

## Learning to save lives

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By Nicole Million

MIDLAND – Confidence, combined with proper training, can be a lifesaver.

That's the message a national organization is trying to send students by giving them cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillator training.

The ACT Foundation of **Canada's mission is to help** establish CPR and automated external defibrillator (AED) training in high schools across the country, including Midland and Penetanguishene secondary schools.



The charitable foundation, along with the provincial government and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, has spearheaded the initiative to ensure all youths graduate with the skills and knowledge to save lives.

ACT executive director Sandra Clarke said the goal is for schools to own the program and to have teachers provide the training as part of the regular curriculum. The organization raises funds and donates the training equipment to the school.

**“Every average-sized school receives a class set of 30 mannequins, and we bring in teacher training partners – in Simcoe County, that is Simcoe County EMS – and they provide training for the teachers so they then become the instructors for their students,” she said, adding the provincial government has inserted CPR training into the Grade 9 curriculum. “We are very excited about that.”**

More than one million Ontario students have already been trained through this program, noted Clarke. Despite that, she said, the foundation still has to complete the program setup in about 30 per cent of Ontario high schools.

In Simcoe County, the program has been established in 14 of 24 high schools, with the remainder only having partial funding.

**“We have a grant from the government, but (that) has to be matched at the community level. There are 10 high schools that we still have to raise \$2,500 per school to complete program setup. It’s a big gap.”**

In Simcoe County, the program also includes training on AEDs.

**“The combination of CPR with the use of a defibrillator at the scene of a cardiac arrest can significantly increase the chances of survival,”** Clarke said, adding the rescue of a student who suffered cardiac arrest at James Keating Elementary School last November highlighted the importance of CPR and AED response in an emergency. **“By ensuring all youths are trained in both CPR and AED in high school, we are creating a culture of lifesaving among our current and future generations.”**

Defibrillators are widely distributed in public places and all of the high schools in the county. However, research shows it is still the firefighter or paramedic who is often the first one to arrive on the scene and use the defibrillator.

**“(That) means the public is nervous. Not enough citizens are trained in how to use the defibrillators that are in the arenas, in the community centres, etc.,”** she said.

Clarke said they have received funding to set up the program at both Midland Secondary School and Penetanguishene Secondary School.

**“They have the CPR training mannequins and the AED training equipment, and the teachers have been trained to teach to the students,”** she said.

St. Theresa’s High School still requires additional funding before the program can begin, she noted.

Funding for MSS came from the Midland Civitan Club and the Penetanguishene Legion; the Penetanguishene Lions Club provided the funding for PSS.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, when sudden cardiac arrest occurs, if the person receives immediate CPR and defibrillation within the first few minutes, the rate of survival can increase by as much as 50 per cent.

**“It’s all about saving lives. Most emergencies happen out of hospital. They happen in public venues and the citizen can’t wait for EMS to arrive,”** said Clarke. **“It’s absolutely essential the person who witnesses the emergency knows to take action.... It’s all about empowering them with the skills and knowledge to save lives.”**