

Humberview students journey to better health

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By Patti Foley



Humberview teacher Alison Harrington-McCabe (left) mirrors the disgusted looks from students in the audience, as pupil Cory Malone (right) helps presenter Kevin Murdoch empty a jar of Cheese Whiz onto a tray. Co-presenter Steve Coons explains to the group how it represents the fat in their poutine. It was part of an assembly kick-off to a new healthy eating programme being presented at the Bolton high school this fall for Grade 9 students.



Celebrating the project are (back row, left to right) Steve Coons, Kevin Murdoch (co-creators of the Lifestyle Journey programme), Viola Gabriel of the Home & School, teachers Adriana Snell and Alison Harrington-McCabe, who was instrumental in bringing the programme to the school. Front row holding student materials are teacher Tanya McGrath who is also working with the team and The Humberview Principal Patricia Macdonald. Patti Foley photos.

You could hear the groans of disgust echo throughout the cafeteria filled with teens, as huge dollop after dollop of Cheese Whiz was piled high on the tray. Steve Coons and Kevin Murdoch, co-founders of Newmarket-based Ideas for People Inc., had just landed centre stage at The Humberview School in Bolton.

And the Cheese Whiz? It was a very graphic representation that demonstrated, for the intrigued students, just how much fat is hiding in their poutine.

Moments earlier packets of sugar had flown off the stage, illustrating the amount of the sweet stuff that's lurking in a soft drink.

Together, Coons and Murdoch have developed The Lifestyle Journey Programme, aimed at empowering students to make healthier eating and lifestyle choices. Alison Harrington-McCabe, a teacher at The Humberview, heard about the programme last fall at a regional meeting of the Ontario Family Studies Leadership Council (OFSLC) and decided to run with the idea.

Armed with the support of Principal Patricia Macdonald, Harrington-McCabe worked with Coons and Murdoch to bring the programme to the school for this year's 400 Grade 9 students.

"We felt that introducing it at the Grade 9 level was vital," says Harrington-McCabe. "For most of these students it's their first experience with cafeteria-eating, as opposed to packed lunches where wholesome choices may have been made on their behalf. Now it's up to them to start making some of their own choices and we hope to equip them to make healthy ones."

The firm's website www.ideasforpeople.com bills the comprehensive course as "curriculum-based for both Health and Language Arts according to the curriculum expectations as set out by the Ministry of Education."

A quick assessment of the programme materials and of Coons' and Murdoch's stage presentation leaves no doubt that the impressively thorough programme is kid-friendly, fully-planned and classroom-ready.

The first of the four main components is The Lifestyle Journey Story, a fictional story involving three friends, designed to raise young people's awareness of the connection between their personal lifestyle choices and their own health. The second component is a Back-to-Basics Healthy Eating Guide that features seven "absolute need-to-know foundation strategies" that teach the very core of healthy eating principles, plus six "secondary strategies" that add to the students' knowledge base

of how to eat healthier.

The third and fourth components of the project consist of a Healthy Eating Learning Poster to act as a daily reminder and the 20-Day Healthy Habit System, a calendar-style tracking log. There is also a Parent's Guide and a Teacher's Guide.

Harrington-McCabe and fellow teacher Adriana Snell will lead the students through the series which even includes a healthy breakfast provided on Wednesday mornings for the duration of the eight-week programme.

"We are very excited to bring the programme to The Humberview, especially since it's the first school in Peel Region to implement the programme," says Murdoch. "We congratulate the staff here for being proactive with a programme that helps students start high school off on the right foot, in terms of their well-being and personal health," he adds.

According to the health-conscious creators of The Lifestyle Journey, there are approximately 4,100 middle school students in the Toronto District School Board who are also starting the programme this fall, in addition to schools in Alberta, BC and Saskatchewan that have been utilizing it for about three years.

After Wednesday's kick-off the students are incredibly enthusiastic and raring to go. Meanwhile, the school continues to search for corporate sponsorship to help carry the programme, which comes at an estimated cost of \$12,000.

"There has been community interest but, unfortunately, we have not been able to secure corporate backing as yet," says Macdonald. "We're hoping community-minded organizations may still step forward with offers of financial assistance or with healthy food donations for the breakfast segment of the programme."