

# Team Shan

One young woman's diagnosis spurs educational campaign targeted at younger demographic.

Shan Larsen loved life - art, sports, music, and time with friends and family. Shan also enjoyed working with children, coaching figure skating, and teaching swimming. In 2005, after graduating with a visual arts degree, she was preparing to go into education when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was only 23. Shan passed away four months later, but her spirit lives on in a unique project that may save the lives of other young women.

Team Shan Breast Cancer Awareness for Young Women (Team Shan) was started by Shan's mom, Lorna Larsen, a former health promotion specialist who was shocked when her daughter was diagnosed with the disease at such a young age.

"I wondered why the issue of breast cancer in young women had not come across my desk. I had heard that cancer in young adults is aggressive but little more than that," says Lorna.

Team Shan is dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness in young women through educational campaigns about the disease, risk factors, symptoms, and self-help strategies. In the fall of 2011, on the University of Calgary, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the University of Saskatchewan campuses, Shan's smiling face appeared on billboards, in transit shelters, and on the interior and exterior of buses. Brochures, bookmarks, and pens were distributed

and radio and closed-circuit television spots aired.

All materials feature Shan, a caption that makes it clear that she was only 24 when she lost her life, and the campaign theme, breast cancer . . . not just a disease of older women. Materials also included sunflowers inspired from Shan's original artwork.

Campus partners played a key role in the success of the campaign. Partners included Student Health Services, who distributed Team Shan material at campus events and when young women come into clinics; campus library and bookstore staff, who also distributed materials; women's resource centre partners and staff from faculties like nursing and kinesiology who conducted 'lunch and learns.'

The campaigns wouldn't be possible without the community grants Team Shan has received from the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation - Prairies/NWT Region. Raising awareness among young women is important to the Region. In fact, it is the only Region of the Foundation with a Youth Advisory Council, a staff position dedicated to the council, and registered student groups at universities.

Team Shan conducted formal evaluations of the success of each campaign by asking young women on campus to complete questionnaires and provide



# Breast Cancer...

*not just a disease of older women*

**Shanna Larsen was only 24 when she lost her life to breast cancer**

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[teamshan.ca](http://teamshan.ca)



COMMUNITY GRANT RECIPIENT: *Team Shan*

verbal comments. Team Shan also collected feedback through email and Facebook. "The vast majority of those who responded now understand their breast cancer risk. We've been asked to 'continue doing this wonderful work,' and next fall, Team Shan will be back on campuses across the prairies," says Lorna.

Shan was shy, so Lorna thinks she would be pretty surprised to see her face on billboards and buses. She was also a caring, kind-hearted person who would be proud to see that her mom and Team Shan are making a difference.

"Young women felt it was important to know that Shan was a real person," says Lorna. Through the campaigns, Team Shan has a way of spreading her message to love what you do, take care of yourself, and go for your dreams. "Shan's spirit continues to speak," says Lorna.

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