



**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.