

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNITED WAY AWARDS HONOUR TORONTO YOUTH

Get in the Way Awards to be presented to young community leaders

TORONTO, August 15, 2006 – They brought school supplies to Cuba, set up an art contest in earthquake ravaged Pakistan and taught themselves how to read Braille and sign to communicate with deaf-blind adults.

For their outstanding contributions to the community, six young people aged 13 to 18 will receive United Way's *Get in the Way Awards* on August 17. Toronto Argonauts coach Michael Clemons has sponsored two of the awards this year.

"These inspirational young people demonstrate what community leadership means with their incredible energy and drive to help others," said Frances Lankin, President and CEO, United Way of Greater Toronto. "Youth play an important role in helping build a better city for us all, as these extraordinary young people have shown."

The following six recipients were selected – three elementary school students aged 13 and under and three secondary school students between the ages of 14 and 18. The winners are:

Shanice Chin, 13 – Scarborough resident - A strong believer in community and actively involved in her school, Shanice is a reading buddy to a Grade 1 student, volunteers with the school's breakfast club, and crochets for homeless people. Shanice is also a leader in her Scarborough neighbourhood, volunteering at United Way agency Second Base Youth Shelter. Lending a hand wherever it is needed, she prepares and serves dinner and wraps gifts for youth over the holidays. She also participates in the Enbridge CN Tower Stair Climb for United Way as part of the agency's annual team challenge, conquering her fear of heights and giving back to her community.

Dilshaan Panjwani, 13 – Etobicoke resident – At the age of 13, Dilshaan has already mastered the concept of thinking - and acting - globally. In March, Dilshaan and her sister carried art supplies to school children affected by the earthquake in Northern Pakistan. They set up an art contest in the tented camp city to instill hope for the young children who lost their homes. In collaboration with War Child Canada, Dilshaan and her sister also went to Peshawar, Pakistan, to deliver school supplies and wool toques donated by her school. Dilshaan has been volunteering since she was only five years old, singing 'O Canada' at numerous multicultural events in Canada and abroad. In 2003, Dilshaan was recognized by the Ministry of Citizenship with an Ontario Volunteer Services award and in 2005, she received the Canada Day Youth Award from Canadian Heritage.

Alexander Heim, 14 – Etobicoke resident – Recently diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes, Alexander supports families by offering to speak with newly diagnosed youth through the family mentorship program at Sick Kids Hospital. Also involved in his school's student council, he helped gather and sort non-perishable food for Second Harvest and worked on a clothing drive for Goodwill. Alexander is active in his neighbourhood and says if he could drive, he would be volunteering all over Toronto. For the past three years, Alexander was an assistant leader with the Mighty Fourth Humber West Cub Group, supervising the cubs, assisting with badge work, as well as running games and activities.

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Stacey Bateman, 18 – Upper Beaches resident – Some of the simplest rewards of volunteering are the friendships you make. For Stacey, her inspiration comes from the disabled people with whom she works. At 13, Stacey began volunteering with United Way agency Community Living Toronto (CLT) in the Scarborough Summer Literacy program, working one-on-one with the lowest functioning adults. Over the past five years, she has volunteered with the drop-in program as an assistant coordinator, has taught herself Braille and American Sign Language allowing her to communicate with the disabled community, and helped organize and run CLT's involvement in the Achilles Walk. In total, Stacey has contributed more than 1,900 hours to CLT and other organizations. In fact, she is pursuing a vocation as an Intervenor, an interpreter/guide for the deaf-blind.

Ki Young (Rachel) Han, 18 – Toronto resident – As a newcomer to Canada, Rachel had to face the obstacles of a new culture, learning a new language and making new friends, but she never gave up. Instead, Rachel has lent her experience as a recent immigrant by establishing the *Gurlz Rule Group* at United Way agency CultureLink, practicing English and sharing stories with young female refugees who are new to the country. At Parkdale Collegiate Institute, Rachel is a Student Council member and Vice-President and Treasurer of KEY club, organizing events such as the Terry Fox Run and 30 Hour Famine for fellow students. She has also represented Parkdale Collegiate as a Volunteer Ambassador with the Toronto District School Board and Leaders Today initiative, encouraging other students to become active in their communities. Rachel is dedicated to helping people in her community as well. She serves as the Youth Group President for her church and is a regular volunteer at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Jessica Paczuski, 18 – Bloor West resident - Taking her voluntarism globally, Jessica organized school supplies to be sent to Cuba with graduating students of Humber College. During her gap year, Jessica volunteered in three different areas of Canada with Katimavik, Canada's leading national youth volunteer-service organization. Here at home, she gives back to the community through her involvement with Youth Assisting Youth (YAY), a United Way agency. Imparting her love for the arts to others, Jessica brought YAY juniors to the Tarragon Theatre and the AGO. Jessica has also volunteered on several political campaigns, contributing her time over seven years to the campaigns of Gerard Kennedy, David Miller and Peggy Nash.

"Hearing about the extraordinary work these young leaders have accomplished both locally and globally while balancing their own personal obstacles is inspiring," said Clemons. "I am proud to support these youth who have set such positive, responsible examples not just for youth, but for every member of our society."

The awards will be presented at the Rosewater Supper Club, 19 Toronto Street, on August 17. All winners will be awarded a cash bursary and trophy.

Celebrity judges participating in the selection process were: Louise Brown, Education Reporter at the Toronto Star; Devo Brown, Host of the FLOW Factor program at FLOW 93.5; Joan Melanson, Executive Producer for CBC Radio; and Sugar, host of YTV's The Zone.

In 2006, United Way of Greater Toronto aims to raise \$100 million for the community. For 50 years, United Way of Greater Toronto has been working to create lasting change in the lives of Torontonians. Through research, partnerships with business, labour, government and volunteers, and by funding a network of 200 health and social service agencies, United Way identifies needs and takes action to support people and develop strong communities.

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