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THE VILLAGER


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Local teen making a difference

LISA RAINFORD
Aug. 3, 2006

Shamin Mohamed Jr., a local resident and graduate of Runnymede Collegiate Institute, will be rubbing shoulders with the likes of former U.S. President Bill Clinton, former South African President Nelson Mandela and AIDS activist Stephen Lewis.

The 18-year-old is attending the 16th annual International AIDS Conference in Toronto - the world's largest bi-annual HIV/AIDS meeting - as one of several youth delegates on behalf of Foster Parents Plan. As part of the conference, Mohamed will be leading a large panel discussion called In Our Name, during which young people will get the opportunity to review and critically examine some of the projects for HIV prevention that are being conducted in their name.


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"He's such a dynamic young person with tremendous commitment to HIV/AIDS," said Sarah Hendricks, Foster Parents Plan's HIV/AIDS program manager. "He's also one with formidable drive and leadership skills."

Devastated to learn about the death of children through HIV/AIDS when he was just 15, Mohamed decided he wanted to make a difference. He wanted to prove that youth have a strong impact on society and so he founded the Children's AIDS Health Program with a small group of high school students.

"I really wanted to do something different," Mohamed said. "I wanted to create an organization that would get youth in Canada and in other countries working together."

In July, Mohamed led a mission to South Africa where he conducted workshops that educated children about AIDS. He also delivered anti-retroviral medication and materials such as books and toys. His work has not gone unrecognized. Mohamed was the recipient of the DAREarts Leadership award and in 2005 was named one of Youth in Motion's Top 20 Under 20.

Since the inception of the Children's AIDS Health Program in 2004, it has raised more than \$12,000 for youth under the age of 16 who are living in poverty and are infected with HIV and AIDS. A non-profit organization, it is run solely by youth.

Foster Parents Plan's Youth Advisory Council was created in 2003. It was a "competitive process" to apply, according to Hendricks.

More than 20,000 participants from around the world are expected to attend the conference, which takes place from Aug. 13 to 18. Foster Parents Plan will be on hand to ensure the voices of children and youth are heard.

"(Foster Parents) Plan's area of expertise is child-centred community development," said Dr. Joe Decosas, the organization's regional health adviser for West Africa and the leader of its delegation at the conference, in a statement. "Our analysis starts with the life experience of children and adolescents."

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