

## Niagara students learn to jump-start hearts

Mike Zettel

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Owen Botelho was surprised that with an hour's worth of training, he now has the power to save someone's life.

Sixty minutes' worth of instruction is all it took for the Grade 9 St. Francis Catholic Secondary School student to all but master the use of an Automated External Defibrillator and potentially save the life of someone having a heart attack.

"It was really easy to figure out," he said.

Indeed, the devices are designed to be all but fool-proof. With audio instructions, AEDs guide people through the simple steps. The devices, which deliver a jolt of electricity to jump start a heart, are also designed so as to only function on a patient with a heart which has stopped beating effectively.

"It's a very simple thing to do," Botelho said. "It makes me feel like everybody can make a difference."

The high school student was speaking Friday, Feb. 5 at an announcement of the partnership between the Province and the Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation to deliver the devices to each of the region's 30 high schools. The program will also ensure all Grade 9 students receive training on its use, with 5,700 new students being instructed on an annual basis, as part of their CPR training they already receive.

The program is part of a \$1.4-million province-wide initiative to bring AEDs into secondary schools.

"It's a huge feat," said Rachel Gill, ACT's Ontario AED program manager.

Niagara Falls MPP Kim Craitor said these students will become ambassadors in the struggle against heart disease, often known as the 'silent killer.'

Craitor said the relative ease of use of AEDs make them an effective tool.

He noted the Province also recently passed the Good Samaritan law, which removes all liabilities on those who administer a shock with an AED to someone in need.

While AEDs are simply designed, St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley said the training the students will receive is crucial, in that it gives them the skills to know to use them and the confidence to act in a critical situation.



**Niagara students learn to jump-start hearts 2.** Grade 9 St. Francis Catholic Secondary School student Colin Miller performs CPR on a dummy in a demonstration of how to use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED). The demonstration took place last week at an announcement that Grade 9 schools at all Niagara high schools would be trained in the use of the potentially life-saving devices. *Mike Zettel*

Other partners in the project include First Ontario Credit Union and Heart Niagara.

John Crocco, director of education for the Niagara Catholic District School Board, said the students, unfortunately, will have more and more opportunities to use the devices. He cited a recent report by the Ontario Heart and Stroke Foundation, which described the 'perfect storm' of trends in the last decade, all of which increase the chance of heart disease. High blood pressure is up 77 per cent, diabetes 45 per cent and obesity 18 per cent, Crocco said.

And high school students themselves are not immune. Dr. Doug Munkley, who is associated with Heart Niagara, said while actual heart attacks are rare among high school students (though not unheard of), the age group has been identified as the next high risk group for heart disease.

Munkley said the training could serve to raise awareness of heart health among students, so they can make the right choices to protect theirs.

"It's your choices that for a very large portion determine how your heart health is going to be," he said.

"You can save your own lives."

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