



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**UNITED WAY AND THE PROVINCE CELEBRATE SUPPORTERS OF
YOUTH CHALLENGE FUND**

*Slaight Family Foundation and other members of private sector honoured for helping build
young leaders in 13 priority neighbourhoods*

TORONTO – Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and United Way Toronto’s Frances Lankin joined Youth Challenge Fund Chair and Toronto Argonauts CEO Michael ‘Pinball’ Clemons last night at a special reception at Queen’s Park, honouring individuals and members of the private sector who have supported the work of the Youth Challenge Fund (YCF).

“The Youth Challenge Fund has been a tremendous success, bringing together people who love their city, who want the best for our young people and who will not let guns or gangs take the hopes and dreams of our children,” said Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty.

The Youth Challenge Fund was established in 2006 as a partnership between the Government of Ontario and United Way Toronto. It has invested in 111 unique youth-led initiatives that use creative, collaborative approaches to engage and provide opportunities for young people in Toronto’s 13 priority neighbourhoods.

“Because of YCF, people across the city are learning what youth-led really means,” said Lekan Olawoye, Executive Director of FYI (For Youth Initiative), supported by two YCF grants and a United Way member agency. “I’m so proud to come to work every day and be a part of this vibrant movement to create lasting change with my peers, so the voice of youth will be present at decision-making tables from this point forward.”

YCF was designed to mobilize, convene and engage hard-to-reach youth, and to challenge community members and young people to embrace the ideas and leadership of Toronto youth. This approach empowers youth as they build relationships with community service organizations and institutions. As a result, all partners collaborate and develop skills to work in new, more effective ways.

For Frances Lankin, President and CEO of United Way Toronto, YCF has meant an opportunity for the community to be flexible in how it responds to the needs of youth.

“All of the individuals here are a true inspiration. We asked them to help us try something different, to have faith in an approach to youth development that hadn’t before been tested – and they stepped up,” said Lankin. “They went above and beyond to support an initiative that will impact the community for years to come, as part of a coordinated effort to better serve the young people of this city.”

Michael Clemons, YCF’s Chair, said he was touched by Toronto citizens’ foresight in recognizing the importance of YCF’s work in the community.

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“Three years ago, we stood together in a community centre and committed to address the unique challenges facing youth in our city. Tonight, we reflect on what we’ve accomplished, and recognize the incredible people who have helped turn our dreams into reality,” said Clemons. “Because of them, YCF has helped foster powerful young leaders across this city who are working to balance the scales of equality, access and opportunity for youth growing up in communities where resources are most needed.”

After an initial provincial investment of \$15 million in 2006, United Way Toronto leveraged additional provincial matching funds by raising \$15.8 million, generously provided by individual and private sector donors. A \$5 million gift from the Slaight Family Foundation greatly contributed to United Way’s fundraising success, enabling a total investment in YCF of \$46.6 million.

According to donor Gary Slaight of the Slaight Family Foundation, “It’s not every day that families can support a grassroots process that builds the knowledge and ability of our young people. It’s been amazing to witness how YCF provides youth with opportunities to do great things with their lives, and affect real change in their communities.” The Slaights have a longstanding relationship with United Way. Gary’s father, Allan Slaight, was Chair of the UWT Board in 1985.

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