

NEXT GEN | SURREY NOW-Leader

Celebrating Surrey's Youth

Be The Light scholarships help South Asian girls

2026 applications now open after gala fundraiser

Tom Zillich

Scholarship applications for 2026 are now open through Be The Light Society (BTLS), a volunteer-run, registered non-profit charity that supports South Asian girls in their pursuit of post-secondary education.

In December the Surrey-based organization reached its goal to donate 20 scholarships, each valued at \$2,500, to deserving South Asian girls in financial need in B.C. high schools in 2026.

Announced last September, most of the 2025 scholarship recipients attend Surrey schools including five students at L.A. Matheson Secondary (Anmol Panesar, Arshiyot Dhanda, Avneet Sahota, Komalpreet Kaur Kooner and

Sharan Dhariwal) along with Anahat Sidhu (Lord Tweedsmuir Secondary), Anmol Kaur Dayal and Jaisleen Kaur Gill (Sullivan Heights), Ekjot Kaur Johal (Khalsa Secondary), Komal Sangha (Queen Elizabeth Secondary), Rida Chaudhary (Frank Hurt Secondary), Sudita Chawla (Panorama Ridge), Tanveer Kaur Gill (Tamanawis) and Arshmin Kaur Gill (Princess Margaret Secondary).

"Many of this year's BTLS scholarship recipients are now beginning their post-secondary programs, putting their awards directly into action," says a post on bethelightsociety.ca.

On Nov. 18, more than 200 South Asian women representing all industries and professions came together to raise funds for these scholarships at the fourth annual Be The Light Gala, held at Fairmont Pacific Rim in Vancouver.

By awarding 62 scholarships in four years, the society celebrates "not only



Be The Light gala-goers at Fairmont Pacific Rim in Vancouver on Nov. 18, 2025. (Contributed to Surrey Now-Leader)

the achievements of its recipients but also the collective efforts of donors, volunteers and community members who make this meaningful impact possible," according to Karen Dosanjh, BTLS

board member.

"Seeing our community unite to raise the funds needed for these scholarships was incredibly inspiring," Dosanjh said. "At Be the Light Society, we believe

that every donate is vote of confidence in a young girl's dreams, and we are profoundly grateful for the generosity that has fueled our collective mission to empower future generations."

Scholarship recipients are selected for their community involvement, financial hardship and ability to persevere. Academic success will be considered but is not a deciding factor.

The scholarships will be presented in June 2026.

Visit bethelightsociety.ca/scholarships for eligibility requirements and more information.

"We are thrilled to open this year's scholarship applications and encourage South Asian girls across B.C. to apply," Dosanjh added.

"Each scholarship represents more than financial support, it's a clear message to these girls that their dreams matter, their hard work is seen, and their future is full of limitless possibilities."

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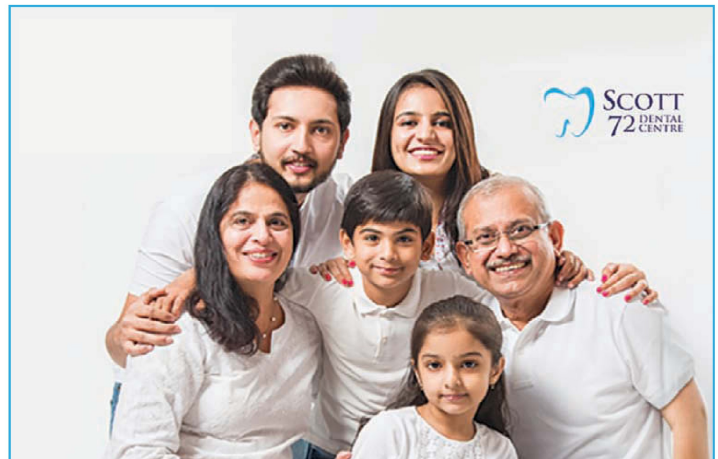
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– Celebrating Surrey's Youth –



The Dhahan Youth Award winners and their teachers. From left to right, L.A. Matheson Secondary Punjabi teacher and language department head Gurpreet Kaur Bains; Dasmesh Punjabi School student Mandeep Kaur Sandhu; L.A. Matheson students Arshdeep Kaur Sidhu and Navdeep Kaur Gill; Dasmesh Punjabi School student Inderdeep Kaur; Princess Margaret Secondary student Jasmeet Kaur Bassi; Coast Capital broker relations manager Parveen Brar; and L.A. Matheson principal Sunny Deol. (Dhahan Youth Award /Contributed to Black Press Media)

Surrey students earn 2025 Dhahan Youth Award

Students from L.A. Matheson, Prince Margaret and Queen Elizabeth secondary schools honoured

Grace McLeod

Students from L.A. Matheson, Prince Margaret and Queen Elizabeth secondary schools were among eight winners of the 2025 Dhahan Youth Award.

The annual Dhahan Youth Award ceremony took place in November, featuring stories and written works from secondary school students in both Punjabi and English. Surrey Schools says that this yearly showcase serves as a way

for Punjabi youth "to embrace their rich cultural heritage" through creative writing in the Punjabi language.

The Dhahan Youth Award was founded in 2017, in partnership with L.A. Matheson and Coast Capital, and has since featured numerous Surrey Schools students over the years.

This year's awards were presented at the 12th annual Dhahan Prize for Punjabi Literature ceremonies. Eight students earned awards – six of them being Grade 11 and 12 students in Surrey schools.

This year's winners from Surrey Schools are:

- Arshdeep Kaur Sidhu, L.A. Matheson Secondary
- Navdeep Kaur Gill, L.A. Matheson Secondary
- Simran Kaur Choongh, L.A. Matheson Secondary
- Jasmeen Rai, Princess Margaret Secondary
- Jasmeet Kaur Bassi, Prin-

cess Margaret Secondary • Ramneet Sidhu, Queen Elizabeth Secondary

Other recipients include Mandeep Kaur Sandhu and Inderdeep Kaur of Dasmesh Punjabi School in Abbotsford.

These winners received framed certificates, prize money and the publication of their work in *Lofty Heights*, an anthology of the winning submissions from this year's Dhahan Youth Award winners.

Lofty Heights is published in the Punjabi scripts of Gurmukhi and Shahmukhi, as well as in English and French.

The stories must originate in Punjabi, and the students are tasked with translating their original Punjabi story into English on their own.

The Dhahan Prize for Punjabi Literature will soon be accepting submissions for the 2026 Dhahan Youth Award. For more information, visit dhahanprize.com



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Surrey students shortlisted for \$100K Loran Award

Grace McLeod

Two Surrey secondary school students are among the 2026 Loran Finalists in the running for a prestigious scholarship offered by the Loran Scholars Foundation.

Grade 12 students Ibrahim Shaaban of École Earl Marriott Secondary and Aiden Rothmund of Grandview Heights Secondary have made the list of 90 shortlisted candidates, selected from more than 5,000 student applicants nationwide.

Surrey Schools says that they were chosen after semifinal interviews were conducted to identify key qualities founded in Loran Scholars. This process included demonstrated strength of character, a deep commitment to service and exceptional leadership potential.

Both students now must await national selections that



Grade 12 students Ibrahim Shaaban of École Earl Marriott Secondary (left) and Aiden Rothmund of Grandview Heights Secondary (right) have made the list of 90 shortlisted candidates for the Loran award (The Loran Scholars Foundation / Contributed to Surrey Now-Leader)

will be made in February to determine if they are named two of this year's Loran Scholars.

The Loran Award is valued at \$100,000 over four years and consists of an annual stipend and tuition waiver from 25 partner universities.

They will also receive one-on-one mentorship, up to \$14,000 in funding for summer work experiences, annual

retreats and membership in a community of values-driven individuals.

If these two are not selected as a Loran Scholar, they still are eligible for a \$6,000 award that can be used at any Canadian public university.

For more information on how to apply for this scholarship going forward go to loranscholar.ca.

Schools share the spirit of giving

Surrey schools were filled with the spirit of giving over the holiday season.

Here are a few highlights of how local schools gave back to their communities in 2025:

- Newton Elementary and Woodland Park Elementary helped out the Surrey Food Bank. Newton's classes collected more than 36 boxes of food for the Surrey Food Bank, and Woodland Park raised \$942 and filling 30 boxes of food.

- Fraser Heights Secondary students and staff built dozens of rocking toys for the Surrey Christmas Bureau, volunteering their time to support those in need while also raising \$1,450 for local families. It was the 23rd year for the project.

- L.A. Matheson Secondary's Punjabi classes hosted the school's annual Holiday Angel Tree Drive for the Surrey Women's Centre, collecting essential items and toys for care packages for women and



L.A. Matheson Secondary has hosted its annual Holiday Angel Tree Drive since 2010. The school's Punjabi classes gathered donations for the Surrey Women's Centre. (Surrey Schools photo)

children to support survivors fleeing violence. The school has hosted its annual Holiday Angel Tree Drive since 2010, with the school's Punjabi classes gathering donations for the Surrey Women's Centre as its charity of focus for the past three years.

- Earl Marriott Secondary School held a Christmas food drive featuring an annual friendly school-wide competition.

Students rounded up donations of non-perishable food items, toys and money for Sources Food Bank.

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