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News / Vancouver

Butterflies in Spirit founder shortlisted for national award

Lorelei Williams up for Samara Canada's Everyday Political Citizen prize, one of two B.C. finalists

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Lorelei Williams (left) performs with Butterflies in Spirit in this 2012 file photo.

By: [David P. Ball](#) Metro Published on Sun Nov 26 2017

One of British Columbia's most prominent advocates for missing and murdered Indigenous women has been shortlisted for Samara Canada's national citizenship award.

Vancouver's Lorelei Williams, 37, was nominated for her work with Butterflies in Spirit — a dance troupe she founded with fellow children of missing women. She told Metro she's "excited" her group's story will get another platform but that it hasn't been easy.

"I'm telling my family's story, my story, and my truth — it's been a lot of hard work telling those stories over and over again," said the Native Education College student in a phone interview. "I couldn't have gotten here without my communities, especially without my Butterflies."

Williams' cousin Tanya Holyk's DNA was found on serial killer Robert Pickton's farm; her aunt Belinda Williams remains missing.

Several months ago, Williams took her own family's story to Colombia, where her dance group performed and spoke at an international women's peace conference.

"One thing I learned was that when they advocate for their rights, they could die — just

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for the things I'm advocating for," the Skatin and Sts'ailes First Nation member told Metro in a phone interview. "Even when we were there, an advocate died.

"But when we performed they traveled so far to see us and meet us ... We told the women's groups about Canada's brutal history with our people and they were floored — they all said, 'We can't believe this is happening in Canada,' and asked if we wanted allies and to help each other fight our battles together."

Williams is one of two B.C. finalists for the Everyday Political Citizen Award — one of just nine Canadians over 30 shortlisted.

The Samara awards honour "the incredible impact that ordinary Canadians are having in communities across the country," said Samara Canada's Jane Hilderman in a statement.

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