



Glebe student is one in a million thanks to CPR training

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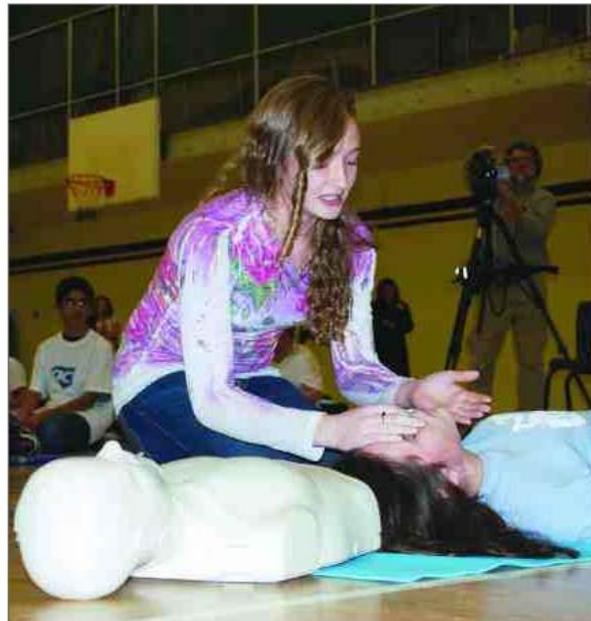
By Desmond Devoy

Megan Dicks is one in a million.

The 14-year-old grade nine student at Glebe Collegiate Institute is the one millionth student, across the province, to have received the ACT High School CPR Program since 1994.

She demonstrated her skills before a school assembly and a number of important guests, including provincial Education Minister Kathleen Wynne, on the afternoon of Friday, November 27 in the school's gym, 212 Glebe Avenue.

"It's really exciting that it means that so many other kids know how to do this and can save lives," said Dicks, after she demonstrated how to perform CPR on a friend who pretended to faint in the middle of speeches in front of the podium.



"This was sort of random, I guess," she says of her being chosen at the one-millionth student. When she was preparing herself for her big debut, she admitted that "at first, it was a bit nerve-wracking," but she carried her demonstration off well, even with the T.V. cameras present, which is especially noteworthy since she only learned the CPR procedure last month. "I'd be fine in a real life situation," she said confidently. While she is unsure if she wishes to pursue medicine when she leaves school, when it comes to CPR training, "this is really important."

Statements like that are probably music to Dicks' principal's ears, to know that the message is getting through.

"We know that the survival rates of cardiac arrest increases when there is immediate help," said Patricia Kulka after Dicks' demonstration. "This is an important skill for our community."



So far, 547 schools in Ontario have the ACT High School CPR Program, about 70 per cent of the schools in the province, and about 128,000 youth are trained in CPR every year by their high school teachers. Of those schools, 47 are in the Ottawa area. On top of this, more than 1,500 teachers have been trained under this program.

In welcoming Wynne to the school, Ottawa West-Nepean MPP Jim Watson told students that it would be in their best interests to make Wynne feel welcome since, as the Education Minister "her signature will be on your diploma! If you're not doing well, just slip a blank sheet of paper over," to get her "autograph."

On the more serious matter of Dicks' demonstration though, Watson commended her and the other actors in the mini-drama for showing "how one person could save a life." While it may be years before one's CPR training becomes necessary, "you never know when it could save a life," said Watson.

Wynne said Glebe Collegiate reminded her of her old high school in Thornhill, north of Toronto. She agreed with Watson that CPR is "the kind of skill that communities need to be healthy and safe."

She noted that the provincial government spends about \$2 million a year for CPR training and defibrillator support.

"That is money that is very, very well spent," Wynne said. "I think it is absolutely critical...it is part of that broader set of skills."

Because of their skills, "you make our communities safer," Wynne said of the students seated before her.

Sadly, there may be more opportunity than need be for the students to use their skills sooner rather than later.

"Heart disease is, after all, the number one killer in Canada," said Krista Scaldwell, of the ACT Foundation's Board of Directors, representing one of the group's partners, Bristol-Myers Squibb Canada. "Life is one of those precious, fleeting gifts and everything can change in a heart beat."

Dr. Justin Maloney, Medical Director of the Ottawa Base Hospital and of the ACT High School CPR and AED programs, pointed out that the survival rate of someone suffering from a cardiac episode stands between five and seven per cent "and that's a number we have to change in our lifetime."



But even though those numbers may be quite sobering, because enough people knew CPR to help the people who did survive, Dr. Maloney estimated that about "20 to 30 people are alive, every year, because of what you are learning. There are 20 people on the streets, walking, that otherwise wouldn't be."

Dr. Maloney was realistic that, even with the best of intentions and skill, "it isn't always going to work out, but at least you tried your best."

While Watson and Wynne were away from Queen's Park, since the legislature usually does not sit on a Friday, after a demonstration of a typical CPR class, she commended the students for their good attendance record.

"I know how much dedication it takes to be here on a Friday afternoon," she said with a laugh.

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