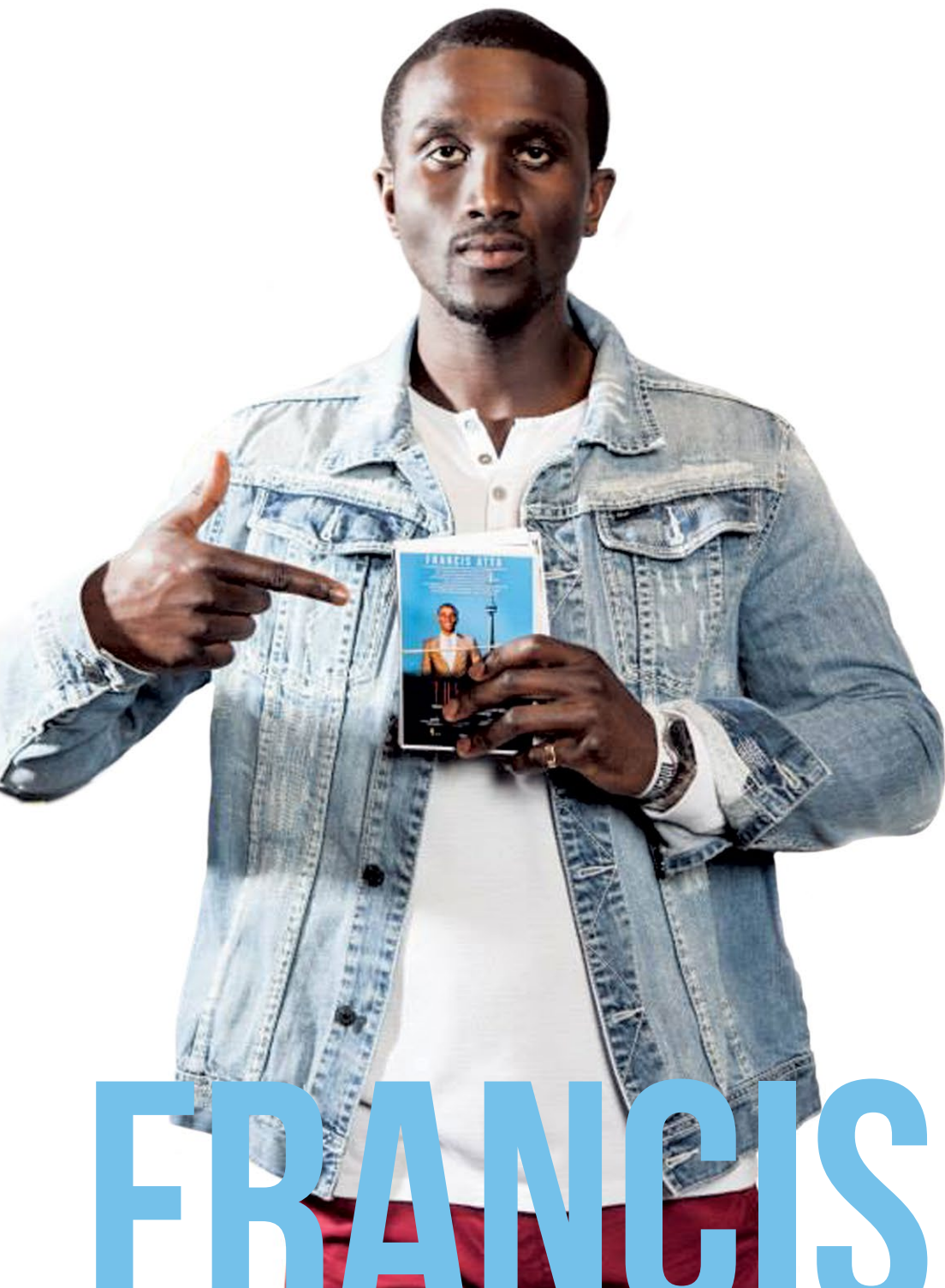
FRANCIS ATTA

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark grey hoodie, is seen from the side, looking out of a train window. The background is blurred, suggesting motion. The image is split into two panels by a central text box.

BEGINNING

Francis lived most of his childhood in the Jane & Finch neighbourhood in Toronto. The son of factory workers and one among a family of 14, Francis witnessed his parents toil to feed him and his siblings, and recognized the importance of hard work at a tender age. His father was instrumental in impressing upon Francis' young mind the necessity of education and independence. This lesson proved especially relevant after a few years when his parents divorced and 7-year old Francis watched his parents' marriage end in turmoil. These early events left an indelible mark on his mind, planting the seeds of determination to reach out to others undergoing similar traumatic experiences. Even as he went through a long phase of academic neglect, his father continued to be a good role model throughout this tumultuous time — trying to maintain stability for Francis and his siblings' lives so that they would become self-sufficient individuals. To this day, Francis credits his father with many of the lasting life lessons that he carries with him.

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“2000–2010: *From 25% to College Scholar*”

Involvement in sports was another aspect of Francis' life that has had a huge influence on shaping his character. Sports taught Francis self-discipline and determination. In grade ten, he took the team to the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations' Championships and this proud accomplishment cemented his interest in steering people onwards through concerted team effort. During this time, Francis also noticed that those among his friends who did not take up constructive activities ended up as school dropouts or gang members. This got him thinking of the numerous children in priority neighbourhoods who have very limited access to the resources required to engage in fun and meaningful pastimes. It was this realization that led to him volunteering at community centres so that he could share his thoughts and time with children who needed a role model or maybe just a patient ear.

FRANCIS

ATTA

Two consecutive “turning points” in Francis’ life occurred shortly thereafter. It began when Francis tore a knee ligament and was rendered unable to participate in competitive sports for close to 4 years. With what seemed like the end of his future and an ensuing loss of purposefulness came an aimless wandering as Francis took up a few different courses of study but found he had limited interest in each one. A larger vision of building a stronger community and directing youth along fruitful endeavours pervaded all that he did. This included visiting his former high school and coaching students interested in professional basketball, for free. This was when he won a Lions Club scholarship and enrolled in GBC for the Child and Youth Worker program. The second pivotal moment in Francis’ life started when he began attending a youth church group where he embraced the power of faith and believing in something greater than oneself that could guide him towards his goals. The high level of strength and positivity he gained through church mobilized him further.

Cumulatively, these influences passionately drove Francis to lay the foundation for his company K.E.Y.S., a motivational speaking company that conducts workshops to inspire and motivate people of all ages. Francis’ life has been an embodiment of the simple fact that the things we do today will determine our future because we had the KEYS all along. He teaches that no matter how many obstacles lie before us, it is our attitude that will shape our ultimate achievements.

Starting out from a modest upbringing — often going days without enough food and limited parental attention — to receiving over 25 prestigious Canadian awards such as Canada’s Top 25 Immigrant Award (2012) and the Urban Hero Award (2010), and being on the Dean’s Honour List for three consecutive years at GBC. These accomplishments have humbled Francis and have shown him the true power of people and groups “reaching out” to each other. With this in mind, Francis has utilized various social media platforms to convey inspirational messages so that he can continue to help motivate and inspire others.



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TODAY

Francis is a Youth Advocate and presently works with the Toronto Catholic District School Board and at Covenant House in Toronto. On October 10th, 2013, Francis released his first book titled “The Flip”, that proposes different techniques for parents and youth to reevaluate their lives and change what is negative into something positive. The book addresses current situations youth often face, and provides a realistic outlook on the trials, which plague them. The Flip provides examples from Francis’ own life experiences, emphasizing the importance and benefits of hard work, honesty and positive influences. To date, over 5000 copies of this book have been sold through various agencies; schools, such as GBC; community and rehabilitative centers; and other organizations.

Francis is also an official United Way of Toronto spokesperson and interacts with community leaders to effect a visible change in the low-income areas of Toronto. His company implements varied fundraising activities such as selling T-shirts with the proceeds going to school supplies for underprivileged children. He knows firsthand the feeling of being unable to pay for basic necessities and does his best to ensure that he can help as many children as possible to avoid such circumstances. Francis is in the process of starting a subsidiary company called “Future Keys” focused entirely on mentoring grade 8 to 12 students and to this end he is already conducting life skills workshops at James Cardinal McGuigan Catholic High School.

Francis Atta's life is a shining example of how the human spirit truly is stronger than anything that ever happens to it. It is up to us to take the hand that we are dealt and make the most of it — with a little help from the right societal and community resources. As Francis takes firm and guided steps towards giving back and building a well-rounded base that youth can fall back on, he feels a great sense of accomplishment when he maps where he started from and where he is today. And this is exactly why he knows and believes with all his heart that if he did it, so can you!!

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HIGHLIGHTS

2014

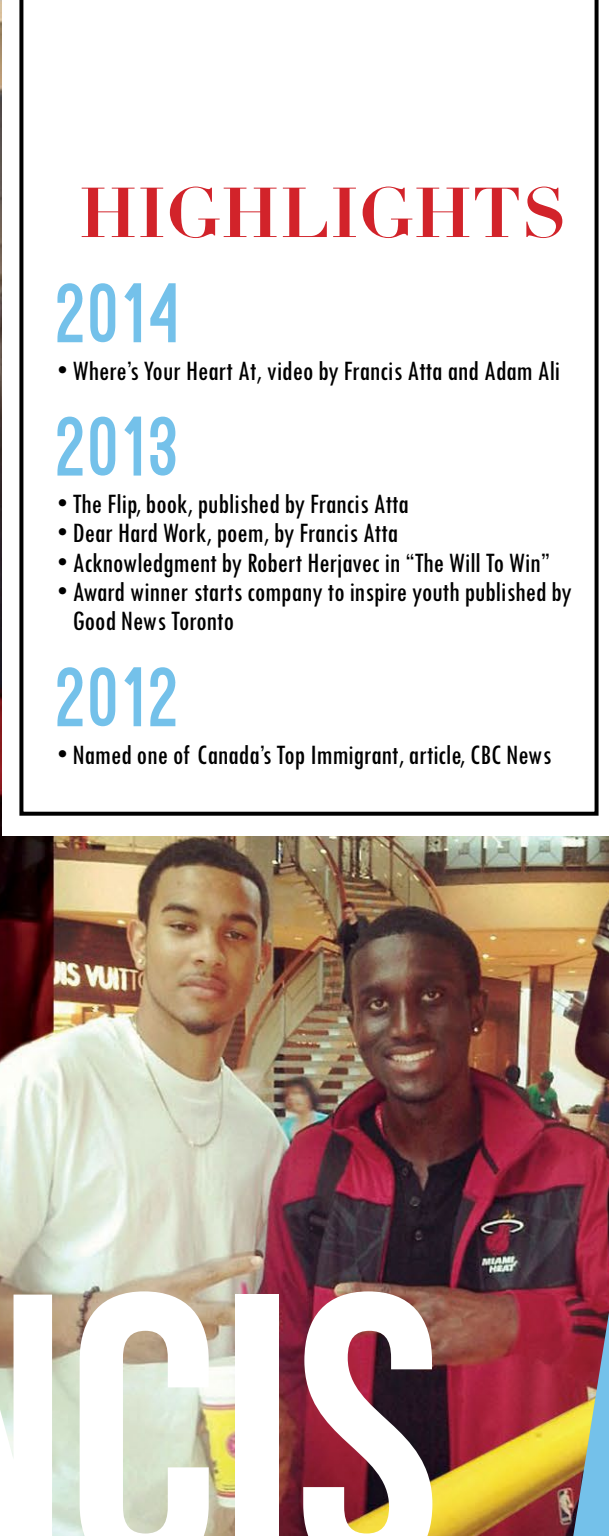
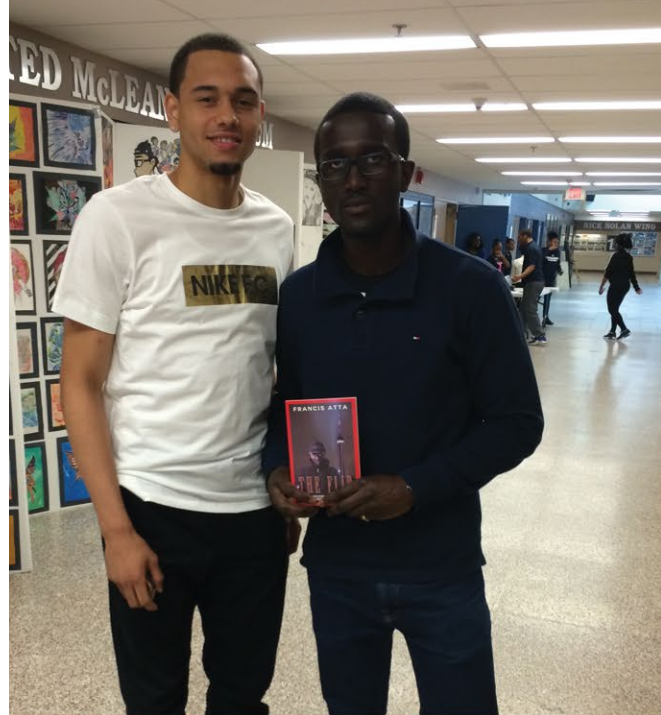
- Where's Your Heart At, video by Francis Atta and Adam Ali

2013

- The Flip, book, published by Francis Atta
- Dear Hard Work, poem, by Francis Atta
- Acknowledgment by Robert Herjavec in "The Will To Win"
- Award winner starts company to inspire youth published by Good News Toronto

2012

- Named one of Canada's Top Immigrant, article, CBC News



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Canadian IMMIGRANT
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Francis Atta

4 THE PHILIPPINE REPORTER 1 NOV. 23 TO DEC. 13, 2012

No Colour, One Blood

By Beatrice E. Pao
The Philippine Reporter

Francis Atta is working to change people's perceptions about his neighbourhood, Jane and Finch.

Francis Atta teaches children "to get along with everybody, not just their own kind."

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Progress evident

Canadian dream 'very much alive'

September 12, 2013 share 3

Education recognized as 'key to success'

Hey Everyone... Sid is Back!

Francis Atta

INJURED? CAR ACCIDENT? SLIP & FALL, ALL TTC ACCIDENTS OR TRUCK ALL BUS ACCIDENTS, PEDESTRIAN OR CYCLIST STRUCK BY AN AUTOMOBILE, VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mentoring is recipient's passion

Individual winner: Francis Atta

Francis Atta is not ashamed to admit he made some wrong choices in his younger years.

Growing up in the Jane Street and Finch Avenue area, the star basketball player at James Cardinal McGowan Catholic Secondary School didn't pay much attention to school work and focused solely on shooting hoops.

When Atta graduated in 2004, it was expected his athletic talent would continue to grow, but knee surgery cut short his dreams.

"I couldn't play like how I used to play," he said. "I was working and chatting with the wrong crowd. If you surround yourself with negative people, negative stuff will happen to you."

Atta's life began to change when he began to change of three people involved in his life.

He said, "They God and the first thing I said, 'This something me.'"

Atta soon seeking em tance at JVS, often

the first person to arrive in the morning.

"Every day I was here looking for a job," he said. Atta then enrolled in the child and youth worker program at George Brown College and, for someone who frowned at school work in high school, landed on Dean's List with a 3.8 grade point average.

ing for God," he said. "I'm a true Christian, I felt like I gotta talk to them (students) and mentor them. I make it I tell them I'm there for them and school. I want them to go to college. I've been through all this stuff. I have 10 brothers and sisters. I was living in a dark place when you can't see the light."

Atta, a motivated person applying has lost n to violence clear of walked u "It's a focused, out there y goal and ishe good, I every

Never, ever give up, 'top immigrant' says

Francis Atta recently graduated from a youth and child worker program.

where he showed great talent.

After graduating, however, knee surgery cut short his athletic dreams and he started hanging out with the wrong crowd. Some of his friends were drawn into gang life and lost their lives.

But Atta then had a scruple of hockey breaks that changed his life. He became friends with some young women who were involved in the church and that led to his own religious commitment. And he won a scholarship, which he used for the youth and child worker program at George Brown College. He recently graduated at the top of his class.

He's been giving his time for years to numerous youth organizations in the neighbourhood he grew up in. He's been teaching basketball, mentoring, and sometimes, just listening.

Atta is now working as a child and youth worker at Community Youth Centre, where he gives motivational talks to young people. He also teaches basketball and leads to a basketball team. He also teaches to encourage people to get up.

Atta says he's not a religious person, but he's a person who believes in God.

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'A smile changes everything'

Francis Atta, a youth leader in the Jane-Finch area, advocates smiling as a way to launch friendships and inspire change.

around you. That's where everything starts," he said. "Even when it comes to gang life, it's so charged with emotion and a lot of it is just a strong feeling but it's often strong feelings that lead to building relationships in neighbourhoods."

Next, volunteer, Sanjour said. "It's a lot of organizations that are out there, but it's not about the money. It's about the community. We call them philanthropic volunteers, people who aren't clients but want to help."

"It's an amazing outreach for somebody living in inner city areas such as Leaside or Forest Hill."

He doesn't underestimate the power of one person, as long as that one person wants to work as a team, Atta said.

The Jane-Finch community work as a team. Atta said, "The Jane-Finch community has a reputation but there are some positive things coming from the neighbourhood."

Atta said, "I must have started with 'I must have started with somebody. It's amazing what one person can do.'"

"Mother Teresa did it and she needed other people. You need a team. You need a family."

Atta said, "I all come back to building relationships with the community like a family and everything will be better."

He said, "Setting the whole community together is a beautiful movement."



AWARDS

- Toronto Community Housing Corporation Recognition Award for Community Service, 2013
- Identify 'N' Impact Award for Community Youth Worker of the Year, City of Toronto, 2013
- African Entertainment Award for Community Service, 2013
- Young Black & Gifted Award for Community Service, 2013
- Lincoln Alexander Recognition Award, 2013
- Canada's Top 25 Immigrant Award, Canadian Immigrant, 2012
- Black Business and Professional Association Award for Best Lifestyle, 2011
- Erma Collins Award, Jamaican Canadian Association, 2011
- Herbert Carnegie Future Aces Citizenship Award, 2011
- Garfield Weston Scholar, 2011
- Agent of Change Award Recipient, Center For Social Innovation, 2011
- Urban Hero Award, Toronto Mirror Newspaper, 2010

2014 PUBLIC APPEARANCES

"The Pursuit of Greatness" with Eric Thomas, Orlando Bowen, Shaun Boothe, Karen Donaldson, Victor Beausoleil and Akil Augustine.



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