

Oshawa teen saves friend's life in school cafeteria

Students speak out on importance of CPR, Heimlich maneuver training

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By Jillian Follert

OSHAWA -- Nadine Gharzeddine never thought she would actually have to use the CPR and Heimlich Manoeuvre training she learned in her Grade 9 gym class, but just two days after completing the course, she was proven wrong.

On Dec. 11, the student at Monsignor John Pereyma C.S. was eating lunch in the cafeteria when she looked up to see a classmate coughing and grasping her throat.

Fourteen-year-old Kayla Knowles had been eating a carrot when she suddenly started choking.



"I could still breathe a bit, but not much," Kayla says.

Remembering what her class had learned in the CPR course, Kayla tried coughing and leaning over a bench to release the stuck food, but it didn't work. "People sitting around me thought I was joking, no one was helping me," she said.

Fortunately, Nadine sprung into action.

"I could tell by her expression she wasn't kidding," she said. "I went over to her and I did the abdominal thrust we learned in class. I was scared, I didn't want to do it wrong. I had to do it five times before it worked."

Kayla walked away from the incident unscathed and now the pair -- who have known each other since elementary school -- are speaking out about the importance of CPR and Heimlich Manoeuvre training.

CPR is now a mandatory part of the Grade 9 physical education curriculum in Ontario, and the Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation of Canada is working to bring it to other provinces as well.

ACT works with governments and community partners to bring the CPR program to high schools by raising money for resources like mannequins and teacher training.

Once teachers know the program and have the materials, schools can offer the training long term with no other financial requirements.

So far, the ACT Foundation has helped train 900,000 youth.

"We want to ensure every young person graduates from high school with the skills to save a life," said ACT's executive director Sandra Clarke. "This training gives young people the confidence to act in an emergency. You can't wait for an adult to do it and you can't wait five or 10 minutes until the ambulance gets there."