

## United Way's 2006 Coats for Kids Drive Kicks Off Today at Victor Mager School

United Way of Winnipeg's (UWW) 2006 Coats for Kids drive to collect winter outerwear for children in Winnipeg kicks off today at Victor Mager School in St. Vital. Now until the end of January 2007, Winnipeggers are encouraged to donate gently-used children's coats, parkas, snowsuits, jackets, ski pants, toques, gloves and mittens.

"Every winter, children are subjected to the risk of hypothermia and frostbite," says Marc Proulx, Public Fire Education Coordinator with the Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Services. "They're at great risk because they lose heat from their skin more rapidly than adults."

Blisters that occur are akin to a second-degree burn. If the blood vessels in the frostbitten areas are affected, permanent damage may occur.

With support of United Way's Coats for Kids partners – The Winnipeg Sun, CTV Winnipeg and 1290 AM, the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, Perth's Services Ltd., United Parcel Service, and Oyate Tipi Cumini Yape, a UWW-funded agency – thousands of Manitoba children will be sheltered from these injuries.

More than keeping kids warm, Coats for Kids is implementing program changes that focus on developing pre-employment skills in casual staff and volunteers to support women and children who are rebuilding their lives and homes after leaving abusive relationships.

Now, the Coats for Kids program will bring an added value by enhancing employment-related knowledge and skills for volunteers and staff, as well as developing appropriate attitudes and behaviours that will provide a strong foundation for these individuals to pursue further education and/or job training.

"Through Coats for Kids, youngsters receive more than just warm clothing to face cold Manitoba winters – the program also gives them confidence, dignity and self-esteem to face a cold, hard reality that parents sometimes need help with basic necessities for their children," says Gwenda Templeton, Manager of Community Investment, United Way Winnipeg. "For the Coats for Kids trainees it's about much more than sorting and distributing donated items; it's giving them the tools they need to rebuild their life. "



More than 95,000 items of winter outerwear have been distributed to Manitoba children since the first Coats for Kids collection drive over 17 years ago. Gently-used children's outerwear can be dropped off at any Winnipeg Perth's location or at any Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service station. Donated clothing is collected by UPS and then sorted at a United Way central warehouse, cleaned by Perth's, and sent to schools, daycare centres, community organizations and United Way agencies to be distributed. This year, Coats for Kids expected to give more than 5,000 items to local children.

To donate children's outerwear, please call United Way's **Coats for Kids Hotline at 586-KOAT (5628)**.

For more information, please contact:

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