

Winnipeg teen up for political award after nod from Rick Mercer

Kakeka Thundersky, 18, lost both her parents last year, volunteers at 5 different organizations

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An 18-year-old Indigenous woman is up for a prestigious political award, thanks in part to CBC's Rick Mercer.

Kakeka Thundersky has been selected as a finalist for the 2016 Everyday Political Citizen award from Samara Canada.

The teen has organized clothing drives for Siloam Mission and the Salvation Army, delivered Christmas hampers through The Winnipeg Christmas Cheer Board and volunteered with Got Bannock?, a group that prepares and hands out healthy meals on the streets of Winnipeg.

- [Winnipeg student rakes in backpacks for clients at Siloam Mission](#)

"Thunderbird House holds a special place in my heart too," she said. "It brings people together. I love it there ... I noticed how much of an impact they were having, and I wanted to be a part of that."

Thundersky said a difficult upbringing made her realize how important it was to volunteer.

"We often didn't have much money, much food. I have a bunch of siblings," she said. "Christmas Cheer Board would come in and help make Christmas a little bit less stressful ... Now that I'm currently not in those times, I can help them."

She said she was also inspired by her mom, Raven Thundersky, [who died last year after a battle with cancer](#).

"She was an activist in Winnipeg, an anti-asbestos activist and she did a lot for Sisters in Spirit, for missing and murdered indigenous women, so I had a lot of influence from my mom growing up," said Thundersky, who also lost her dad last year.

"It was really tough. You know, you lose both of your parents. Eventually, as time went on, I was just thinking, 'I can't just sit there. I can't just be sad all the time.' I guess I started giving back even more," she said.

She's now one of 20 finalists for the Samara Canada award and is the only Winnipeg candidate.

Thundersky was nominated by her sister, and Mercer later selected her as a finalist.

"To take action like this, to become a leader among your peers when even at the best of times it is so easy to retreat into your own world, is something I greatly admire," Mercer said in a release.

The non-partisan charity recognizes citizen works in politics, and the judging panel is made up of big Canadian names including Margaret Atwood and Cindy Blackstock.

"It's kind of weird having Rick Mercer pick you as a finalist, so it was really surprising," she said. "It's kind of weird being nominated for any award, especially this one."

Kakeka is currently studying at the University of Winnipeg to become a teacher. She hopes to teach in an Ojibway-immersion program in the future.

"I always try to be a role model because I have two younger sisters," she said. "I want my two little sisters to succeed."

The winner of the prize will be announced on Dec. 8.

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