

Students across region learn how to save a life ACT Foundation brings CPR training to Grade 9 classes

Adam Bramburger, Staff Writer

When graduation comes in four years for the Grade 9 students now writing their first set of year-end exams, they'll move on with an important skill not all their predecessors learned.

In addition to multiplying compound fractions and conjugating irregular verbs, this group of more than 1,500 Quinte area students will graduate knowing how to save lives.

Working with community and national partners, the Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation has come to this region in its goal to have CPR taught in all secondary schools across the country.

At a launch event at Quinte Secondary School in Belleville Friday, ACT Foundation executive director Sandra Clarke shared the model that has helped the foundation train 1.8 million young Canadians in lifesaving skills.

She said through its community partners, the organization provides CPR manuals and a class set of 30 mannequins to each participating school.

Then, an effort is made to have Grade 9 physical education teachers trained by community agencies and put into a position where they're able to go to school and train classes.

Clarke says the equipment stays in the school and it is reusable in future years, while the training will last until the teachers need a refresher course or move out of the schools.

"This way schools are not dedicating funding every year to bring in outside agencies," she said. "It is a sustainable model."

In the Quinte region, the program is backed by contributions from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Government of Ontario as well as lead community partner TransCanada Corporation.

Health-care partners AstraZeneca Canada, Bristol-Myers Squibb Canada, sanofi-aventis and Pfizer Canada also provide funding to keep the ACT Foundation alive and active in its mandate.

All of the eight schools in the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board, including PECE, and the local schools in the Algonquin and Lakeshore District School Board are offering the program.

Leona Dombrowsky, Ontario's Minister of Education joined dignitaries, sponsors, and students at Quinte for Friday's demonstration.

She worked with Cole Goodfellow as the student showed the steps he would take when confronted with an emergency situation.

Dombrowsky said she had previously trained in CPR on her own and she offered her support for the high school program.

"Whether you're on the soccer field, at the grocery store, or in a community centre, this is important. It's something you need beyond the walls of high school," she said. "I took the training to be sure that if something happened in my own family, I would know what to do."



SAVING SKILLS Minister of Education Leona Dombrowsky receives advice from Quinte Secondary School student Cole Goodfellow on her CPR technique during a demonstration Friday.
(Adam Bramburger/Gazette staff)

Dombrowsky praised the program as excellent, nothing that each year, there would be thousands of students who knew how to address an emergency.

Belleville mayor Neil Ellis added that like many important lessons taught in school, students may not know where they'll be or when they might need to have their CPR skills, but now they'll be prepared.

Trillium Foundation representative Sadie Sidsworth said her organization believes so strongly in ACT's work to promote healthy, vibrant communities that it has given seven grants to the organization over the years, totaling about \$750,000.

TransCanada Corporation community liaison Janice Badgley agreed the program was an easy sell from a sponsor's point of view.

Badgley said most companies are quite focused on safety and this endeavour would help that outcome not only in workplaces around the region, but also in homes and public areas.

"This is empowering our youth to save lives and it is also empowering them to effect change," she said.

ACT Foundation board member Jane Ouellette, the Ontario east manager for pharmaceutical company sanofi-aventis, called the CPR classes a most important lesson in life, even though it is one they hope students never have to live through using.

"We sincerely hope you never have to use it, but we're thrilled that you have the knowledge and skill and are ready to intervene."

Another aspect of the program which Clarke and board member Kevin Berube, of Pfizer Canada, discussed was a prevention component built into the practical studies.

Berube said the ACT Foundation also encourages students that there is a need to be heart smart and commit to healthy lifestyles including eating right and exercising regularly.

"It's not just about the thump and blow of CPR, it's very important that we're also teaching about a healthy lifestyle," said Clarke. "The students are so excited to learn about CPR that teachable moments do arise."

Since the ACT program started as a pilot in 1994, some 600 schools have become involved and Clarke said there have been some success stories shared with the foundation about students and teachers who have used their skills in life-saving situations.

She said many adults are commonly overwhelmed by what to do in a panic situation, but through these lessons, students are finding themselves calm and prepared to tackle the task at hand before medics are able to arrive at the scene. "It's another life skill they can put in their toolbox," she said.

Goodfellow said he felt the training was well worth his time and he'd be prepared to save a life if the situation arose. That was welcome news to his grandmother Thelma Goodfellow, a Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board trustee who recently experienced a scare when her husband had a heart attack.

She said having more people in the region who know what to do in a similar situation makes the program one the board believes in strongly and is appreciating of.

Clarke said Canada is one of the leading countries in placing CPR training in its schools, yet she still believes more can be done. "Our next step in defibrillator training. We just need to find the funding to make that happen."