



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2011 REPRESENTATIVE'S AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

VICTORIA – Two outstanding youth, a mentoring police officer, and a number of remarkable organizations are being recognized for their excellent work on behalf of B.C.'s vulnerable children and youth.

In announcing the winners of the fourth annual Awards of Excellence, B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, said this year's recipients are doing exceptional work that is changing the futures of the children and youth they come in contact with every day.

"It's an honour to recognize what these extraordinary people and organizations do in their communities," said Turpel-Lafond. "They are providing resources and support that help young people improve their lives and put so many on a better path."

This year's winners include:

- a 17-year-old political refugee from the Philippines who is inspiring and encouraging youth in her community, and promoting human rights and opening minds abroad;
- a youth leader using her own life experiences in care to encourage empathy, raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health issues, locally and globally;
- an organization that is a creative and compassionate leader in the treatment of and support for child victims of sexual abuse;
- an initiative that is a catalyst for changing how services are provided to Aboriginal children, and adapts popular mainstream infant development programs to make them more culturally relevant for First Nations babies and children;
- a youth worker who translates her inherent belief that positive change is possible into outstanding advocacy that has improved services throughout the Coast Fraser region.
- a unique team from a variety of organizations that pulled together to provide Tamil migrant families with child-centered, culturally responsive services;
- a tireless Vancouver police officer who changes youth's lives through his creative projects and by being an outstanding role model and mentor;
- and a passionate and principled woman who -- through diplomacy, strength and evidence-based research -- is pushing social change to make B.C. a safer place for women and children.

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The recipients of the 2011 awards of excellence are:

Youth Leadership Award (co-winners):

Samantha Claver and Lilia Zaharieva, Victoria

Service Provider Award

Mary Manning Centre, Victoria

Cultural Heritage and Diversity Award:

Aboriginal Infant Development Programs of B.C.

Advocacy Award:

Dawn Johnson, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Vancouver

Innovative Services Award:

Burnaby Board of Education and Ministry of Children and Family Development

Mentoring Award

Constable Richard Lavallee, Vancouver

Lifetime Achievement Award

Tracy Porteous, Vancouver

Award winners will be honoured at a dinner October 13 in Vancouver, at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

The awards dinner will feature a special presentation by spoken-word virtuoso Shane Koyczan, who delivers brilliant, humane, furious and funny anti-bullying messages and anti-violence messages. Koyczan performed in the 2010 Winter Olympics opening ceremonies and is the winner of the US Slam Poetry Championship and Canadian Spoken Word Olympics. As well, Canadian Country Music Awards 2008 female artist of the year Jessie Farrell will perform.

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Note: Media are invited to attend and cover the Awards presentation and performances, but are asked to confirm their attendance in advance.

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Backgrounders attached for award winners.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Youth Leadership Samantha Claver

Samantha Claver is a 17-year-old youth who moved to Canada from the Philippines in 2007 with her father and two sisters, as a result of fear and violence in her home country.

Samantha is a Youth Community Developer with Project Respect, the youth sexualized violence prevention program of the Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre. She assists in developing youth-centered programming and curriculum to improve education around sexualized violence.

She has been involved in two theatre projects "Where is Home" and "My Forbidden Disorder" that enabled newcomer youth to share their migration experiences with audiences and evoked discussion and reflection on issues such as immigration, trauma, exclusion and bullying.

She positively contributes to her community by inspiring and encouraging young people to participate as well, which is clearly evident through her involvement with the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society and the Bayanihan Community Centre.

Samantha is dedicated and committed to pursuing the values and goals of her parents and continues to be an activist in her local community and abroad. She attends events with her father to speak about her experiences in the Philippines and in Canada, where she promotes human rights.

Hearing Samantha's story of coming to Canada as a political refugee is inspiring; she shares her story through her involvement in theatre and at human rights events which generates compassion and awareness within the community.

Samantha is entering Grade 12 this year and is one of only a few students selected to attend the UStart program at the University of Victoria, a program for students to start university early. Her future goal is to become a medical doctor.

Nominator comments:

I think a good leader shows commitment, trust, friendship, honesty, bravery and is someone I could look up to. Sam is committed to everything she does. We trust each other and she is very honest. She is a good friend and always welcoming to new people. She is also brave, like in the theatre projects. I look up to her as a leader. She makes a difference in many young people's lives. All these things make her an amazing person and a good person to win the youth leadership award.

Samantha has experienced a great deal of loss and hardship throughout her life. However, instead of allowing these difficulties to paralyze her, she has worked tirelessly to educate and motivate those in her community to take a stand against oppression and political injustice.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Youth Leadership Lilia Zaharieva

Lilia Zaharieva was born in Bulgaria but has lived most of her 24 years in Victoria. She is a committed youth leader with the Federation of BC Youth in Care Network who worked on a planning committee that organized and ran this year's International Foster Care Organization's (IFCO) Biennial World Conference Youth Program in Victoria. She played an integral role in providing more than 70 youth in and from care around the world an unforgettable and positive experience.

During IFCO Lilia delivered her first international keynote speech to a youth and adult audience, a speech which moved many as she modeled someone many youth were able to relate to.

Lilia has also assembled a youth group in her own community called insideOUT aimed at connecting youth and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, particularly when youth are living with a parent with a mental illness. Having grown up in government care because her mother suffered from mental health issues, she realized there was a lack of support for young people going through similar family experiences.

Her natural public speaking ability provides her many avenues to connect with people about mental illness and provide them the inspiration, and support. Lilia is also able to connect with youth on an individual level, providing them personal support to help them face their challenges.

Lilia was nominated and won the United Way of Greater Victoria Youth Now Award in 2011 for volunteer leadership and was recently accepted in to the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria.

Nominator comments:

Having spoken at the recent International Foster Care Organization conference, I understand she will also extend her reach globally. I could not be more thrilled and hopeful for those seeking inspiration that youth in care can and do experience rich full lives. Her authenticity is the voice that is needed to be heard and recognized.

Lilia's hard work, commitment and determination shines through in all the work that she does.

We are empowered by Lilia.

Lilia is continuing on to school and continuing her journey as a former foster child with a positive, emotional story that has the dream and ability to change lives on a regular basis through her dedication and commitment to youth, especially youth in care.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Service The Mary Manning Centre

Mary Manning Centre (MMC) was founded by Mary Manning in 1984 to provide support services to child survivors of sexual abuse. MMC is Victoria's only non-profit agency dedicated to the treatment, education and health promotion, and support of child victims of abuse. The Centre serves more than 200 children and families every year.

In its other role, MMC is the primary provider of victim services for children and youth in Greater Victoria who have experienced abuse. Some children can be involved in legal proceedings where both families and children require specialized forms of support. Most referrals come from families, police, victim assistance programs and other government and community agencies serving children and families, health care workers and others.

Mary Manning Centre applies the best and wisest of practices of social service. MMC works to the following ends: helping people obtain concrete services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services; and participating in legislative processes.

MMC also pays attention to the wisest of practices around teaching. Collectively and individually they have learned the impact the knowledge, values and skills used by contemporary services providers.

MMC believes they have not yet reached the limit of what they can do to contribute. They plan to take new risks, develop new capacities, recruit new partners and play unfamiliar roles as they balance donor and community needs. Wherever they fall on the spectrum from grant making to change making, they believe passionately in their organization's potential and responsibility to promote positive community change, family involvement and child and youth justice.

Nominator comments:

In our work with vulnerable families, victims of abuse and children at risk, we often are witness to the impact of those who have been victimized. We are also privileged to be witness to the impact of innovative, wise, compassionate, creative and culturally sensitive trauma support that Mary Manning Centre provides.

Mary Manning Centre has provided counseling of the highest standards for numerous children and youth in our community and are deserving of this recognition. They are also leaders in developing partnerships, engaging First Nations communities and advocating on behalf of children, families and our sector.

Mary Manning offers exceptional service to the community and is an agency the embraces partnership and innovation. It is truly a leader in our sector.



BACKGROUND

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Cultural Heritage and Diversity Aboriginal Infant Development Programs of B.C.

The Aboriginal Infant Development Programs of B.C. (AIDP) adapt popular mainstream programs to become more meaningful and culturally relevant for the children and families they serve. It takes the Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program or the Parent/Child Mother Goose program and incorporates their own language, pictures, songs, foods and storytelling to make it more culturally appropriate. They also translate nursery rhymes and poems into their traditional language.

The programs honour the teachings and traditions of their Elders and ancestors to develop, implement and provide services for Aboriginal children and families as the guiding principles of quality programs and services.

Urban AIDP work diligently at incorporating and respecting the language and culture of the traditional territory and nation that their programs work in as well as honour the culture of the families that they serve.

AIDP celebrates the families' cultural heritage and language by combining modern/contemporary academic education and research and compliments this by respecting the history, knowledge and resilience of the First Nations People of B.C. and more specifically the local nation or band. Many use Elders as the resource and knowledge keepers to continue to educate AIDP professionals with Aboriginal history and heritage especially regarding parenting. One AIDP refers to "Spe'qum" another refers to "Paq'mi Nuq'yuk." In both languages this means children should be regarded as flowers to blossom and need to be nurtured and cared for to become beautiful.

Nominator comments:

Over the last 19 years the Aboriginal Infant Development Program has been the catalyst for changing how services are provided for Aboriginal children. They have been advocates for ensuring that Aboriginal children have services that are holistic, that honour and respect their Indigenous ancestry and they have broken down jurisdictional boundaries and fostered new ways of working together for the betterment of the children.

The Aboriginal Infant Development Programs recognize that our children are the greatest gifts that the Creator has given us and we must do all that we can to support them and their families so they can develop to their greatest potential.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Advocacy Dawn Johnson, Youth Engagement Coordinator Ministry of Children and Family Development

As a tireless supporter of children's rights, Dawn Johnson continually advocates on behalf of the young people that she works with to ensure their rights are upheld and respected.

Dawn has worked as the Youth Engagement Coordinator for the Ministry of Children and Family Development for just over three years and in that time she has led numerous influential projects and initiatives that have significantly improved services throughout the Coast Fraser region. Most notably, she has led the creation of fully functioning, sustainable youth advisory councils in both Vancouver and Squamish.

Through these councils she has given young people in and from government care an opportunity to voice their opinions in a safe, respectful and meaningful way. Dawn works in partnership with council members and other young people to identify youth priorities and make recommendations on how services could better meet the needs of young people.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development is a large, complex organization and as such can sometimes make people feel powerless. Dawn has strategically navigated the system to find appropriate opportunities to give children, youth and staff new advocacy skills. In addition, the courage and passion that she regularly demonstrates has inspired people to advocate for change even in the face of resistance.

Dawn has helped to change the attitudes to young people who past experiences with the ministry left them angry, disempowered and silent. Young people involved through her work are now finding opportunities for positive interactions with the ministry and are able to use their own experiences to change the system for the better.

Nominator comments:

Dawn is an exceptional leader with a grace and generosity rarely seen amongst someone so early in their career. There is no doubt that the voices of children and youth are heard, listened to and acted upon because of Dawn Johnson's inherent belief that positive change is possible.

For anyone who has seen Dawn work with high-risk youth, it is easy to see that it is a labour of love. Her dedication is infectious and she exemplifies the quality of an outstanding, dedicated leader who possesses personal integrity and a natural gift in connected with youth.

Due to her unique life experiences, Dawn understands and can relate to numerous perspectives, including challenges, struggles and opportunities that can face vulnerable populations. I believe this gives Dawn a quiet determination, knowledge and courage and makes her an excellent advocate for children, youth and families.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Innovation The Ministry of Children and Family Development The Burnaby Board of Education

In August 2010 the mass arrival of a large number of Sri Lankan women and children in British Columbia presented a unique challenge in providing child and family-centred, culturally responsive services.

In the interest of keeping the families together, the Ministry of Children and Family Development made the decision to house the detained women and children at the Burnaby Youth Custody Centre (BYCSC).

Minors who were not detained were able to live together at the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre rather than separately in foster homes and possibly far from the rest of their families.

From the outset a philosophy emerged and rapidly spread throughout the management of staff at the centre. It is best described by the following:

- We will do whatever it takes.
- We will provide the services that we would want for our own family members.
- We will be open, flexible and we will work as a team.

A cohesive and collaborative response, demonstrating strong teamwork, caring, compassion and professionalism was delivered by the various disciplines and program areas.

Staff worked tirelessly upon arrival at dockside, admission to the facilities, through the initial days of arrival and in the months afterwards to ensure the 70 plus women and children were well settled in the new environment.

A group of teachers and district administrators from the Burnaby School District worked with the BYCSC to provide educational services to the Tamil migrant families. Their spirit of service and care greatly added to the team's ability to meet the unique and significant needs of the children and their mothers.

All of these people demonstrated a flexibility and responsiveness above and beyond what might be expected in assisting the families to transition into their new lives in Canada.

Nominator comments:

In the early days of the program one of the youth supervisors who happened to be close to retirement age was learning to count in the Tamil language with the help of a nine year old girl. He was struggling to count to six when she quickly and effortlessly counted from 1 to 100 in English. Her mastery in comparison to that of the youth supervisor brought everyone – mothers, children and custody centre staff – to laughter. It was a bonding moment. We all recognized that we were a community brought together to support each other in every way we could.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Mentoring Constable Richard Lavallee Vancouver Police Department

Rick Lavallee is currently the Aboriginal Liaison Officer responsible for approximately 12,000 urban Aboriginal people. He is assigned to the Diversity and Aboriginal Policing Section of the Vancouver Police Department.

Originally from Manitoba Rick, who is Metis, takes great pride in his work with urban Aboriginal youth. He is a role model for these youth, many of whom have never been exposed to positive, healthy influences. Rick provides positive teachings focusing on healthy choices while maintaining the youths' unique cultural teachings and protocols.

An example of Rick's innovation and creativity was when he was able to secure the donation of three large cedar trees from the Vancouver Parks Board after a major wind storm had toppled them. After transporting the trees, Rick enlisted Aboriginal master carvers to teach youth about Aboriginal protocols for carving large cedar canoes.

He is a key figure on the Broadway Youth Resource Centre's Breakfast Club that provides nutritious meals to youth who might not otherwise have access to healthy food choices. While they are preparing breakfast, he takes the opportunity to speak to them about any issues they may be having while providing assistance in avoiding negative behaviours.

Rick is also involved in five Pulling Together canoe journeys, a long-standing program where the police and Aboriginal communities paddle traditional canoes in a journey that is designed to bring them closer together.

Rick spends countless hours of his own time working with youth in other innovative programs, mentoring them and supporting them in any way that he can. He is available to them at all hours and has devoted his work and his life to changing the direction of youth towards positive and healthy choices and preventing the cycle of negative behaviour.

Nominator comments:

I am 21 years old. I've known Rick for about four years and he has been there for me through an important part of my life where I've really grown a lot. He inspires me to continue to challenge myself and be a good leader for others. He leads by positive example showing others to be involved in the community and to make positive lifestyle choices and to take good care of themselves and others. Having Rick's support and mentorship has helped me decide that I would like to help others as well. I really look up to Rick and I am so thankful he has been in my life to help me through such a meaningful part of it where having a good role model was so important.



BACKGROUNDER

The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Lifetime Achievement Tracy Porteous

Tracy Porteous has been working to improve the lives of children, youth and families in B.C. for more than 30 years. In her career she has paid special attention to the safety and security of those that are marginalized – Aboriginal women, immigrant and refugee women, women of colour, gay/lesbian and transgendered victims of domestic and sexual violence.

People have described her as the most innovative, passionate and principled advocate they have met – dedicated to improve the safety of women and children. Focused and steadfast are other adjectives that have been applied to Tracy.

From 1995 to the present day she has worked as the Executive Director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C. This provincial organization works on behalf of B.C.'s sexual assault centres, community based victim service programs, stopping the violence counselors and outreach workers.

Prior to that she worked at the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre - first as a school based educator and publications development coordinator; then manager of the crisis line and emergency response program and volunteer coordinator; and finally as executive director. During all this time she provided direct support to women and girls, who had been sexually assaulted, and to their families. She worked closely with police, the Crown and child protection services; raised funds; developed policy and new programming; and as the media contact and subject matter expert, was often called upon to speak about these issues to the public.

She has had direct involvement at a provincial and national level in the development of government policies on violence against women in relationships, sexual assault and child abuse, and education and training to support those policy implementations.

She has persisted in bringing forward difficult issues and standing up for unpopular ones such as the impact of cuts to services or lack of coordinated policy response to violence against women. She has overcome these challenges by being positive, diplomatic, engaging and presenting evidence based research supporting her concerns.

Tracy is an outstanding champion for B.C. women and children, and her work is a testament to her dedication and passion.

Nominator comments:

From the very beginning Tracy's vision has been to engage various community partners and individuals in order to create social change and impact policy to improve the lives of women and children. She is a born leader and a strong advocate who is respected across B.C. for the support she and her organization provide.

Tracy has and continues to participate in discussions with governments, service providers and other provincial initiatives to advocate for systemic changes and improve the lives of British Columbians. Ending Violence Association of B.C. has developed resources, training and has excellent initiatives, public awareness campaigns and created links to a world of information. Ending Violence Association of B.C. has succeeded in this with her leadership. We owe her a debt of gratitude and I hope she will be honoured for her tireless efforts.