



# News Release

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## For Immediate Release

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### **UBC PSYCHOLOGIST, UBC EARLY EDUCATION GRAD STUDENT HONOURED WITH KORCZAK AWARDS**

VANCOUVER – A devoted child rights advocate who insists on the inclusion of children’s voices in research and on all matters that affect them is this year’s recipient of the prestigious Janusz Korczak Medal for Children’s Rights Advocacy. Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl has been awarded the medal in honour of her long career elevating the voices of children and youth.

During the same virtual ceremony, Early Childhood Education master’s student Cayley Burton received the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada Graduate Scholarship in Children’s Rights and Indigenous Education. Both recipients are associated with the University of British Columbia (UBC) Faculty of Education.

The medal was presented by B.C. Representative for Children and Youth Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth and Korczak Association President Jerry Nussbaum in a virtual ceremony, during which Dr. Charlesworth delivered the UBC Faculty of Education Dean’s Distinguished Lecture, *Rights and Belonging: Bringing Korczak’s Legacy to Life in Contemporary Times*. The scholarship was presented by Dr. Anton Grunfeld.

Janusz Korczak was a Polish-Jewish author and pediatrician, best known for his selfless heroism in 1942 when, as an orphanage director in Warsaw, he refused offers of freedom and accompanied the children in his care to a Nazi extermination camp. His visionary and far-reaching ideas around child voice and child rights continue to be influential in the present day.

The work of Janusz Korczak has been a driving force through Dr. Schonert-Reichl’s nearly 40-year career as a teacher, researcher, professor and Director of the Human Early Learning Partnership at UBC. Prior to receiving her Ph.D., she worked as a middle school teacher and taught at an alternative high school for “at-risk” adolescents. During her MA work, she lived and worked as a child therapist at a residential treatment institution that was profoundly influenced by the work of Dr. Korczak.

B.C. is seen as a world leader in the field of social and emotional learning due, in part, to Dr. Schonert-Reichl’s work. She has taught a large number of educational professionals, has acted as an advisor to the Ministry of Education and was one of the architects of B.C.’s renewed education curriculum.

“Too often we see research being conducted on children, rather than in collaboration with them, leading to skewed results that do not reflect their priorities,” says Schonert-Reichl. “Korczak said that children are people now, not just people of the future. Children know what they want and need. Their perspectives are vital to ensuring that our research and programming is relevant and truly supports their life-long well-being. To have my work recognized with this award is a tremendous honour that reinforces my most fundamental beliefs.”

Meanwhile, Burton’s work focuses on gender-inclusive teaching practices for preschool children through the use of LGBTQ+ picture books. Her interests centre around cultivating awareness, acceptance and knowledge among 3- to 5-year-olds about the social and cultural diversity of childhood gendered experiences.

“For me, it’s about honouring the individuality and agency of every child to express themselves authentically,” says Burton. “Like Korczak, I believe that children are intelligent and capable, and I am committed to elevating and showcasing their voices which are too often silenced in adult-centred societies.”

Charlesworth says the two recipients are an inspiring pair who are blazing trails for others.

“Janusz Korczak’s beliefs, actions and writings demonstrate why children’s rights matter and how to put them at the centre of our work,” says Charlesworth. “As we navigate a turbulent time of tremendous uncertainty, Dr. Schonert-Reichl and Cayley Burton are both living into the vision that Korczak had for child rights and belonging. It is so fitting that they should be honoured in his name.”

The Janusz Korczak Association of Canada was established in February 2002, with its home in Vancouver. The association is devoted to the ideals and legacy of Korczak (1878-1942). His teachings and work remain powerful and relevant for educators, social workers and children’s advocates committed to social justice and education for democratic citizenship.

The association’s mandate is to support the human rights of all children and to foster recognition of Korczak’s humanism and sacrifice. It strives to teach others about this man, whose ideas were adopted by the United Nations in its *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1989.

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