

Teenager honoured for rights efforts

By Lindsay Kines, Times Colonist October 14, 2011

She lost her mother and very nearly her father to political violence in the Philippines five years ago. But rather than let that terrible moment destroy her life, 17-year-old Samantha Claver of Victoria has used it to help promote understanding and human rights.

On Thursday, she was honoured with an award of excellence for youth leadership from B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth.

Mary Ellen Turpell Lafond recognized Claver for sharing her personal experiences through theatre and public speaking, and for helping others through her involvement in community groups such as the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society.



University of Victoria student Lilia Zaharieva, 24, received the other youth leadership award for her efforts to inspire youth and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

The Mary Manning Centre in Victoria took home a service award of excellence for its longstanding work with child survivors of sexual abuse.

"It's an honour to recognize what these extraordinary people and organizations do in their communities," Turpell Lafond said in a statement announcing the fourth annual awards.

"They are providing resources and support that help young people improve their lives and put so many on a better path."

Samantha, a Grade 12 student at Victoria High School, said in an interview this week that she's following the example set by her parents.

"They wanted change and they fought for it whether it meant their lives," she said.

Dr. Constancio Claver and Alyce Omengan-Claver were political activists in the Philippines, where they were placed on a hit list and targeted by assassins, she said. In On July 31, 2006, they were shot while driving Samantha's younger sister to school.

"That day I lost my mom," Samantha said.

Her father survived, but was badly wounded. He went into hiding, moving between safe houses, before bringing his three children to Canada in 2007.

After the family settled in Victoria, Samantha got involved in the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, where she became active in theatre projects that raise awareness about immigration issues, trauma, bullying and exclusion.

This summer, she worked with Project Respect at the Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre, developing programs to prevent youth sexualized violence.

"I think she's a phenomenal young woman," Elicia Loiselle, the centre's prevention co-ordinator, said.

"She is incredibly dynamic and has just an amazing quality of including everyone."

Constancio Claver said it gives him "great satisfaction and fulfilment" to see his daughter honoured for such important work, but stressed that he wants his children to find their own path. "I do the same kind of work, but I don't want them to just be doing things because they're forced to," he said. "So this is something that she's doing on her own."

Samantha, who hopes to become a doctor, is one of a select group of students accepted into the University of Victoria's UStart program that offers an early taste of university.

She received her youth leadership award at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Vancouver.

A full list of the other winners and their biographies can be found at www.rcybc.ca.

lkines@timescolonist.com

twitter.com/lindsaykines

© Copyright (c) The Victoria Times Colonist