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## **‘I Believe You’ campaign to be launched at the U of L**

The Preventing Sexual Violence Action Committee at the University of Lethbridge is committed to prevention of sexual violence and, this year, one of its key initiatives is the ‘I Believe You’ campaign.

The province-wide ‘I Believe You’ campaign was launched Aug. 31 with simultaneous events in Calgary and Edmonton. The campaign will be launched on campus Thursday, Sept. 17 with an information table and photo booth set up near the entrance to the 1st Choice Savings Centre. Interested media are welcome to interview campaign organizers at 11:45 a.m.

At the photo booth, students can snap pictures of themselves and sign up on Thunderclap, an online platform that helps people rally together to spread a message. Using #IBelieveYou, the message will be broadcast through the social networks of those who have signed up on Sept. 30.

The U of L is among the 23 post-secondary institutions in Alberta to support the campaign, which is funded by the Alberta government. The campaign is designed to increase public awareness and provide education on how to best respond to survivors of sexual assault. Most sexual assaults — 97 per cent — aren’t reported to police but victims may tell friends or family members. A survivor who hears a positive response like ‘I believe you’ is more likely to come forward and, as more survivors feel safe coming forward, the cycle of abuse can be stopped.

“In Canada, we know that one of the riskiest times is during the first year of post-secondary school,” says Heather Rowland, a U of L counsellor and Chair of the Preventing Sexual Violence Action Committee. “For the past few years we have adopted programs aimed at preventing sexual assault and this year we have even bigger plans. We are pleased to bring the ‘I Believe You’ campaign to our campus.”

“We want our students to learn in a safe environment where they are treated with equality and respect. The ‘I Believe You’ campaign helps us create that kind of environment with a few simple words,” says Dr. Judith Lapadat, associate vice-president (students).

“Students who participate are pledging to say ‘I Believe You’ when someone comes forward saying they’ve experienced an assault,” says Rowland.

Another focus for the committee this year is bystander engagement. These programs are targeted to helping students find the right words to use and the points where they can intervene when they see something untoward is happening.

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