

## **Feature Write-Up – Winner: Brandon Wong**

Brandon Wong has been named the *Inspiring Social Worker of the Year (2025)* for his outstanding dedication to advancing compassionate, ethical, and transformative care in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Specializing in mental health and substance use, Brandon has emerged as a leader within interdisciplinary healthcare teams, where his steady commitment to collaboration and trust has been vital to supporting communities facing profound challenges.

Since joining Vancouver Coastal Health in 2021, Brandon has demonstrated exceptional growth and leadership. He is recognized not only for his strong clinical skills, but also for his ability to create safe, inclusive spaces where colleagues and clients alike feel supported. Brandon consistently champions trauma-informed, client-centered practice, blending professional expertise with empathy and humility. His innovative work has improved access to services and inspired both peers and mentors across the healthcare system.

Brandon's practice reflects the very spirit of this award: resilience, justice, and hope. His unwavering belief in the dignity of all people continues to shape healthier communities and exemplifies the values of social work at its best.

## **Inspiring Social Worker of the Year – Honouring Nominees**

Each year, the *Inspiring Social Worker of the Year Award* recognizes one individual whose professional dedication and personal commitment to social justice stand out in extraordinary ways. Alongside the winner, many remarkable nominees submit strong applications that highlight the breadth of social work excellence across British Columbia. These individuals embody compassion, resilience, and innovation in their practice. We are proud to honor their contributions here, as their stories inspire colleagues, communities, and the next generation of social workers.

### **Nominee Profiles**

#### **Bopo Chan**

Bopo Chan is a compassionate social worker whose career in Canada began during the 2021 pandemic. Drawing on her leadership experience and deep commitment to advocacy, she has dedicated herself to serving vulnerable populations, particularly within busy community health settings. Bopo champions culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care, working to remove stigma from marginalized groups while advancing patient-centered healthcare. As a newcomer to Canada, she has also been a strong voice in building solidarity with BIPOC communities and in preserving cultural identity and heritage. Her work demonstrates resilience, dedication, and an inspiring ability to bridge cultural values with social justice practice.

### **Cherlyn McKay**

Cherlyn McKay is recognized for her thoughtful, client-centered, and creative approach to social work. Her practice is deeply rooted in anti-oppressive principles and a steadfast commitment to justice, which she integrates into both her work with clients and her collaboration with colleagues. Cherlyn is known for her hopeful and inventive spirit, consistently thinking beyond existing power structures to envision and work toward more equitable realities. She supports clients from diverse backgrounds with persistence and creativity, inspiring others through her ability to blend relational practice with systemic awareness.

### **Dr. Leah Douglas**

Dr. Leah Douglas (MSW, PhD, RCSW) is celebrated for her inspiring mentorship and leadership in both teaching and social work practice. As a long-serving faculty member and Chair at the University of the Fraser Valley, she has played a central role in the growth and success of the Master of Social Work program. Leah has guided more than 50 graduate students through their major research papers, providing rigorous academic supervision while fostering confidence and excellence. Beyond the classroom, she is recognized for her ability to motivate colleagues and students alike, combining professional expertise with genuine care.

### **Natasha Marriette**

Natasha Marriette is a dedicated social worker, educator, and mentor whose career reflects a deep commitment to advancing the profession. A graduate of the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) and now a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia, she has consistently combined academic excellence with community engagement. In 2024, Natasha joined UFV as an Assistant Professor, where she is already recognized for her leadership and mentorship of students. She is admired for her perseverance, her ability to inspire emerging social workers, and her vision for building equitable and supportive learning environments.

### **Shireen Soofi**

Shireen Soofi is a social worker and activist whose career reflects a profound dedication to social justice, healing, and human dignity. With more than a decade of experience supporting marginalized communities in Canada and abroad, her work centers lived experience while challenging systemic oppression. Shireen has engaged in community-based work with newcomers, youth, and other vulnerable groups, demonstrating a consistent commitment to building safety and belonging. Her practice integrates political awareness with compassion, making her a strong advocate for collective care and transformation.

### **Susan Soloman**

Susan Soloman, a proud Gitxsan social worker, has dedicated 14 years to advancing trauma-informed, culturally grounded, and community-driven practice through an Indigenous lens.

Holding a Master of Social Work specializing in Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency, Susan integrates ancestral knowledge and professional expertise to address the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism. Her leadership and advocacy reflect a profound commitment to social justice, with a focus on uplifting Indigenous communities and creating spaces of healing and strength.

### **Tammy Roche**

Tammy Roche, RCSW, AMHSW, is a Canadian-born clinical social worker who practices between Canada and Australia. Through her cross-continental initiative *Between Two Pines*, she has built a practice rooted in justice, accessibility, cultural safety, and collective care. Tammy is recognized for her dedication to supporting marginalized individuals and for advancing ethical private practice that sustains both clients and practitioners. Her work emphasizes the transformative power of presence—creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and understood. By fostering safety and connection, Tammy inspires healing and resilience, while also mentoring others in the field to thrive in their own practice.

### **Stuart Smith Swenson**

Stuart Smith Swenson, MSW, RSW, has dedicated his career to supporting people navigating substance use, mental health challenges, and systemic inequities. His work at Providence Health Care, particularly at Crosstown Clinic in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, has been defined by his commitment to harm reduction, trauma-informed care, and social justice. Stuart consistently advocated for equitable healthcare access, creating innovative programs such as contingency management groups and streamlined intake processes for safe supply services.