



Meet Victoria's New Youth Poet Laureate – Agartu Ali

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC – At last night's Council meeting, Agartu Ali was introduced as Victoria's 2018 Youth Poet Laureate. Serving as a champion for youth and the literary arts, Victoria's Youth Poet Laureate seeks to inspire and engage local youth to share their stories through both the written and spoken word.

"We are so proud to welcome Agartu Ali as the City's new Youth Poet Laureate," said Mayor Lisa Helps. "This young woman is an inspiring member of our community. We look forward to the work she will do bringing people together and building community through spoken word."

Agartu Ali is a 15-year-old spoken word poet who is a Grade 10 student at Victoria High School. For as long as she can remember, poetry has moved her emotionally and motivated her to be an advocate for change in her community. Ali volunteers at numerous local elementary schools and community organizations and often uses poetry as a vehicle to connect with her community.

While she is not yet a well-known face in the larger poetry scene, Ali believes this anonymity gives her an approachability that she plans to utilize in this position. She hopes youth will see themselves in her and that she can learn alongside them.

"My vision is to bring the many different cultures and people of Victoria together," said Ali. "With my roots in the refugee and immigrant sector, and my love of the written and spoken word, I believe I harbour the dedication and resources needed to make this vision a reality. I hope to provide an outlet for youth to express themselves by writing what is beautiful, what is painful and what is real."

A Call for Nominations open to Capital Region poets 14 – 24 years of age was held in the fall. Applicants were required to have an established body of work (written or spoken word) and to have been recognized for notable contributions in their career. Submissions were evaluated by a peer committee comprised of representatives of the literary and poetry community. The Greater Victoria Public Library coordinated the selection process.

"Agartu's love of words will encourage young people in our community to tell their stories through poetry," said Maureen Sawa, CEO of the Greater Victoria Public Library. "We look forward to partnering with Agartu and giving youth opportunities to embrace the power of words."

Mentored by Victoria's Poet Laureate Yvonne Blomer, the Youth Poet Laureate creates and presents new works to Victoria City Council and Youth Council, conducts poetry readings at City and Greater Victoria Public Library events, and organizes a community youth poetry event.

The Youth Poet Laureate is an honorary one-year term position from January 1 to December 31, 2018. In addition to the year-long mentorship, the position receives a \$1,750 honorarium and \$1,000 of project funding. The Youth Poet Laureate position is funded by the City of Victoria and the Greater Victoria Public Library.

Victoria was the first municipality in Canada to have a Youth Poet Laureate. For more information, visit: www.victoria.ca/poetlaureate.

ATTACHMENT: Photo of Agartu Ali

— 30 —

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