

HANDOUT 28

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VOLS HELPING FEARFUL ARABS: YOUNG STUDENTS GET ESCORTS TO SCHOOLS

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One by one, the children kissed their mother goodbye and barreled out the door for school.

But they did not walk alone yesterday to their red-brick schoolhouse in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

A white-skinned woman they had never met before held their hands as they skipped down the streets. The children's Palestinian mother did not go with them because a stranger had kicked her and called her a terrorist at the laundromat on Tuesday.

After that happened, the mother thought it would be safer for her children if they walked to school with a volunteer who did not look Arabic.

"It seems like it's okay to hate an Arab now," said Emira Habiby Browne, president and founder of the Arab-American Family Support Center in Brooklyn. "It's nothing new. It happened after Oklahoma City. After TWA Flight 800." Changing appearances The harassment has been so widespread since the attacks on the World Trade Center - 100 incidents reported in the city alone, according to the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund - that some Muslim women have traded their traditional head scarves for baseball caps and Arabic men have shaven their beards and mustaches.

Some Muslims and Arabs who have been verbally or physically abused refuse to leave their homes.

With so many living in fear, Habiby Browne's center began recruiting volunteers to escort scared children to school and women to the grocery store or doctor's office.

More than 100 people - including several Jewish volunteers - had signed up as of yesterday.

One volunteer is Jessamine Price, 26, a doctoral student at New York University.

At 8:15 yesterday morning, she walked five children in her Bay Ridge neighborhood from their apartment to Public School 170 on Sixth Ave.

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Price asked the oldest in the group, a spunky fifth-grade girl, to lead the way to school. She held the hands of twin girls wearing matching pink plastic backpacks.

Three blocks later, the small procession reached the school, and Price waved goodbye.

"There's not much I can do in terms of rescue work," Price said. "But this is something I can do. It shouldn't be that anyone in the neighborhood should feel scared because of where they started out in the world."