



SHINE YOUR LIGHT - DONATE TO STUDENT RELIEF

CHARTING A WAY FORWARD

In the time of COVID-19

When the 2020 year began, there was buzz and excitement as the UWI Toronto Benefit Gala entered into a new decade of fundraising. By February, news of the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread. By late March UWI Executives in consultation with Dr. Upton Allen*, Head of Infectious Diseases Sick Kids Hospital and Professor of Pediatrics at University of Toronto, made the decision to cancel the 2020 Gala. The COVID-19 pandemic swiftly changed the world and in dramatic ways. We are all engaged in social isolation/distancing in one form or another, global economies have been decimated, dreams deferred and those who were struggling to make ends meet are now more vulnerable than ever.

Across the Caribbean, the impact of the pandemic has been profound and deep.

This is a story of Mouyton May, one student whose spirit of determination, grit and courage, will warm your heart.

THE MOUYTON MAY STORY



UWI Toronto gala scholarship helps Jamaican complete university education

By Ron Fanfair - ronfanfair.com
May 15, 2020

Had Mouyton May thrown in the towel in pursuit of higher education, very few would have faulted him given the multitude of hurdles he faced.

Not knowing his parents and without a regular home for most of his life, it's almost a miracle that he's graduating this year from the University of the West Indies (UWI) with a Bachelor of Applied Science degree. Marine Biology and Computer Science are his major and minor respectively.

On the verge of not returning for his final year because of a lack of funds, May was cast a lifeline. He was the recipient of a UWI Toronto Gala \$3,000 scholarship in 2019.

"I had bills to be paid and I was barely getting by," May recalled. "A friend who I owed money threatened to go to the police if I didn't repay her right away although I tried to assure her I was doing all I can to get her money. I was just barely getting by and I was really down. I am so appreciative of that scholarship because it took me out of a hole. I am not out of the woods, but it allowed me to go back to university and focus on my school work." Most times, good things happen to those who persevere in the face of myriad obstacles.

With graduation approaching and May obviously seeking employment, GraceKennedy Foundation Executive Director Caroline Mahfood sent his resume to Dr. Parris Lyew-Ayee Jr. who is the Director of the Mona GeoInformatics Institute at UWI.

Very impressed with the young man during the interview that lasted over an hour, Lyew-Ayee hired May as a Project Officer. The young man didn't know at the time that his new boss is a nephew of the late Ray Chang who teamed up with his wife, Donnette Chin-Loy Chang, to be the patrons of the annual Toronto fundraising gala that has raised \$1.5 million for 550 students attending UWI in the last decade.

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SHINE YOUR LIGHT

STUDENT RELIEF CAMPAIGN

The *Shine Your Light* campaign focuses on at-risk students to support their welfare during the pandemic so they can afford meals and other basic necessities as well as ensuring funding of student tuitions.

This global campaign is reaching out to the UWI Toronto Gala family, the Caribbean community, members of the diplomatic corps and friends of the Caribbean and UWI worldwide.

Shine Your Light on these students giving them inspiration and support for the future that lies ahead.

The **SHINE YOUR LIGHT** campaign runs until **September 30, 2020.**

STUDENTS AT RISK

Over three thousand students face extreme economic hardship and are now struggling for day-to-day survival as a result of lack of funds for food, lodging, laptops, internet services, medicine for chronic diseases, as unemployed single parents, tuition, etc. The pandemic has upended not only their lives but their dreams as well.

They are the future leaders of the Caribbean and the very people who will be depended on, not only to provide the research for health matters and other issues endemic to the region, but also the solutions and treatment necessary for the cure and alleviation of these challenges. They will be the people in the trenches and on the front lines in the modern-day world wars fighting to eradicate and eliminate these types of diseases that are existential threats to humanity.

MATCH AND BUILD

For every dollar donated, the UWI Toronto Benefit Gala in partnership with the Chang Endowment Fund will match funds raised. Our goal is to raise \$50,000 from our global UWI friends and family.

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UWI Toronto Gala 2013 Honouree Dr. Upton Allen on the front line fight in COVID-19 research.



*Upton Allen, MBBS, MSc, FAAP, FRCPC

The Hospital for Sick Children
Division Head
Infectious Diseases

Consultant in Infectious Diseases
Infectious Diseases

Interim Medical Director
Transplant Centre

U of T researchers to track the demographics of the COVID-19 pandemic

By Royson James Contributing Columnist The Toronto Star
Sun., May 10, 2020

Excerpt from article:

A recent Star story on scientists pushing to get a vaccine by the end of the year suggests there are at least 90 such projects "speeding ahead around the world in desperate efforts to slow the pandemic."

Now, add 31 project teams at the University of Toronto to this coterie of global lab coats — each armed with university and private funds that are to fuel research aimed at exposing bit by bit, how the virus works, spreads, can be contained — and why it affects some populations more than others.

The U of T awarded are recipients of a Toronto COVID-19 Action Fund grant — a total of \$8.4 million — awarded and announced a mere 30 days after the fund was created and 338 applicants submitted ideas.

"The consequences of COVID-19 is severe for society, so the faster we can find our way out of this the better it is for everybody," said Vivek Goel, U of T's vice-president of research and innovation.

The world is faced with a new virus, there is no immunity in the population, no vaccine or drugs to treat it and the only viable defence are public health measures like social distancing that have huge economic and social consequences.

Meanwhile, young people seem impervious to its harm, then not. The aged are definitely at risk but then a centenarian survives its grip. Animals are safe, but maybe not. And all the time, the poor and marginalized — frequently, predictably people of colour — die at rates twice as high as white folks.

The conditions are a call to arms that didn't have to be sounded in the scientific community, really. Most other scientific projects are now stalled behind the giant global lockdown, so everyone might as well jump on the coronavirus research train.

"COVID-19 presents an array of unprecedented global problems that require urgent attention and expertise from experts in a wide variety of disciplines — from medical specialists and public health researchers to economists, social scientists and mathematicians," Goel said.

The breadth of projects approved by the University of Toronto reflects the massive task ahead for a world forced to examine a phenomenon that requires a telescope as well as a microscope. Social conditions left far in the distance — like why people of colour and marginalized groups are dying at rates twice that of white neighbours — must be pulled into the social scientist's lab, along with the tracking of the virus' genome.

Dr. Upton Allen and his team is a good example. Using data from SARS as a base comparison, Allen's team will measure the differing types of immune responses at different stages of the illness, from early infection to post recovery, and across different age groups.

"What we do believe is the immune system responds in different ways, perhaps for young children and the elderly. By better understanding how it behaves, this provides insights into why some people respond with mild symptoms while others are hit hard. This helps determine what treatment will be beneficial," Allen said.

While our immune system builds a wall of defence during the illness, the symptoms of feeling unwell suggest that there are "holes in the immune defence," Allen explained. "Perhaps one should target a specific treatment to try and fix those defects, to fix weak spots in the immune system.

"We call them immune modulators. They help to dial down the damage," said Allen, head of infectious diseases at Sick Kids and professor of pediatrics at U of T.

Doctors currently have two ways to treat coronavirus patients — either with anti-viral agents or immunal modulators. "The question is, can we apply them to COVID-19? In studying the immune system, we will get a better understanding of how ready the immune systems of patients to receive vaccines, and receive them safely and mount an effective protection response. This is important information," he said.

But Allen is not stopping there, at the pure science. His team will ensure his research includes some social science, including a sufficient number of African Canadians to provide representative results that allows them to draw conclusions about the COVID impact on that demographic.

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Please help us to help students in the greatest need.
Thank you in advance.

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This newsletter is dedicated to sharing news and stories from The University of the West Indies Toronto Benefit Gala, The University of the West Indies, its campuses, students and profiling game changers making a difference across the Caribbean.

Contact us at: toni@uwitorontogala.org

