

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**INTRODUCING MENDOCINO COUNTY'S NEWEST YOUTH POET
LAUREATES – AUBREY MCHONE AND IRIE WAGAR**

Ukiah, CA | February 2, 2026 – California Poets in the Schools (CalPoets) announces Mendocino county's third Youth Poet Laureates – Aubrey Mchone of Point Arena High School and Irie Wager of Ukiah High School.

Mendocino county follows the lead of the nation, the state and sister counties (Alameda, Los Angeles, Sonoma and Ventura) in acknowledging a student who has achieved excellence in poetry, allowing them to be a leader for the county in raising the profile of poetry and developing its audience.

Both candidates were selected from a qualified pool of applicants by a panel of judges. The judging panel included distinguished poets and teachers from throughout the county and Aubrey Mchone and Irie Wagar were so strong that the committee decided to grant the award to both of them.

Aubrey Rose Mchone, a Junior at Point Arena High School, described by her peers and close friends as a 'bubbly personality' is ecstatic to be awarded this momentous opportunity. Growing up she sought that one of the only ways she could truly express her innate emotion and pain was through poetry. Writing down feeling in a systematic structure to give the nameless a name. So it's not just a thought but a physical format by which she can share. In doing so, Aubrey found that through sharing her performative poetry she can inspire those who resonate with her words to write down their own thoughts. Not just as a means of expression to share with others, but also a therapeutic release in which people can write down the struggles that plague them day to day.

Aubrey says, "I have always wanted to help other people. It is my "purpose" in life. I plan to go into the medical field to help others, and am doing what I can now to help my community. I hope to aid as many people as I can in finding a voice in which they can express themselves. As, it's imperative to instill the imaginative process in thought to lead to tangible change. Audre Lorde's Essay 'Poetry is Not a Luxury' punctuates this very topic. I believe for a society and its people to meet positive growth, the creative process and the innate imagination must be present. To ultimately allow for new ideas that can translate to a new means to help others. I wish to continue this installation of new found thought to better our community".

Irie Wagar is also honored to accept this incredible position as Mendocino County Youth Poet Laureate. Irie has a strong passion for the arts, writing her heart away while participating in too many plays to count and always striving to do her absolute best work. She loves the creative process, and even when it gets to be too much, she has preserved and made beautiful art. As a 17-year-old senior, at Ukiah High School Irie has found a plethora of older voices to look up to, two of which being her drama teacher, Chris

Douthit and her creative writing teacher, Michael Riedell. Irie chooses to surround herself by nature, finding beauty in every insect, hungry for the unique.

Irie says, “I believe poetry can be found anywhere, from a dirty subway to the top of Mount Fuji, in the depths of the soil and in the hearts of others. I don’t turn away from artistic possibilities. I believe my work is honest and emotional because I prioritize making sure my art comes from the deepest place in my heart. It’s the kind of art that makes me a better person. I cannot express how ecstatic and proud of myself I am. It is such an honor to be chosen as the Youth Poet Laureate of Mendocino County.”

Current Poet Laureate of Point Arena and long-time poet teacher with California Poets in the Schools, Blake More is coordinating the Mendocino County Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) program as part of a national and statewide project with support from California Poets the Schools, Urban Word NYC, the Arts Council of Mendocino County and the Mendocino County Office of Education.

When asked about the purpose of the YPL project, More says: "I am so lucky to be living my soul purpose, because as a lifelong artist and poet, I believe I, like all creators, have a duty to share our love of craft with the next generations. It is how we keep our art fresh as well as continue the legacy of self-expression. This is an incredible project, and now in its third iteration, I am very excited to help Aubrey and Irie get their amazing voices out into the world. It is my honor to guide them through their upcoming journey as Mendocino County’s third and fourth Youth Poet Laureates.”

Aubrey & Irie’s term as Mendocino County’s Youth Poet Laureates begin February 1, 2026 and continues through June 2028. Within that time, both youth poets are committed to conduct at least five public appearances/readings/workshops – ideally one within each supervisorial district, virtual or otherwise. Each will receive assistance in publishing a collection of her poems.

Schools and community organizations are encouraged to contact Irie and Aubrey (through Blake More, at California Poets in the Schools – blake@arenatechcenter.org) if you are interested in hosting one or both of them at a public event – which we encourage you to do.

The Mendocino County program is organized by California Poets in the Schools and supported by the Bill Graham Supporting Foundation, with additional in-kind support from the Arts Council of Mendocino County and Mendocino County Office of Education.

Click here to access the 2026-28 Mendocino Youth Poet Laureate Media Kit including photos: <https://bmoreyou.net/mendocino-county-youth-poet-laureate-2026-2028/>

Stay tuned for a virtual poetry reading to celebrate Aubrey and Irie’s appointment as the Third and Fourth Mendocino Youth Poet Laureates!

About California Poets in the Schools

California Poets in the Schools, a non-profit founded in 1964, is one of the nation's largest literary Artists-in-the-Schools programs. Over one hundred trained, professional Poet-Teachers deliver poetry sessions throughout California to students in K-12 classrooms and a variety of other venues, such as children's homes, juvenile halls and hospitals. Students are empowered to express their creativity, imagination, and intellectual curiosity through writing, performing and publishing their own poetry.

Since its founding in 1964, CalPoets has inspired over one million students in sixty thousand classrooms to create six million poems. Many of the young people reached through our programs are low-income, rural or second language learners. Student poetry is published in an annual, juried statewide anthology. High-school students from many counties are coached by our Poet-Teachers to compete in tiered Poetry Out Loud competitions from the classroom to the national level. Poet-Teachers gather at yearly symposia for ongoing professional development and community building.

For immediate information, please contact:

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