

Laval students learning life-saving skills

By Stephanie Azran
The Suburban



Every year, upwards of 2500 Laval high school students are graduating with more than just the basics- they are also learning the skills needed to save lives. Recently, Laval-based pharmaceutical company Sanofi gave those students a helping hand with a donation of \$18,000 to the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation (ACT), matching government funding in order to get a number of automated external defibrillator (AED) training units into all nine Laval high schools.

“The Sanofi donation means so much for us in Laval. We can’t set up the program anywhere if we can’t find the training resources,” Sandra Clarke, ACT’s executive director, told *The Suburban*. “With this donation from Sanofi, Laval is taken care of.”

“Sanofi was one of our founding partners, so it’s especially meaningful that they have supported it right here right in their community. It shows their long-term commitment,” she added.

ACT has been running programs in Canadian high schools for over twenty years. Rather than come in as an outside agency to teach the course, ACT trains teachers to be instructors, updating their training when needed and adding new skills and materials all the time.

“It’s not part of the provincial curriculum [yet], but we are working in partnership with the government of Quebec,” said Clarke. “They have provided us with 50% of the funding for the training resources. They’ve been very supportive since 2005.”

The ACT program is running in every Quebec high school.

Most recently, ACT has been focused on teaching people to use automated external defibrillator (AED) machines, which are becoming more readily available in public places due to their life-saving capabilities. Clarke explained that in a cardiac arrest emergency, which often happens outside of a hospital setting, proper CPR and the use of an AED unit can increase the victim’s survival rate by up to 75 per cent.

Besides the obvious benefits of teaching students such a valuable life skill, Clarke says that teachers and students are seeing other benefits from the training. For one, it gives teachers a chance to talk to their students about heart health and risk factors; secondly, the students feel a sense of agency.

“Teachers tell us it builds self-esteem and the students see themselves as part of the emergency response system. When an emergency happens, they have a duty to respond and it’s natural to respond,” she said. “By taking charge with a few simple skills, they can make a difference in saving someone’s life. It’s creating a culture of action.”

The training has certainly been put into action: Clarke mentioned two recent events in which properly trained students and teachers saved lives while waiting for paramedics to arrive.

“Students are stepping out in all sorts of emergencies,” she said.