



CANADIAN RESOURCE CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME  
Ensuring the equitable treatment of crime victims in Canada

# EMPOWER

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**Sign the Petition** to encourage your MP to review and update the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. (Petition created by the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime)

## “I Wear Something of Hers Every. Single. Day.”

### How Would You Cope With the Murder of Your Young Daughter?

“Christina had a big heart,” says her mother, Sherryl Fraser. “She would buy homeless people food from McDonald’s. She had a presence about her. She was a great listener. Christina had this gift of being able to counsel people.”

Her gift was taken away on Easter Sunday morning in March 2016 when Christina Voelzing was caught in the crossfire - and the egos - of a current and former boyfriend.

As the former burst into the West-Ottawa townhome Christina rented with her roommates, she ran downstairs from her bedroom to intervene.

Shots rang out. One severed her carotid artery. The potential that was Christina’s life would soon be over, creating an instant void in the lives of the people who loved her.

Sherryl awoke to the sound of her phone. “Christina’s been shot,” she read. The sender was from one of the soon-to-be-convicted felons who caused her death.

Sherryl’s life and the life of her daughter’s surviving loved ones were altered forever, throwing them into an abyss they have to live with for the rest of their lives.

With her background in social work, working with criminals and victims alike, Sherryl is able to compartmentalize the feelings and emotions brought on by the violent loss of her only daughter.

### How does she cope?

“There’s not a moment that she’s not in my thoughts. I wear something of hers every single day. I wear a piece of her jewellery, taking it off only when I’m working out.”

“She’s with me all the time. Her friends continue to celebrate her. We do a Christmas tree at her gravesite every year. We celebrate her birthdays. We meet on the anniversary of her death. It will be five years this March.”

Sherryl is acutely aware of how fast time has passed. The void left by her daughter's death continues to impact those closest to her.

When Christina was shot, her older brother Brian was living halfway around the world in Dubai, pursuing his dreams of becoming an executive chef.

As Christina lay in the hospital on life support, her parents decided to try and keep her alive long enough for Brian to get home to Ottawa to see his little sister one more time.



What must have been going through his mind during the thirty-six-hour journey to her bedside, wonders Sherryl.

Closer to home, Christina's stepfather Dave and her stepbrothers Ben and Noah were all dealing with this avoidable tragedy in ways of their own.

### **The Slow Road to Healing**

"I'm a very strong person to begin with. I don't share my tears in public very often," says Sherryl. "To me, that's a very private emotion."

Yet, deep inside, she is never sure what will trigger the deep well of emotions constantly brewing deep inside.

She worries about her son. "Children of divorced parents crave continuity," notes Sherryl. And, although he had been living abroad for five years before the death of his little sister, "Christina and Brian were very, very close."

"For him to come home and deal with Christina's death was hard." It still is to this day. "I wonder what it will be like for him as he deals with his loss.

This November, Sherryl is travelling 11,000 kilometres to see her son, her daughter-in-law and her granddaughter, who is "*the spitting image of my daughter when she was a baby*".

Travelling halfway around the world is a challenge, especially during a pandemic. There are so many details to take care of to make sure you arrive safely. You need a plan.

The same truth occurs when you are on a journey to try and heal from trauma. The main difference being, you may never know if or when you'll arrive at a destination.

When Sherryl looked for resources to help her cope with Christina's murder, she found none.

Part of Sherryl's healing process included getting back to work two weeks after Christina's death, where her colleagues and students supported her in ways she could never have imagined.

One day, as she drove to the college campus where she works, Sherryl remembers thinking; *there is no support for survivors of homicide*. She decided she would set up a victims group for those who were going through what she continued to cope with. Then, within a week of that thought, Sherryl received a call from the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime. There was a new victims of homicide support group. Would she like to attend?

This was the call Sherryl was waiting for.

"I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know who the other people in the room would be." Yet as she looked around the first evening, Sherryl realized '*all these people are just like me*'.

The group taught Sherryl things she never knew. She learned about victim's compensation and how to navigate uncharted waters. She was connected to others who were in the same boat and able to offer solace.

"You need to purge. You need to get things out. The group is a safe environment that allows you to share whatever is on your mind, with no judgement," notes Sherryl.

***"The CRCVC provides the life raft you can grab onto until you can walk out on your own two feet and ready to face the world because this is the worst place in the world you***

could ever be.”

To support students in the victimology program, Sherryl created the “**Christina Voelzing Memorial Award**”. The award is given to a victimology student – the same program from which Christina was about to graduate – at Algonquin College.

Sherryl tried to find the good that has come from Christina's death. She is happy with the sentences of both accused. The one who pulled the trigger got thirteen years, the instigator got eight.

When she compares her story to the stories of other homicide survivors, she realizes how lucky she is. "Because I'm so fortunate, I'm here to help others."

Sherryl is a life raft now, doing now what she knows Christina would be doing for anyone in need, making sure that the light that was Christina's heart continues to shine.

*(Christina Voelzing (1992-2016) was just 24 years old when she was senselessly murdered. She leaves behind her mother Sherryl, her father Scott, her stepfather Dave, her big brother Brian and her step-brothers Ben and Noah. She also leaves behind her cherished grandparents Lloyd and Vivian, aunts, uncles and cousins and a close circle of her very best friends.)*

[To support Sherryl and other victims of homicide, please click here.](#)



### **Christina Voelzing Memorial Award**

Awarded to a full-time student in the Victimology program who demonstrates the enthusiastic charm, passion, and incredible generosity that Christina Voelzing displayed every day of her life.

This person should be honest, brave, and full of life – someone whose presence energized those surrounding them.

Someone whose tremendous heart and dedication motivated themselves and others to make the world a better place.

The recipient must personify the Victimology program's will and drive to help victims in our community.

## Christina Voelzing Memorial Award Inspires Students of Victimology.

By Ashley Burns

It was hard to find the correct words to express my gratitude and honour for receiving the 2019/2020 Christina Voelzing Memorial Award.

Throughout my year in Victimology, I heard stories of Christina's life and the brave, generous, and passionate impression she left on all those she came into contact with. The Christina Voelzing Memorial Award is more than an honorarium that is casually given to a student at the end of the year. To me, this award symbolizes a torch being passed, from Christina to every student who receives it. It is a chance to share Christina's life with victims of crime, and to help and support victims with the bravery, generosity and passion Christina would have.

I felt as if I got to know Christina throughout the year. Many professors shared stories of her enthusiastic charm and zeal in class, I heard of the deep impact her death had on every student and professor. Especially on my first day of orientation when Sherryl spoke to our class about her daughter's murder.

One of the assignments in Victimology included writing our own obituary, a chance to display what we will be remembered for. I remember one of our professors creating a sacred space, and reading Christina's obituary, written by her while she was a student in the class. What was written as a class assignment, became an event that deeply impacted me, four years later. In those few moments, I had an altering realization that life will come full circle one day, and it is up to each of us individually to choose where our focus and attention lies. I wanted to leave a similar impression and long-lasting impact that Christina did. Her life motivated me to use my voice to help victims whose voices need to be heard.

I truly believe that receiving the Christina Voelzing Memorial Award has equipped me to better assist victims of crime. Working at the CRCVC is more than a job for me, it is a chance to participate in changing victims' lives. I am driven to connect with victims and push on doors for them. I only hope my efforts will leave a lasting impact on individuals, like the impact Christina's life left on me.

*(Ashley Burns is a former student at Algonquin College. Ashley graduated from the same victimology course in which Christina Voelzing was enrolled. Today, Ashley works for the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime where she channels the values instilled by Christina to help victims of crime every single day)*

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## From Victim to Supporting Victims

*Delivering newspapers in Etobicoke was Susheel Gupta's very first job. He was 12. On Sunday, June 23, 1985, Susheel's life and the lives of his father and brother changed forever.*

*Susheel's mother, Ramwati, was one of the 329 souls aboard Air India flight 182 when it exploded in mid-air off the coast of Ireland. Ramwati was the victim of the largest ever terrorist attack against Canadian citizens.*

*When his father told Susheel about his mother's death, the work ethic instilled in him by his immigrant parents kicked in, and Susheel went about delivering his papers.*

*Susheel's work ethic continues to this day. In addition to his volunteer work as Board Chair of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, Susheel is a Member of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) National Working Group on responding to Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, and a Member of International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence (INVICTM).*

*Recently Susheel sat down to write this note to CRCVC supporters.*



Dear CRVC Supporters,

Since the tragedy that deeply affected me and my family, I have made it my professional career and personal mission to help victims of terrorism and crime.

I had been doing this for many decades when the CRCVC reached out to me simply to ask if there was anything *they* could do for me.

They did this without expecting anything back. This outreach encouraged me to join them in caring for the justice system, caring for communities and caring for victims.

I became more and more engaged when I saw the impact the CRCVC was having on people across the country. I knew I had to stay involved.

I saw the various facets of support they offer including support groups, providing written support, advocating to Parliament and provincial legislatures for people who are in their weakest moment, having just suffered a loss to crime.

CRCVC was there to give these people a hug, to be their voice and to be their advocate.

As a trained lawyer I know how important it is to have someone to lean on, to stand up for you, to be your advocate, especially when you are an innocent victim of crime.

When a crime occurs, it's not a single day or a single incident. It has lifelong repercussions for the victim and their loved ones. It also affects our communities and our entire country.

This is why it is important to have organizations like the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime to be there for the entire lifespan of a crime victim.

The nature of the crime against my mother and my family is very public. We are not only reminded of her death on every birthday or anniversary, we mourn with the public on a national scale every June 23rd.

It took almost twenty years for the trial to run its course. It was a constant reminder. We were engaged with the criminal justice system for over two decades.

It was my suffering that fueled my desire to help other victims in the future. The CRCVC plays a remarkable role in helping fulfill this dream.

### **Why support the CRCVC?**

The CRCVC runs on donations. This support allows them to do more than just hold the hands of victims. They

work in the thick of things. Whether it be writing victim impact statements, attending parole board hearings or advising on victim's compensation rights.

CRCVC makes people stronger. They help people return to some form of normalcy. They help people get back to work. They improve lives for all Canadians.

When someone is in a time of emotional weakness and trauma, they need trusted support to deal with the bureaucratic nightmare and all the things that need to be done. It's overwhelming and we have to ensure CRCVC is there to help.

The mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of someone so innocent, so in need is eased when they have a trusted shoulder to cry on and for someone to help them get back on their feet, to deal with the pain and the suffering they endure.

Victims are purely innocent people who have not brought on the fate they must endure. They deserve our support.

If you are reading this, you either support the CRCVC or maybe you're thinking about it. You play a big role in creating their resiliency. Your compassion, your empathy as a donor helps victims who can sometimes be easily forgotten.

CRCVC never forgets. They couldn't do what they do without you. Thank you.

Susheel Gupta

Chair

Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime

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## **This Story May Shock and Offend.**

## **Read With Caution...and Look for the Hope.**

Imagine finding out your seven-year-old niece was traded online and sexually abused by someone she trusted.

Now imagine the investigation, the trial, the prospect of parole (the offenders are beginning to get out next year) and the lifetime of dealing with the gruesome details of horrific crimes committed against someone barely out of grade two.

This is the aunt's story, her name is not used.

The facts: A seven year-old girl was sexually abused and filmed by her mother's boyfriend and others who responded to an online ad entitled "incest daughter". Five people were charged and found guilty. The charges against the girl's mother were stayed.

Out of the love of her niece and the search for justice, the aunt of this young girl became the voice, eyes and face at the investigation, trial and lifelong recovery of the innocent young victim.

The aunt clocked thousands of miles on the road as the only family member to witness the trials of the five people accused of sexually exploiting this young girl.

She was there to look the offenders in the eyes and to let them know that the little girl they abused is loved.

Throughout all of this trauma, the aunt leaned on the services provided by the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime.

"In the early days of the trial, I was talking to CRCVC nearly every day of the week," she recalls. "The people who work at CRCVC give people so much hope."

"When it all came about I was isolated," she recalls. "When I found the CRCVC, I felt like it was a weight lifted off my chest. There was somebody there to help, so I wasn't facing everything alone."

"To have someone there in your corner. It really helped."

This loving aunt knew she had to do something and she knew she needed help.

"I could easily say '*I want to make a complaint*', but will I do it? No. I didn't have the energy." She just didn't know where to start.

"The CRCVC helped me by writing victim impact statements. They wrote complaints to the ombudsman on my behalf. I couldn't do that on my own. I was just exhausted by dealing with the initial trauma."

It isn't just help with paperwork.

"There's emotional support too," she says. "When I feel like I'm at my wit's end and I just can't cope, I talk to the people at CRCVC. They'll set me back on track. I've even talked to them late at night or off hours."

Although the offenders of this heinous crime are incarcerated, two of the offenders are out of jail on full parole. One is out on day parole. Only two remain behind bars, but they will get out. This causes even more stress for the aunt as she gears herself up for parole hearings.

"We work so closely with all of our clients," says CRCVC Executive Director, Aline Vlasceanu.

"There's the initial trauma and everything that goes with it, including the trial. Then, there's parole and the inevitable re-traumatization."

"Just like we were there for this amazing woman in the beginning, we'll be there again and we'll stay by her side for as long as she needs our help."

Despite all the help provided by CRCVC, the aunt is quick to realize, nothing will ever bring back what was taken from her beautiful, young niece.

**You can support this loving aunt and anyone who reaches out to the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime [by donating here.](#)**

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## Snapshots

### [New research centre at Algonquin College helps support victims of violence](#)

"I hope that this sort of research really sheds a light on the reality of victims, on their needs, and the gaps that exist so that, moving forward, while there is no one size fits all solution, we can start bridging those gaps tangibly and legitimately," she says. "The research and evidence are there now. We must move forward and do something. I think victims of homicide—all victims, in general, really

### [Ombudsman says police, first responders must do more to inform crime victims of their rights](#)

Ombudsman for Victims of Crime Heidi Illingworth says the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights has not delivered on its promise to ensure victims' rights are respected and upheld in a more balanced criminal justice system.



—should be empowered; all research and all resources should be victim-centred, victim-led and trauma-informed, in order to help them create that 'new normal'."

Aline Vlasceanu,

Executive Director, Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime.

[Donate Now](#)

## Upcoming Events

### CRCVC's Monthly Drop-In Support Group for "Loss to Violence"

The drop-in support group is for family members, friends and close loved ones of homicide victims, and is intended to offer peer support to those dealing with violent loss.

Last Thursday of every month.

*Please note, we have gone VIRTUAL.*

To RSVP please email us at [crcvc@crcvc.ca](mailto:crcvc@crcvc.ca)

