

# Student group puts skills to use

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Members of the "First Responders" group at Fort Frances High School recently had their emergency response skills put to the test.

While attending the international "E.M.S. Today" conference in Charlotte, N.C. in late February, they noticed someone experiencing a potentially-fatal asthma attack.

"At the conference, the students responded to a severe asthma attack," recalled former local paramedic John Beaton, who had accompanied 10 members of the F.F.H.S "First Responders" to Charlotte.

"They did everything on their own without me being there, which was really impressive," he enthused.

"Their training kicked in and they did all the right procedures," Beaton said.

"The person likely would of almost died or quit breathing, resulting in brain damage from lack of oxygen, if the students hadn't reacted."

Beaton added when Charlotte paramedics arrived on the scene, they were impressed with the students' response to the emergency.

"It shows how they react whenever anything happens," he remarked.

"When they see something on the street, they just go for it."

First established 15 years ago by Beaton, this year's F.F.H.S. "First Responders"

also are taught how to effectively respond to emergency situations.

When a medical emergency happens at the high school, students from the group who are "on call" quickly respond to the situation instead of waiting for paramedics to arrive.

The students involved collectively put in 600 hours of volunteer work annually.

The "E.M.S. Today" conference welcomed thousands of Emergency Medical Services professionals from several countries, who attended to learn about new issues and innovations in their field.

In order to attend, the local "First Responders" spent the last two years raising money to cover most of the trip's costs.

"We fundraised so the only thing that the students had to pay was airfare," noted Beaton.

Ben Chapman, a Grade 11 student who attended the conference, said the group was given the tools to develop their skills even further.

"For me, it gave me a better taste of para-medicine," he remarked.

"I knew this was something that I wanted to do but this conference has gotten me really into it.

"Attending the conference expanded on what we already knew into new fields that we maybe didn't have an interest in before," echoed fellow Grade 11 student Maddie Soderholm.

"It gave us a taste for [different fields] and gave us prac-

The students who attended the conference said their favourite part was watching the JEMS games, which Beaton described as an Olympics for people involved in health care.

Some 27 teams competed in simulated scenarios where they had to treat heroin overdoses and victims of a nightclub shooting.

Soderholm agreed her highlight was the JEMS games, noting she learned a lot from watching E.M.S. professionals respond to simulated emergencies.

"Watching a scene unfold in front of us, and seeing how the decisions we make can change or impact [someone's care], is really cool," she remarked.

In the past, Beaton has taken students to "E.M.S. Today" conferences across the U.S.

"This is the third time we did the field trip," he noted, adding they previously went to Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Md.

"The trip is meant to expand the students' horizons so they can see different experiences," Beaton explained.

"Some of these students would never get to see these places, like Washington."

Beaton is encouraging students interested in health care to join the "First Responders" group at Fort High.

There are no prerequisites for students to join; they just fill out a sign-up sheet in the school office.

In the meantime, Beaton looks forward to bringing more students south of the border to

consists of 21 students, in Grades 9-12, who receive extensive training in first aid and tice,” she added. “It taught us new things that we wouldn’t get to try here.” attend the “E.M.S. Today” conference in the years to come.