

# Life-saving learning

■ Pilot project lets Central Okanagan school district students learn to become medical first responders...

By Chris Stanford  
WESTSIDE WEEKLY

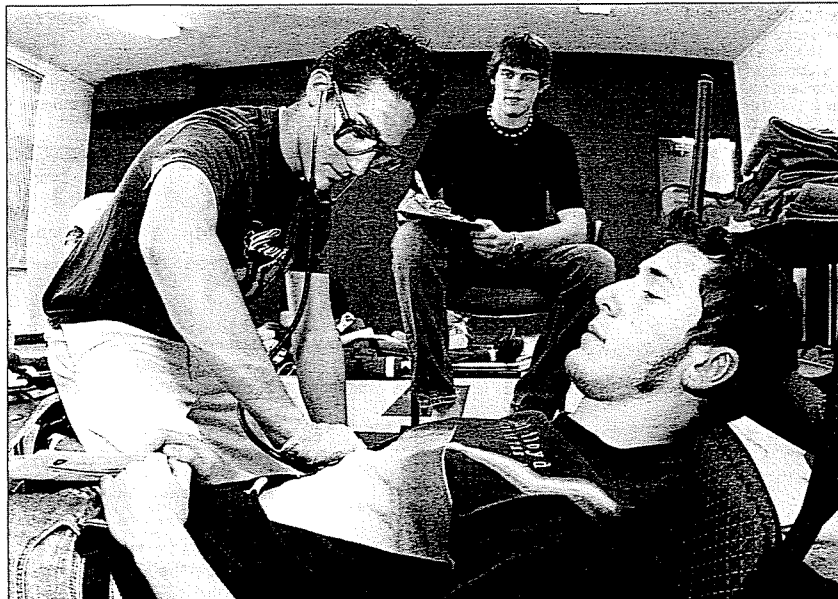
Call it How-To-Save-A-Life 101. While others grapple with equations and essays, two Mount Boucherie Secondary school students have also been learning how to deal with life-threatening emergencies like somebody choking on a piece of steak or having a deadly asthma attack.

On their own time, Jordan Thiessen and Nick Adamack, both in grade 12 at Boucherie, along with eight other Central Okanagan School District students, have been taking a course to become certified by the provincial Emergency Medical Assistants licensing board as emergency medical responders.

The course, which started in February, involves over 100 hours of classroom time during which they have been learning about human anatomy, physiology and dealing with sick and injured patients.

The program is a collaboration between the school district, the Justice Institute of B.C. and Constable Neil Bruce school math and science teacher Aaron Volk, who is himself a certified basic life support paramedic that works for the ambulance service in Kelowna.

A pilot project modeled



Chris Stanford/Westside Weekly

Jordan Thiessen, left, of Mount Boucherie Secondary school uses a stethoscope to listen for breath sounds on "patient" Kodi Ackerman as Nick Adamack looks on during EMR class at the Justice Institute's Kelowna campus.

after a similar program on Vancouver Island, it is designed to give students important life skills along with the knowledge of how to properly handle traumatic and medical emergencies.

While some in the class are taking the program out of general interest, Thiessen and Adamack are using it as a stepping stone to careers in the medical field.

Adamack has already been accepted into the four-year respiratory technician program at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops and will starting there in the fall, while Thiessen's goal is becoming a full-time firefighter on the Westside or elsewhere.

"I've done my share of jobs, but now that I've been taking this course it's opened my eyes," said 18-year-old Thiessen.

"My brother is a diabetic, so now we know how to treat that" he added. "Everything I've learned here can be used in my life."

If successful with the final course exams at the end of this month, he plans to take the next step up and become provincially-certified

as a primary care paramedic, the same level to which Volk is trained.

He found out about the program, offered for the first time this year, through the career life program at his school, and jumped at the chance to get some valuable experience, along with the four credits on his school record.

Amidst the clutter of oxygen bottles, spine boards and other specialized equipment, Nick Adamack treated a "patient" recently one evening during practice scenarios at the Justice Institute campus the class uses in Kelowna.

Using the mock scenario of a ten-centimetre piece of glass embedded in the victims' head as a result of a bar fight, he practiced the skills he has learned over the past few months.

The son of a full-time paramedic based in Kelowna, Adamack worked through the training situation played out on the classroom floor.

Taking control of the patients' neck in case of any possible debilitating injury, he performed an ordered assessment and treated the

"wound" using clean gauze to stabilize and bandage it under the watchful eye of Volk.

"Now, if I'm in a scenario like this (in real life), I'll know what to do" he said. "I've always wanted to do something in the medical field, something that's intense."

He has been out on ambulance ride-along with his father, an advanced life support paramedic and has seen several real situations with patients requiring urgent care.

Emergency medical responders in British Columbia are certified to a national standard set by the Canadian Medical Association.

As certified first responders, the students will be able not only to deal with traumatic injuries such as broken bones, burns and cuts, but will have protocols to treat medical conditions like heart attacks, shortness of breath, diabetic emergencies and serious allergic reactions.

Many fire departments and police forces in British Columbia and elsewhere require the certification as a condition of employment.

Volk says he has been impressed with the students' progress during the course.

"The school district approached me last April after hearing about a similar thing on Vancouver Island, and I really liked the idea" he said.

"These kids are pretty motivated. When they first come in into the program it's a big deal to handle all the responsibility but they're all doing well. Their confidence is a lot higher and I think they'll all be successful."

He has been a part-time paramedic with the B.C. Ambulance Service for six years, currently working out of Kelowna.

The students have been getting the training after regular school hours two night a week, and every second Saturday since February. To receive their certificate from the Justice Institute, they will have to demonstrate competence in a written knowledge test, two emergency scenarios and a variety of manual skills specific to an emergency responder.

If successful with a 75 per cent grade in all compo-

nents, they can then go on to similar testing by the Emergency Medical Assistants Licensing Board and receive their provincial certification.

The students involved with this program have also had to pay about \$200 for the course to cover textbooks and supplies, but that is a lot less than the \$1,500 or so that they would have had to pay otherwise.

Although it offered on a pilot basis using the Justice Institute classrooms in Kelowna, it's hoped that funding can be arranged and logistics worked out to run it on a permanent basis next fall in one of the local schools, according to Kelly McRae of the school district.

"That depends on a school having a position available for Aaron, but we're really hoping that (a school) can pick this up" he said. "I think students would be excited about taking the program, and we want to promote it."

With projected staffing shortages throughout the medical field in B.C., the EMR program serves as an ideal entry point for students.

Students interested in the EMR program can speak with their career life program co-ordinator, or e-mail Aaron Volk at avolk@sd23.bc.ca or phone Doug Gunn at 860-9729, ext. 4129. ■



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