

Joshua Yasay's legacy lives on with endowed award at York University

It may be some time before the family of Joshua Yasay (BA Spec. Hons. '11) can find closure in his senseless death. But despite the extensive homicide investigation into the July 2012 Danzig Street shooting spree, in which Joshua of Ajax, Ont. was one of two innocent bystanders killed, and the ongoing and grueling court proceedings, the Yasay family is thankful for a small victory: the Joshua Yasay Award for Excellence in Criminology and Community Service at York University has been endowed in perpetuity.

"To have Joshua honoured with his own endowed award is an incredible and overwhelming feeling that words cannot describe," says Jennilyn, Joshua's sister. "This means Joshua's legacy will live on forever and this award will help finish what he started, which is to help the young leaders of tomorrow change the world."

Created by York in memory of the criminology alumnus who was a passionate volunteer working toward a career with the police force, the Yasay award is given each year to a fourth-year criminology student who has positively impacted their communities through civic engagement and stewardship. A campaign to raise funds for the endowment two years ago recently surpassed its goal of \$25,000. In total, contributions trickled in from more than 200 individual donors, including York criminology alumni and community members, as well as from the annual Joshua Yasay Charity Basketball Tournament led by the Yasay family and fundraising events organized by the Criminology Society at York student club. More than 80 per cent of the donations are less than \$100.

"The number of donors and volunteers who supported the campaign is a testament to the many lives Joshua touched," Jennilyn says. "Many people think, talk, and wish about making a difference, but Joshua actually did it. Although he's no longer with us in a physical sense, his name and legacy will live on. This allows us to have something to look forward to each year."

Since the Yasay award was created, two recipients have had the honour of continuing Joshua's mission to make a difference in their communities. Gillian Maharaj (BA '13), the award's inaugural recipient and now a second-year student at the Osgoode Hall Law School, has continued to volunteer at the Scarborough Courthouse, where the Danzig Street shooting trial took place. She also volunteers with Pro Bono Students Canada: Family Law Project to provide legal support involving children issues and takes part in Osgoode's Child Protection Externship to work with the legal counsel for Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

"Joshua was always interested in social justice and so am I," Maharaj says. "As a past recipient of the award, I still feel motivated and encouraged to work hard to promote social objectives, not only for myself, but for the Yasay family."

Carina Bastidas (BA, BEd '14), second recipient of the Yasay award, is a certified junior high and high school teacher who has volunteered with several community initiatives, including Student Connections, to tutor and mentor youths from neighbourhoods known for violence and crime. Like Joshua, who spent his spare time coaching at-risk youth basketball, Bastidas works at a Muay Thai boxing and fitness gym to work with community centres and schools in teaching kids the benefits of healthy and active living.

"The Yasay award not only helped with my studies, but it gave me extra motivation, validation, and confidence to do something about crimes in the city," she says. "Joshua's story hit very close to home for me. Growing up in the Jane and Lawrence area with a lot of crimes in the neighbourhood, I was always blessed to have mentors who helped give me the guidance and tools necessary to make important life decisions. My goal is to teach in the neighbourhood I grew up in, and to bring social justice through teaching."