

Saskatchewan

Regina youth worker, residential school survivors advocate recognized with honours from Governor General



Mark Simms and Elizabeth Gagné among those receiving honours for exceptional dedication to service

[Bryan Eneas](#) · CBC News · Posted: Sep 14, 2019 4:00 PM CT | Last Updated: September 14



Mark Simms works with youth in Toronto and Regina to produce music videos and promote them to larger audiences. He was recognized on Thursday by the Governor General with the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. (CBC Marketplace)

Two Regina residents were among the Canadians recognized with honours by the Governor General this week for their exceptional service.

Gov. Gen. Julie Payette presented 40 Canadians with honours, including the Decoration for Bravery, the Meritorious Service Decoration, the Polar Medal and the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers, at Rideau Hall in Ottawa on Thursday.

Mark Simms received the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers, which "pays tribute to the dedication and exemplary commitment of volunteers," according to [a news release from the Governor General's office](#).

Simms earned the recognition for his work with at-risk and vulnerable youth in both the Jane and Finch neighbourhood in Toronto, and in North Central in Regina.

"[It felt] really overwhelming," Simms said of winning the award. "It's a pleasure to be there, in [other winners'] presence. At times I felt like I didn't deserve to be there, just hearing the things some of these other people did."

Another recipient, though, told him not to downplay or devalue his own volunteer efforts.

"I guess that's true. It shows that volunteering is very important, so we can get other people to get involved, and also being a role model for younger kids as well — just showing them it's good to put in their time," Simms said.



Gov. Gen. Julie Payette, seen here in a 2018 file photo, presented the honours at Rideau Hall on Thursday. (Justin Tang/Canadian Press)

Simms's work includes video production, and working with young people in Regina's North Central and in Toronto's Jane and Finch neighbourhoods to help them create rap music videos

at no charge.

He was praised for his 15 years of work with Jane-Finch.com, and for using "the power of the internet and video to give voice to marginalized residents" in the news release from the Governor General's office.

He said he works with Indigenous youth behind the camera as well, teaching them how to use the equipment. It's an effort he makes to give kids tangible skills and expose them to potential careers in his industry.

"A lot of these guys, they want these skills. There's just no one around to teach them," Simms said.

Simms said Jane-Finch.com is a "jump off" platform that's used to promote the work of young people, which can lead to exposure from other media outlets. Simms said one of the videos was even picked up by MuchMusic.

He said he's now working on a short film in the Toronto area, but still hopes to return to Regina to work with young artists here.

Cemetery clean-up efforts earn recognition

Regina's Elizabeth Gagné was also a recipient of the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers.

She was recognized for her efforts around honouring the survivors of residential schools, including her work to organize Orange Shirt Day activities at Harvest City Christian Academy in Regina.

- [**On Orange Shirt Day, Sask. teachers express pain, importance of teaching students about residential schools**](#)
- [**Cemetery walk honours children lost to Regina Indian Industrial School**](#)

Residential school survivors were invited to the school to speak about their experiences during those events, the Governor General's news release said.

Gagné has also organized educational trips to the Regina Indian Industrial School Cemetery.

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