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His research interests include the forensic assessment of child abuse, epidemiological trends of disease such as flu, SARS and other public health related illness and Dr. Walker holds a special interest in studying the results of programs which aim to decrease the risk of injury and death to the young adult population.

Saanich Police Conversations Program - An Evaluation Study - "Talk to your kids so we don't have to"

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Dr. Walker holds honours which include the Order of St. John, Her Majesty's Medal for Humanitarian Service, and has held multiple academic scholarships and fellowships across Canada and the United States. Saanich, British Columbia is a suburban community, and part of the Capital Regional District (CRD) located on Vancouver Island, British Columbia which is on the West Coast of British Columbia and covers an area of 112 square kilometres. Saanich is the largest municipality on Vancouver Island, with a population of approximately 110,000 citizens. In 2003, the CRD experienced a particularly tragic year where 11 youth aged 16-25 were killed in motor vehicle collisions. Of those 11 youth, 8 were killed in Saanich. Members of the Saanich Police Traffic Safety Unit (TSU) were responsible for the investigations related to these motor vehicle collisions and found the outcomes destructive, yet preventable.

METHODS

Under the leadership of Saanich Police Department (SPD) Inspector Bob Downie, the Traffic Safety Unit (TSU) decided to take aggressive, preventative action in order to decrease the ongoing motor vehicle related tragedies. The Saanich Police actively participated in local schools, hosting education sessions geared to high school students and their guardians. Through these sessions, the Saanich Police Department identified that involvement of guardians was essential, as they were not typically involved in the education and prevention efforts related to driving behavior in youth. Based on common sense principles, the SPD developed a program named Conversations – a program engaging guardians and their youth in frank discussion towards prevention of motor vehicle collisions.

Since December 2003, Conversations has been running in Saanich with the leadership and partnership of the SPD, and the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC). The program is funded by community partners and other emergency services partners such as the BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) and local Emergency Department Staff, who are active participants, along with victims and families directly affected by collisions.

RESULTS

Data has been collected on the impact of this program over a three-year period. In October of 2006, the authors evaluated this project to provide an evaluation of the program. This report will provide: a sequential background of events surrounding the Conversations Program, a review of the literature in the area of young drivers program evaluation and benchmarks for success, significant data that has been obtained through Conversations, and an analysis of the current program's

benefits to the local community. In addition, the analysis of the current program will identify opportunities for future development of Conversations. Saanich Police

SUMMARY

The study illustrated that involvement of guardians in their youth's safe driving education through consistent conversations with relevant safety education materials influences a young driver's attitude towards driving. This creates the potential to change youth attitudes towards driving behavior, a step closer to the ultimate goal of improving young driving behavior in the hope of decreasing youth traffic fatality.

The findings of this study provide insight into other variables, such as the personalities of young drivers and guardians' driving behavior, to be considered in its second phase of implementation. With its improved sampling design, this program could be used in areas with similar setting.

The impacts and successes of Conversations show the potential of such programs to improve youth driving behavior. Programs like Conversations therefore need to be supported by appropriate institutions. Factors that determine the success of programs have to be identified and properly addressed if future program development efforts are to bring about the desired outcomes.