

## Shabina Lafleur-Gangji: Winner of the 2016 AHG Victoria Fortner Award in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The winner of the AHG's Victoria Fortner Award in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is Shabina Lafleur-Gangji of southern Ontario, Canada. Shabina works with a number of organizations and collectives that use herbal knowledge to help heal traumatic loss of culture and contribute to the self determination of racialized people. Shabina's work as an herbalist and herbal educator aims to focus on the experiences of racialized people in order to heal the legacies of white supremacy and colonial violence.

Shabina believes that in order to bring justice to the centuries of violence imposed on indigenous people, black people, and other racialized communities, we must ensure that people have access to affordable herbal health care and are supported in receiving herbal education programs, in learning from their own community members, and in their struggles for self-determination. As a queer, mixed-race herbal medicine educator, her work is heavily influenced by healing justice work and movements for liberation.

Alongside other community herbalists, she co-founded the Rizing Roots Collective. Under the direction of Jamaican and Mexican immigrant workers, they collaborated with Growing Community Health and Fuerza-Puwersa to create a 'zine entitled "Herbs and Health." The publication discusses ways to prevent the main health problems for which workers are deported. It was translated into Spanish and Tagalog (a language of Philippine immigrants) and has been distributed to several hundred workers through health fairs for migrant workers.

Shabina has used her herbal knowledge to support and work closely with organizations such as Our Sustenance, Asian Arts Freedom School, and Black Lives Matter Toronto to create herbal education programming, run affordable/sliding scale clinics, raise funds, and build educational

resources. She is currently teaching sliding scale, drop-in herbal medicine classes where she offers subsidies for black, brown, and indigenous students. Shabina also facilitates the School Grown program in Toronto where she mentors youth in growing market gardens at their high schools.

Shabina has been formally studying and teaching about herbs for over eight years. She is a 2009 graduate of Michael Vertolli's Holistic Herbal program, is a 2014 diplomate in Ayurveda and Panchakarma from studies in Kerala, India, and is currently enrolled in the Professional Herbalist program at East West School of Planetary Herbology and the Herbal Medicine for Women program with Aviva Romm, MD. She has also studied informally with Nadine Ijaz and Janette Cormier.

Shabina draws from her education in Western Herbalism and Ayurvedic medicine to facilitate workshops on a broad variety of topics. She recently joined the faculty at the Centre for Ayurveda and Indian Systems of Healing in Toronto where she is teaching about the energetics of western and Ayurvedic herbs. While her education has focused mostly on herbs, Shabina also has studied and taught about cupping therapy, birth doula support, HIV/AIDS prevention, permaculture, racial and transformative justice, and alternatives to incarceration. ■

[www.shabinalafleurgangji.com](http://www.shabinalafleurgangji.com)

*To learn more about the AHG's Victoria Fortner Award or to make a nomination for the 2017 award, please visit <http://www.americanherbalistsguild.com/symposium/victoria-fortner-award>.*



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Shabina Lafleur-Gangji working with *Matricaria chamomilla* (chamomile)