



Meet Victoria's New Youth Poet Laureate – Neko Smart

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC – The City of Victoria and the Greater Victoria Public Library are pleased to announce Neko Smart as Victoria's new Youth Poet Laureate.

The Youth Poet Laureate serves as Victoria's champion for youth and the literary arts, seeking to inspire and engage local youth to share their stories through both the written and spoken word, and serves a one-year honorary term.

"In welcoming Neko Smart as the City's new Youth Poet Laureate, we recognize her unique talents," said Mayor Lisa Helps. "We look forward to the work she will do bringing people together and building community through spoken word."

Neko Smart is a graduate of Victoria High School, and the founder and former captain turned coach of the Vic High Slam Poetry Team. Neko's passion for performance was developed through her local theatre community. She realized the importance of self expression through the arts and embracing her quirky character. She encourages vulnerability in writing as a way of healing through written word.

"Poetry is a means of creative expression that enables me to process the world through the lens of my anxiety disorder," said Neko Smart, "As Youth Poet Laureate, my goal is to emphasize the importance of cultivating open dialogues about mental health in order to reduce stigma and increase safety, particularly in youth."

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.

"Neko'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 her and giving youth opportunities to embrace the power of the written word."

Mentored by Victoria's Poet Laureate John Barton, 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, 2020. In addition to the year-long mentorship, the position receives a \$1,750 honorarium and \$2,000 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: victoria.ca/poetlaureate.

ATTACHMENT: Photo of Neko Smart

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