

Melissa Yari and Cassandra Guardari. All the students are in Grade 11 except Yari, who is in Grade 12.

Safe community group looks to expand focus

■ 'ANYTHING FROM DIABETES, SMOKING CESSATION, FITNESS AND NUTRITION'

BY ALLAN BENNER
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It's been almost a year since a group of area residents got together to focus on the health of their neighbours.

As part of the city's Safe Community Partnership, the members of the Wellness and Prevention subcommittee – the first of its kind in Canada – plan to address a wide range of health issues.

"Wellness and prevention is such a large area. And there are so many things we felt that we could focus on," said chair Joanne MacLeod, during a subcommittee meeting, Wednesday.

"The possibilities are endless."

She said they hope to work with other community partners to assist with "anything from diabetes, smoking cessation, fitness and nutrition, and bring all the other resources in the

community together."

The subcommittee members are eager to start implementing some of their plans.

They are currently putting together two major initiatives, including one dealing with high schools students and another on small businesses with fewer than 19 employees.

The high school project will include an awareness campaign and contests focusing on issues ranging from obesity to internet safety.

"Right now we're discussing project ideas that we're hoping to implement in September when the school years starts," MacLeod said.

She said the project will likely start with one school and, depending on its results, it could be expanded to others.

Although it's still in the planning stage, subcommittee member Gabriella Volpe said the high school initiative will include events promoting physical activity.

"If you're not physically active, there's the potential that you'll be overweight," said Donna Mills, a health promoter from Niagara's public health department and subcommittee member.

For small businesses, MacLeod said part of the initiative has already begun.

A survey was circulated earlier this year, asking business owners if they are aware of some of the resources that are currently available in the community like flu and blood pressure clinics.

"We're looking at what small businesses need in the way of resources focusing on wellness and prevention for their employees," she said.

"We wanted to find out if they felt wellness and prevention resources would be beneficial to their business and employee needs.

"We also wanted to find out what type of issues their workplace experiences."

Mills said the initiatives are in the best interest of employers.

"We know that healthy employees are more productive employees," Mills said.

"They're happier at their job. There's less turnover, less injury, less problems like substance abuse. Certainly there's a nice tie-in promoting wellness and prevention in the workplace."

Small businesses often don't have the resources to offer the type of wellness and prevention programs that larger companies can.

The subcommittee hopes to "raise a level of awareness and education to inform them that there are supports available."

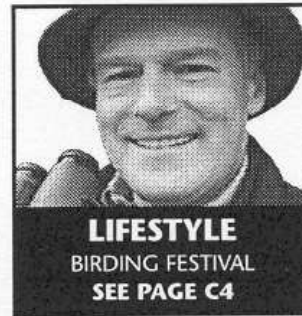
But to make the subcommittee's plans a reality, they need some help.

MacLeod said anyone interested in volunteering can contact Coun. Pat Chiocchio at 905-327-5030.

Chiocchio is chair of the Safe Community Partnership.

"If anyone is interested in joining, we'd be happy to connect with them and see how they might fit in and see what benefits we can offer them," Mills said.

"This is a community initiative and we want members of the community to join."



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