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**MEDIA RELEASE**

# Criminology students fundraise for homicides' survivors

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Buoyed by their passion for restorative justice, up to 30 Simon Fraser University criminology students in the [Centre for Restorative Justice](#) (CRJ) are helping to give a pioneering initiative a running start.

They are ready to walk or run in this summer's [Scotiabank Vancouver Half-Marathon & 5k](#) on June 26 to raise \$90,000 to launch Vancouver's first B.C. Victims of Homicide (BCVH) group.

The [13th annual run/walk](#) raises money for more than 40 charities, and BCVH is the new kid on the course.

An initiative of the [B.C. Bereavement Helpline](#) (BCBH), the group would provide the following:

- An eight-week bereavement workshop series for the family and friends of women whose deaths are connected to the B.C. Missing Women case;
- An eight-week bereavement workshop series for homicides' survivors in general;
- A monthly drop-in for graduates of these workshop series; and
- A summer barbeque social outreach event.

Another 50 SFU-CRJ students have expressed interest in participating in the Scotiabank fundraiser, which has enlisted five teams so far. They are Team Scotiabank, [Chris Ducharme Family & Friends](#), Concordia University, the College of Alberta, the BCBH and the SFU Hummingbirds.

Colleen Pawlychka, an SFU-CRJ doctoral student and teaching assistant, and [Brenda Morrison](#), CRJ co-director and assistant professor, lead the SFU team, whose name is based on the book *Parable of a Hummingbird*. "We need a sponsor for our hummingbird t-shirts so we can take flight. It would be fantastic to have a range of incentive prizes for the students too," says Morrison, who welcomes offers.

She credits Chris Ducharme, a Scotiabank employee and the son of a woman murdered by her boyfriend — a former police officer at the time — with inspiring CRJ students to join the fundraiser.

Ducharme, a BCBH board member, has lectured eight times to CRJ students since 2009 about how B.C.'s lack of therapy and support for the family and friends of homicide victims affected him.

Leading up to the federal justice department's annual **National Victims of Crime Awareness Week**, April 10 to 16, Ducharme spoke at SFU in late March. He will be a speaker at the national federal symposium connected to weeklong event in Ottawa on April 11.

"Chris' talk to the class was truly inspirational," says Morrison. "His story reveals the gaps in a justice system that is offender focused. Twenty of my students wrote long letters to Chris telling him how he has changed their thinking about justice, and how his story has moved them personally. All of the students signed a card made by one of their classmates."

— 30 —

### **Backgrounder: SFU involvement in victims of homicide fundraiser**

**Alana Abramson**, a doctoral student in SFU's Centre for Restorative Justice and the executive director of the North Shore Restorative Justice Society, will run to raise funds for the B.C. Victims of Homicide (BCVH) group.

Having lost a friend in a 2008 high-profile murder case in the downtown eastside, Abramson has a professional and personal grasp of why the BCVH is greatly needed. She says: "I believe deeply in restorative justice. I know how important support services and community relationships are to give hope and support healing of friends and family of homicide victims. Often their survivors are stigmatized and labeled and this is devastating."

Adds **Liz Elliott**, CRJ co-director and associate professor, "CRJ is about healing harms, and includes victims and offenders equally in the quest to heal. Often survivors are left out of the equation because the traditional criminal justice system sees them as witnesses. The proposed support group would help survivors heal from trauma."

Ducharme, who hopes the fundraiser will net a \$150,000 federal government commitment to the proposed group, says: "I have lost five people personally to homicide. This truth motivates students to support a community event that relates to their education and real world issues."

Ducharme notes B.C.'s growing number of high profile cases among its roughly 118 yearly murders is raising awareness of the needs of homicide survivors. Vancouver had the third highest homicide rates in Canada between 1997 and 2006. More recently, there were 532 murders from 2005 to 2009 in B.C., making B.C.'s murder rate the second highest provincially for that period (Stats. Canada).

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