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## Family creates Shelby Jane Seyburn Foundation in honor of late OU graduate

Inspired by their daughter's memory, the parents of an Oakland University graduate and psychology major who was killed last June in a car crash on I-75 have established the [Shelby Jane Seyburn Foundation](#) as a way to keep their daughter's legacy alive while continuing to support the research she was passionate about at OU.

"Shelby was a kind, generous, passionate, strong and intelligent person," said Marc Seyburn, Shelby's father. "It was her passion for the Posttraumatic Growth lab at Oakland University that inspired us to create the foundation. Shelby had a vision for the PTG program, and we wanted to help support that vision because there are so many people that could be affected by this research."

Posttraumatic Growth, or PTG, is defined as the positive psychological changes that can occur through the struggle with traumatic experiences, with the idea that human beings can be changed by their encounters with life challenges, sometimes in radically positive ways.

"The current direction of health psychology is to help people to be more resilient," said [Kanako Taku, Ph.D.](#), an associate professor of psychology at OU and Shelby's mentor. "But Shelby and I discussed that while that may be good, if we help people to continue struggling instead of bouncing back quickly, then there may be a deeper or broader sense of personal growth. Shelby thought maybe we don't have to be resilient; maybe we can still be vulnerable and experience personal growth."

According to Taku, Shelby joined the PTG lab in the fall of 2015 and specialized in the study of PTG in adolescents.

"She had always been interested in this particular age group and found that there are numerous areas with undiscovered information," Taku said. "Generally, Shelby explored the different mental states and personalities of adolescence before and after they experience trauma, also with looking at the different levels of trauma and social support."

Prior to her death, Shelby Seyburn worked in the PTG Lab for two years, and spent the last year as lab manager.

"Shelby was my mentor in the lab," said Velinka Marton, a junior at OU. "Between school and family, she was spread in so many different directions, but she always made sure everyone else in the lab was doing OK. She was a very nurturing and loving person."

As a member of Dr. Taku's lab, Shelby was able to become a published author and speak at national conferences. She also helped establish the "Teen Parent Program" within the Department of Psychology. The program is designed to reach teen parents through a psychoeducation that encourages them to think about PTG and build social support.

"Pontiac has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in Michigan, and Michigan has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the U.S.," said Whitney Dominick, a third-year Ph.D. student at OU who worked with Seyburn in the PTG lab. "This is a major problem because teen parents are much more likely to drop out of high school early, not be able to find a stable job, and they're also at risk for pre-term births, postpartum depression and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Shelby really wanted to focus on how we could help these teen parents."

According to Dominick, the goal of the Teen Parent Program was to foster a sense of social support.

"Shelby wanted the teen parents to connect with each other and be able to have that social support with each other, the school staff and with us on the research team at Oakland University," Dominick said. "She also wanted to educate them about posttraumatic growth, about how they could experience this, and how they could help other people, thereby extending that social support."



*Family, friends and colleagues of Shelby Jane Seyburn, an Oakland University graduate and psychology major who was killed last June in a car crash on I-75, recently gathered at OU to celebrate her life and share her research.*

“I think Shelby would love it,” she said. “Shelby was very passionate about her research, which really focused a lot of social support. This program (the Teen Parent Program) really helped with that aspect by helping people get involved, and I think she would appreciate knowing that it was going to continue.”

Currently, the program has only been implemented in one school in the Pontiac area, but with funding provided by the Shelby Jane Seyburn Foundation, Dr. Taku is hopeful it can be expanded to other areas.

“Shelby’s passion is still alive and this is a great way to continue her legacy,” Dr. Taku said.

In addition to funding PTG research at Oakland University and helping to expand the Teen Parent Program, the Shelby Jane Seyburn Foundation will also help fund undergraduate and graduate student travel to regional, national and international conferences via “travel grants.”

The grants are specifically targeted toward students in the Oakland University Psychology Department that are participating in a research lab and desire to attend a professional conference to present materials. All psychology students participating in a lab at Oakland are eligible to apply for the grant, which will vary in amount between \$250 and \$500. The grant can be used for travel, lodging, registration and meals.

“I think it’s very rare for something like this to happen,” said Lauren Harrison, a research assistant at OU who joined the PTG lab in the winter of 2016. “Typically, if a child passes away, family mourns; but something massive like this, that has multiple purposes, doesn’t really emerge. I think it’s very admirable, and a perfect way to honor Shelby’s memory.”

For more information about the Shelby Jane Seyburn Foundation, or to make a donation, visit [shelbystrong.life](http://shelbystrong.life).

To learn more about OU’s Department of Psychology, visit [oakland.edu/psychology](http://oakland.edu/psychology).