

MEDIA ADVISORY

TO: Assignment Editors/News Directors

WHAT: **Former Humanities 101 student graduating from St. Mary's with a Bachelor's Degree this month, to speak about her experience in the program at Humanities 101 Celebration of Learning**

PHOTO OPP: TracyRay Lewis, former Humanities 101 student and current St. Mary's student, soon-to-be graduate, will speak to current Humanities 101 students about her experiences and journey at their Celebration of Learning on April 15th. TracyRay will be available for photos and interviews.

WHERE: **Fr. Michael J. McGivney Hall**

St. Mary's University College campus | 14500 Bannister Way SE, just off Macleod Trail South
Plenty of free parking

WHEN: **Tuesday, April 15, 2014 | 6:00pm Dinner, Academic Procession and TracyRay Lewis Address at 7:00pm.**

WHY:

On **Tuesday, April 15th at 6:00 pm**, St. Mary's University College will be holding a **Celebration of Learning** dinner and ceremony for students completing this semester's Humanities 101 program. We are looking forward to a very special address from TracyRay Lewis, program alumnus, current tutor, vocal supporter and graduating St. Mary's student. We would be very pleased to have members of the media join us for this very special occasion.

In 2005, TracyRay Lewis was precariously housed, living in a rehab centre, when she learned about the Storefront program, now called Humanities 101. Her rehab counselor didn't know much about the program and thus, suspected that it wouldn't be of any substance, or of much help to TracyRay. The counselor quickly changed his mind after TracyRay's first few weeks in class.

TracyRay explains, "I was allowed to continue because it was doing as much, if not more, for me as my 12-step programs was. It was keeping me sober by teaching me to refocus my energy on moving forward with my life. This was a really big deal."

"In order to continue being allowed to go to class, I had to maintain my schedule of seven 12-step meetings per week on top of my classes, as well as two group counseling meetings, personal counseling meetings and a 9:00 pm curfew," she continued.

Upon completion of TracyRay's first Storefront course, Dr. Tara Hyland-Russell, English professor at St. Mary's who was responsible for bringing the program to St. Mary's campus when Storefront 101 closed and reimagined it as Humanities 101, urged TracyRay to continue to follow her newfound passion for writing and to look into studying at St. Mary's, the academic home of the program. TracyRay followed Dr. Hyland-

Russell's advice and enrolled as a full-time student at St. Mary's the following semester. With the same extracurricular requirements and restrictions that she had faced while taking part in the Storefront program, and while continuing to live in the rehab centre, TracyRay started on what would be a seven-year long journey that will culminate this month.

TracyRay is graduating from St. Mary's University College with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in General Studies . She is no longer precariously housed, nor does she require any type of treatment. TracyRay has been clean and sober for ten years with zero relapses. For nearly a year, TracyRay has held a seat on the Steering Committee with Poverty Talks and has recently returned from the 3rd Annual Cities Reducing Poverty Across Canada conference in Toronto, where she took part in brainstorming and breakout sessions working towards solving poverty and homelessness in Canada. TracyRay is often the only delegate at poverty-solving events with homeless experience.

After graduation, TracyRay is looking forward to continuing her work with Poverty Talks and Humanities 101, and would one day like to own a place of her very own. TracyRay will be available for interviews and photographs.

About Humanities 101

The Humanities 101 program brings free, university-level courses to people who have experienced barriers to learning such as poverty, experience with violence, addiction, homelessness, and interruptions to prior education. Courses are rooted in the humanities and include English Literature, History, Philosophy, Art History, Music and Cultural Studies. Since March 2013, 67 students have taken part in the program and report improvements to quality of life for themselves and their families. Participants have improved their skills and capacities, with graduates of the program pursuing further formal education, employment, and volunteer opportunities.

The program costs a minimum of \$56,000 per term to run and is funded entirely by private donations and fundraising efforts. Students accepted into the program enjoy full coverage of program costs, including tuition, books, hot and nutritious meals before class, assistance with travel to and from class, childcare, instructors' fees and administrative costs. The greater student body at St. Mary's University College has shown incredible support for the program, having raised over \$13,000.00 through student-led initiatives in 2013 alone. This generosity, in addition to the warm and inclusive spirit on campus, is greatly appreciated by the Humanities 101 students, faculty, staff and volunteers, as this program is most certainly a labour of love by, and for, us all.

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