

MEDIA RELEASE

North Simcoe Victim Services invites new volunteers to Information Night & Open House

January 22, 2019 – Orillia, ON

Crisis response volunteers with North Simcoe Victim Services (NSVS) support people during what is possibly the worst time in their lives. Crisis responders provide a unique service of supporting those in crisis and the victims of crime and tragic circumstance.

Because of the nature of their work, the organization provides an extensive training program that teaches volunteers about all the different types of cases they will be responding to, in cooperation with first responder partners. Their role is to provide immediate emotional and practical support, while also freeing up time for police, fire and paramedic responders to do their job.

For those who are interested in learning about the role of a crisis responder and the training program, NSVS is offering an **Information Night & Open House on Wednesday, February 27**. The Info Night takes place at Fire Station One at 500 Gill Street in Orillia from 7 to 9 pm and is free. The event coincides with the association's official formation when it became incorporated as a not-for-profit organization 20 years ago.

"This is a special Information Night that we're offering in recognition of our 20th Anniversary," explained NSVS Executive Director Frances Yarbrough. "It will be an opportunity for future volunteers to meet current volunteers and hear from some of the NSVS trainers who offer sessions related to the types of situations volunteers are asked to assist with, such as assaults, intimate partner violence, motor vehicle accidents and tragic circumstances such as house fires."

"Each year we're fortunate to attract a group of very committed volunteers who are passionate about the work they do," said Yarbrough. "Our volunteers value the education and training they receive, which not only prepares them for their roles with NSVS, but also supports other career and life goals they may have."

Alex Brancatella is looking forward to a career in policing and is confident that his role as a crisis response volunteer was crucial in helping him become a successful candidate with the Ontario Provincial Police. “The volunteer opportunity with Victim Services caught my attention because my goal has always been to work in policing to help people.”

Alex said that working hand-in-hand with first responders in different situations, as well as interacting with victims himself, was invaluable. The NSVS calls he attended ranged from domestic violence incidents to vehicle accidents.

“There’s no better experience in my mind if you are trying to get into policing,” said Alex. “We are supporting people in crisis or suffering from mental illness or experiencing loss. These are the things police and victim services deal with every single day.”

As a victim of domestic violence herself, **Tara Stewart** was aware of what victim services organizations do and got involved with NSVS as a social work student. She has been a volunteer crisis responder for over two years and is now a placement student with the organization, as she completes the requirements for the final year of the Honours Bachelor of Social Work program at Lakehead University.

“Once I began my work as a NSVS volunteer, I was blown away by the realm of calls the organization receives and the diversity of situations, cultural backgrounds and circumstances where volunteers provide support. People that access these services don’t have anyone to lean on; the fact that we can be that person – even if it is simply sitting with them, or making a cup of tea for them – means so much.”

Originally from Owen Sound, Tara found that the experience has not only been extremely relevant to her education, but has also helped her get to know the community and its resources. “I think this will definitely help as I enter the workforce,” said Tara.

For **Sheila Whitmell-MacDonald**, being a volunteer with NSVS has given her the chance to give back and help her community. As an “empty nester,” Sheila was ready for a new and meaningful opportunity. She has been a crisis responder with NSVS for over 5 years and finds gratification in the role, even though it involves being with people during sad and tragic situations.

“Even in the worst, darkest hours of someone’s life, there is something very special about being with them and sharing what they are experiencing. Whatever is going on in that moment, we are able to listen, provide support and often find something positive in those dark moments.”

Sheila, like many other NSVS volunteers, has found that the NSVS training extends beyond her work on calls with the organization. She recalls a recent incident as she was on her way to an afternoon social event.

“I noticed a gentleman standing at the edge of a bridge and I recognized that something wasn’t right. I stopped and spoke with him, remembering what we learned in our suicide prevention training session.” Sheila spoke with him and remained with him until a police vehicle

approached and took him safely to the hospital. “Since sharing my experience, I know it has inspired others to pay attention to situations where your help can make a huge difference.”

To find out more about the services of the organization and how to become a Crisis Response volunteer, consider attending the February 27 Info Night. It’s open to all, is free and takes place at Fire Station One at 500 Gill Street in Orillia from 7 to 9 pm. To reserve your spot, email volunteers@ns-vs.com or call 705-325-5578.

Crisis responder volunteer applications are due March 8, with training beginning on March 18. The training runs for seven weeks on Monday and Wednesday evenings and one Saturday. In addition, there is an online component, contributing to a total of 60 training hours before new recruits are sent into the field. NSVS volunteers respond to calls for assistance in teams of two, with new volunteers partnered with an experienced volunteer during their first few shifts.

Since North Simcoe Victim Services has been operating in the Orillia area, thousands of people have been assisted in a time of crisis. Volunteers respond to calls 365 days-a-year as part of three-person team that is on-call for assigned 12-hour shifts. Currently there are over 70 volunteers who cover 2,190 on-call shifts each year. The organization hopes to attract a full class of 20 to its next training program in March.

– 30 –



North Simcoe Victim Services Crisis Responder volunteers (l to r), Tara, Sheila and Alex are part of a special community team that provides crisis service and support 24/7, 365 days a year. New volunteers are invited to apply to join the organization for the next training program, beginning in March, and to attend a free Information Night on February 27.

Media Contact: Frances Yarbrough exdir@ns-vs.com 705-325-5578