

# THE NEWS

## *From Columbine to Sandy Hook*

### **BYU alumna's thesis on the Columbine memorial guides planning committee for a monument at Sandy Hook**

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When McKay School of Education alumna Rebecka Bingham was writing her graduate thesis on the planning of the memorial for the tragedy at Columbine High School, she had no idea that her research would one day affect the planning of another memorial for a school shooting—this time in Newtown, Connecticut.

“I was very surprised and touched to receive thanks for my thesis project years later,” Bingham said. “I am grateful that my thesis has been a resource that can help others.”

Bingham learned that her thesis, “Planning School Memorials: Feedback From the Columbine Memorial Planning Committee,” is being used by the Sandy Hook Elementary School’s Permanent Memorial Committee. A few weeks ago Kyle Lyddy, chair of the planning committee, contacted Bingham to thank her for her work. “Your thesis has been helpful in dealing with a tremendous tragedy that our town continues to learn from,” Lyddy said. “We reference it often.”

Bingham wrote her thesis in 2008, analyzing the steps that were taken to plan a memorial for the tragic school shooting that occurred April 20, 1999 at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. In researching her thesis, Bingham interviewed three members of the Columbine Memorial Planning Committee, asking them a wide range of questions about planning the memorial. Among a large number of relevant topics, she reported committee members’ responses to questions of how fundraising and donations were handled, how plans and decisions were made, and who or what were driving forces behind the planning procedures. She also asked committee members to discuss special considerations that were implemented to be sensitive to

the emotional needs of students and families as well as particular lessons the committee had learned that would be helpful to others in a similar situation of tragedy.

“You never know when your efforts in shepherding students’ theses or dissertations will help [others] in similar circumstances,” said Melissa Heath, chair of Bingham’s graduate committee. “This news made me smile and warmed my heart. When I was praying for Sandy Hook, I never thought about Rebecka’s thesis and the support it might be to others.”

Now with her completed master’s degree, Bingham work as a school psychologist for the Canyons School District in Salt Lake County, Utah. “Nothing can ever completely prepare you for all of the experiences that you have as a school psychologist,” Bingham said. “However, the education I received at BYU helped to prepare me for how to help students in a variety of situations.”

The David O. McKay School of Education is located at Brigham Young University, the largest privately owned religious university in the United States. The school operates one of the nation’s largest teacher preparation programs, offering degrees and endorsements in a variety of educational fields. Its mission is to improve learning and teaching in the school, as well as in the home, church, and community worldwide.

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