



**Final Report for the 2022-23 Peer Wellness
Education Pilot Project at Ontario Tech
University**

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

University students are known to be physically inactive, have a poor diet, and engage in substance use, all of which correlate with a variety of chronic conditions and poor health outcomes. During this stage of life, especially as many university students are living away from home for the first time, young adults will set habits that can be potentially helpful or harmful to their health and academic success. Peer-to-peer programs and education strategies can be an effective method to reach many students on campus, foster a campus community, increase knowledge and awareness of healthy behaviours, and recognize and refer students to appropriate resources.

In March 2022, a grant was awarded to pilot test a Peer Wellness Education Program at Ontario Tech University through the Faculty of Health Sciences Dean's Discretionary Teaching Innovation Fund. The Peer Wellness Education Program provides opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in the field of health promotion, improve their skills, meet other students, and learn health tips that can be used in their own lives.

In the Spring/Summer semester, a team of 6 students created 3 display boards for social marketing campaigns and 4 sets of palm cards. A team of 11 students in the Fall semester and 15 students in the Winter semester worked together to implement the social marketing campaigns and distribute the resources created in the Spring/Summer semester. Throughout the year, team members contributed over 370 hours to implement various display booths, health promotion events, and workshops organized by the Peer Wellness Education Program and Ontario Tech Health Promotion. The Peer Wellness Education team volunteered at over 77 health promoting events, interacted with over 2080 students, and disseminated over 4450 health promotion resources. The team also created social media posts on Instagram to promote the program, created blog posts for the Ontario Tech Digital Community, and created two additional display boards during this time. Although few students could directly name the Peer Wellness Education team or Ontario Tech Health Promotion as a program or service on campus without prompting during intercept interviews, the majority of surveyed students had seen or heard about a health promotion activity. Team members reported an increase in knowledge of health promotion concepts and an increase in skills related to engaging students in conversations about their health and creating informative and appealing health education resources after volunteering with the Peer Wellness Education team.

The Peer Wellness Education pilot project was very successful. A large volunteer team and collaborations with Athletics and Recreation and Student Life maximized the reach and engagement with students. Students seemed to be excited to be on campus again and readily engaged in conversations with student volunteers. The Peer Wellness Education Program will maintain the momentum achieved over the past year and continue programming into the 2023-24 academic year. Over the next year, the team will create additional social marketing campaigns, create a social media plan, and identify a central space for storing Health Promotion materials.

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Introduction

Physical inactivity, poor diet, stress, and substance use are well-known correlates for a variety of chronic conditions and poor health outcomes. These risk factors are common among university students, many of whom are living away from home for the first time. According to data from the 2022 National College Health Assessment, only 32.0% of Ontario Tech students met guidelines for active adults, 10.0% reported getting enough sleep to feel rested in the morning on 6 or more of the past 7 days, 20.9% reported eating 3 or more servings of fruits per day in the last 7 days, and 39.9% reported eating 3 or more servings of vegetables per day in the last 7 days.¹ Additionally, 57.5% of students reported using alcohol, 27.2% reported using marijuana, and 11.5% reported using e-cigarettes within the last 3 months.¹

During this stage of their life, young adults are setting habits that may be helpful or harmful to their health and academic success. Given that university students represent a sizable population with which to intervene, the insular nature of campus life, and the mobility of this population, student-run, student-focused programming is required.

Education strategies can be an effective method to reach most students on campus, and peer-to-peer programs can help to foster a campus community, increase knowledge and awareness of healthy behaviours, and recognize and refer students to appropriate resources.² In addition, through their involvement in such programs, peer educators may change their own behaviours and develop their own skills.^{3,4}

In March 2022, a grant was awarded to pilot test a Peer Wellness Education Program at Ontario Tech University through the Faculty of Health Sciences Dean's Discretionary Teaching Innovation Fund. Peer Wellness Education Programs provide opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in the field of Health Promotion while learning interactive presentation skills. Peer Wellness Education Programs also provide students with a chance to meet other students and to learn health tips that can be used in their own lives. The skills gained are valuable for any career and provide students with an advantage when applying for jobs. This type of programming aligns with the University's focus on "Learning re-imagined" by providing cross-disciplinary experiential learning opportunities for students across the Faculty of Health Sciences (and other faculties). It also promotes "a sticky campus" by encouraging student engagement on campus.

The following report summarizes the activities of the Peer Wellness Education Pilot Project that occurred between April 2022 and April 2023.

¹ American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment III: Ontario Tech University Executive Summary Spring 2022. Silver Spring, MD: American College Health Association; 2022.

² Shook JL, Keup JR. The benefits of peer leader programs: An overview from the literature. *New Dir High Educ.* 2012;2012(157):5-16.

³ McKeganey SP, Neil. The Rise and Rise of Peer Education Approaches. *Drugs Educ Prev Policy.* 2000 Jan;7(3):293-310.

⁴ Crisp DA, Rickwood D, Martin B, Byrom N. Implementing a peer support program for improving university student wellbeing: The experience of program facilitators. *Aust J Educ.* 2020 Aug 1;64(2):113-26.

Highly Qualified Personnel Involvement

The original grant proposal was submitted to the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences by Dr. Adam Cole to pilot test a Peer Wellness Education Program. While working on the grant proposal, Dr. Cole learned that Athletics and Recreation (in collaboration with Student Life) hired Victoria Palmer in January 2022 as a part-time Health Promotions Coordinator for a one-year contract. Dr. Cole connected with Victoria about collaborating on the pilot project. Victoria was instrumental in developing and implementing the Peer Wellness Education Pilot Project, and the project represented a unique collaboration between the Faculty and a University Department. The Communications Team at Student Life was also involved in creating visually appealing display boards and resources that were used during the pilot project.

Student recruitment took place at the end of the Winter 2022 term. Students were invited to apply to be a Peer Wellness Educator through the [Student Life Student Leadership Positions Portal](#), which included a description of the roles and responsibilities of Peer Wellness Educators.

Students were told about the new position through instructor posts on Canvas and a social media reel posted on the Student Life Instagram page. Students filled out a form to identify which Student Leadership Position(s) they were interested in applying to. Students interested in applying to be a Peer Wellness Educator were also asked 3 additional screening questions:

1. After reviewing the job description, please explain why you are interested in being a Peer Wellness Educator and what excites you the most about this role?
2. What health topics are you most passionate about and why?
3. What types of health and wellness initiatives would you like to see implemented on campus?

The applicants were reviewed and 18 students were invited to participate in a virtual group interview (due to COVID restrictions) to learn more about their interest in the position. From this group of students, 14 were selected to join the Peer Wellness Education pilot project. The recruited team members represented various programs (Public Health/Human Health Science, Nursing, Science) in various stages of their degree (1st-4th year). Table 1 presents the number of students who contributed to the program by semester. In addition to student volunteers, 3 work study students were hired through Athletics and Recreation to support the development of Ontario Tech Health Promotion, and 7 nursing students completed practicum placements with Ontario Tech Health Promotion.

Table 1. Number of Ontario Tech students involved in the Peer Wellness Education Program, by semester

Semester	Number of Student Volunteers		Number of Nursing Practicum Students	Number of Work Study Students	Total Number of Students
	Number of New Volunteers	Number of Returning Volunteers			
Spring/Summer 2022	5	0	0	1	6
Fall 2022	5	4	0	2	11
Winter 2023	0	6	7	2	15

As part of their role, Peer Wellness Educators were expected to complete the Leadership Foundations training course (as part of Student Life), attend the Peer Wellness Educator training session (2 hours, virtual), attend weekly team meetings (1 hour each, in-person), and spend 4 hours per week on other health promotion activities (such as attending outreach events and creating additional campaign materials). It was during this training that the team learned the O.A.R.S. technique for communication skills, the 5 stages of behaviour change and how it applies to health and wellness, as well as components of planning and developing social marketing campaigns (S.W.O.T. Analysis and the 4 P's of marketing).

Throughout the year, team members contributed over 373 hours to implement various social marketing campaigns (Table 2). These hours were accumulated through volunteering at various display booths, events, and workshops organized by the Peer Wellness Education Program and Ontario Tech Health Promotion. Nursing students completed 2 days/week with Ontario Tech Health Promotion, including contributing to the Peer Wellness Education Program, as part of their practicum placement.

Table 2. Student volunteer involvement in the Peer Wellness Education Program in hours, by semester

Term	Number of Hours Volunteered
Total Hours	373.0
2022 Spring/Summer Semester	89.0
2022 Fall Semester	165.5
2023 Winter Semester	118.5

Programming Details

The sections that follow provide a summary of the social marketing campaigns and materials that were created and distributed as part of the Peer Wellness Education pilot project.

Spring/Summer 2022 Program Planning

A small team of 6 students were recruited to develop materials that would be used in the Fall 2022 and Winter 2023 semesters. Over the Spring/Summer semester, team members created display boards for 3 social marketing campaigns and 4 sets of palm cards, described further below.

1. Catch Some Zzz's display board

Attending university is a milestone for many young adults. Midterms and final exams can be stressful for students that are unsure how to prepare, and many students will sacrifice a good night's sleep to study. However, poor sleep can hinder academic performance and contribute to poor mental health. The display board (Figure 1 below) provides sleep facts and tips and encourages students to consider aspects of their own sleep environment that may prevent them from getting adequate sleep.

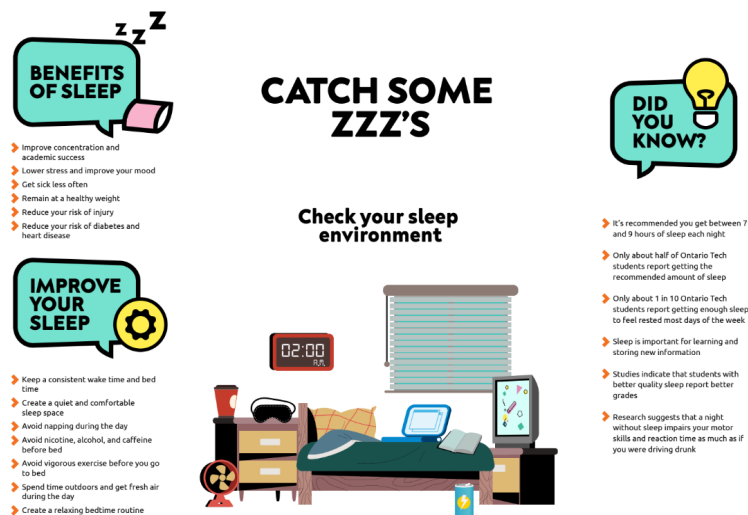


Figure 1. Catch Some Zzz's display board

2. Party Smart display board

During university, many students move away from home for the first time and become old enough to legally drink alcohol and use cannabis. It is widely accepted that alcohol is the most pervasively misused substance on college and university campuses. Given the recent legalization of recreational cannabis in Canada, many students may also experiment with cannabis during university. Knowing that many students will drink alcohol and use cannabis, the focus is not to

prohibit alcohol or cannabis use, but rather to engage students in conversation about how to drink alcohol and use cannabis responsibly.

In addition to purchasing a trivia wheel and creating trivia questions to encourage student engagement, the display board (Figure 2 below) provides safe partying tips for before, during, and after the party, information about the size of a standard drink, and information about relevant Canadian guidelines (Canada’s Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines and Canada’s Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines). The team was also given a variety of resources and giveaway items from [DrinkSmart](#) (a not-for-profit program and resource guide in Ontario) to give out to students.



Figure 2. Party Smart display board

3. Stress Busters display board

Stress is a normal response to the everyday demands of life, and university students are faced with stressors that can originate from numerous factors. With the proper resources and support, students are able to build resilience to cope and thrive under the pressure of stressors. Knowing that stress comes in many different forms, the focus of the display board is to educate students on the importance of identifying stressors, as well as actionable strategies and resources that can aid in stress management. Students were provided with both university and community resources (e.g., [Good2Talk](#)) that can help to achieve this goal.

With an emphasis on peer-to-peer learning, the team conducted an activity that allowed each student to not only share their methods of coping with stress, but provided the opportunity for students to learn of their peers’ methods as well. Students used sticky notes to write down their response to the question “How do you cope with stress?”, and were then asked to attach their response to the display board (Figure 3 below).



Figure 3. Stress Busters display board

4. Sleep Well tip palm cards

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines recommend that adults between the ages of 18 and 64 years acquire 7-9 hours of high quality sleep per night.⁵ With university students falling into this category, it is imperative that students learn the ways in which they can improve their sleep quality and duration in order to yield more positive physical, mental, and academic outcomes. The *Sleep Well* tip palm cards provide practical advice to students, including how to build a healthy night routine, how to prioritize sleep, methods to develop a comfortable sleep environment, and why students should avoid frequent napping. These tip palms cards were designed to be used with the *Catch Some Zzz's* display board. An example of a *Sleep Well* tip palm card is illustrated below (Figure 4).

⁵ Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults (18-64 years). Retrieved June 13, 2023 from <https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-18-64/>.



Figure 4. Front (left) and back (right) of a Sleep Well tip palm card

5. Body Break tip palm cards

Habitual physical inactivity increases the risk of developing harmful chronic health conditions. The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines recommend that adults between the ages of 18 and 64 years engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week, and acquire no more than 3 hours of recreational screen time and 8 hours of sedentary time per day.⁵ The *Body Break* tip palm cards provide students with simple exercises they can do throughout their day in order to increase their physical activity levels and break up sedentary time. Three of the tip palm cards provide visual and written instructions for stretches that can be completed while sitting down, and another tip palm card (Figure 5 below) suggests engaging in mindful walking.



Figure 5. Front (left) and back (right) of a Body Break tip palm card

6. Snack for Success tip palm cards

Coursework, studying, or stressors associated with academics can lead students to neglect their health to focus more on their academics. It is all too common to observe unhealthy diets among university students, and an unhealthy diet can not only negatively impact health, but also affect academic performance. Understanding that many students seek to allocate as much time as they can towards their academics, the focus of the tip palm cards is to provide healthy snack ideas that can be made on a limited budget in short amounts of time. With reference to Canada's Food Guide, the *Snack for Success* tip palm cards (Figure 6 below) seek to encourage students to make healthier snack choices. Three variations of tip palm cards include recipes for crispy chickpeas, hummus, and overnight oats, and another tip palm card provides information about the importance of hydration and ways to make water more appetizing.



Figure 6. Front (left) and back (right) of a *Snack for Success* tip palm card

7. Ridgeback Wellness Reminder tip palm card

Many students prioritize academics over their wellness, and thus the focus of this resource is to bring attention to students' overall wellness. The *Ridgeback Wellness Reminder* tip palm card (Figure 7 below) aims to tackle wellness concerns that range across most university students. These reminders seek to not only encourage reflection, but provide tips to enhance wellness in many different ways. This resource provides wellness tips that relate to the seven dimensions of wellness and provides a QR code to access additional resources and wellness tips.



Figure 7. Front (left) and back (right) of the Ridgeback Wellness Reminder tip palm card

Fall/Winter 2022-2023 Program Implementation

A team of 11 students in the Fall semester and 15 students in the Winter semester implemented the social marketing campaigns and distributed the resources that were created over the Spring/Summer semester. The main focus of the Peer Wellness Education team was hosting weekly display booths on campus to raise awareness of various health topics.

Outreach Activities

Over the 2022-2023 academic year, the team ran various display booths and promoted a diverse range of health workshops and health promotion events. The team generally conducted one outreach activity per week to ensure continuous programming throughout the term.

Display Booths

The team ran 9 display booths in the Fall semester, including the *Catch Some Zzz's*, *Party Smart*, and *Stress Busters* social marketing campaigns. The team ran 27 display booths in the Winter semester, including the *Catch Some Zzz's*, *Let's Talk About Safer Sex* (developed in the Fall semester), *Stress Busters*, and *Party Smart* social marketing campaigns. The team was able to host more display booths in the Winter semester as a result of having nursing practicum placement students on the team. Figure 8 below presents the number of student interactions at display booths in the Fall semester compared to the Winter semester. The team was very successful in interacting with students in both the Fall and Winter semesters.

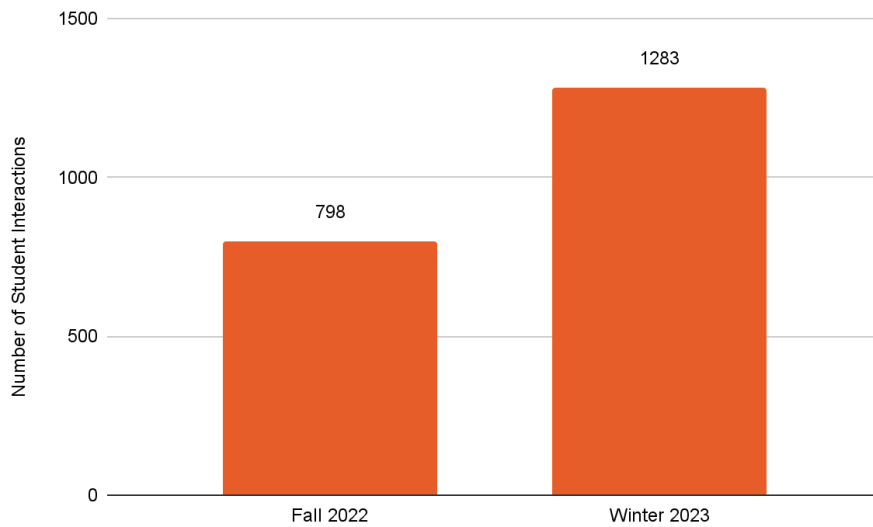


Figure 8. Number of student interactions with Peer Wellness Educators at display booths, by semester

Workshops and Health Promotion Events

The Peer Wellness Education team helped to promote health-related workshops arranged by Ontario Tech Health Promotion. Six workshops ran in the Fall semester and 7 ran in the Winter semester. Workshops included an educational component delivered by an expert in the field pertaining to each workshop. Nutrition workshops were facilitated by Registered Nutritionist Sylvia Emmorey. In the Fall semester, “Eating Healthy on a Budget” and “Eating for Energy” were held; in the Winter semester, “How to Healthify your Diet”, “Eating for Stress”, and “Healthy Snacks” were held. A “Healthy Sleep” workshop was facilitated by Dr. Efrosini Papaconstantinou, which educated students on methods to improve sleep quality. “A Touch of Culture” workshops included monthly interactive cooking workshops in which students had the opportunity to learn how to prepare nutritious meals on a busy university schedule. The meals that were prepared pertained to a specific culture each session in order to highlight the diversity of students on campus. Over the past academic year, students learned how to cook Japanese, Indian, Macedonian, Ecuadorian, and Spanish meals. A “Music Therapy” workshop was led by Registered Music Therapist and Psychotherapist Antoinette (Toni) Mongillo Desideri. This workshop occurred once in the Winter semester, allowing students to play instruments and engage in an educational discussion surrounding the benefits of this particular type of therapy.

The Peer Wellness Education team also helped to promote health promotion events organized by Ontario Tech Health Promotion. Fourteen health promotion events ran in the Fall semester, and 14 events ran in the Winter semester. Health promotion events provided regular opportunities for students to practically execute what they have learned about promoting their health. *Mindful Movement*, facilitated by Siobhan O’Conner, consisted of bi-weekly light yoga sessions that provided students with a movement break in between studying and classes in order to promote physical activity and mindfulness. *Wellness Walks*, led by various staff and students, promoted

physical and mental health by leading students on an hour-long walk/hike around campus and through Cedar Valley Conservation Area. This initiative promoted wellness by aiding in improving mood, decreasing stress, and improving concentration during a busy work day. A “Paint Night” was hosted by Summer Bird, an Anishinaabekwe (or Ojibway woman), from a community in Northern Ontario known as Naotkamegwanning (or Whitefish bay). Summer led a woodland-style “Paint Night” in the Winter semester. This health promotion event educated students on Indigenous culture, and provided participants with a relaxed, stress-free environment to gain valuable knowledge and an appreciation for contributing to overall wellness through artistic expression.

Members of the Peer Wellness Education team promoted workshops and health promotion events in various ways. For instance, the team promoted *Mindful Movement* and *Wellness Walks* while at display booths, handing out palm cards with information about these health promotion initiatives and answering questions from students. Multiple team members also volunteered to help facilitate these events, aiding in increasing student engagement. In addition, some team members volunteered their time helping with nutrition sessions, participating in discussions, and helping to provide snack samples to participants. Some of the Peer Wellness Educators used their personal social media platforms to promote upcoming events and workshops as well, reposting posts made about the events from the [Campus Recreation Instagram page](#). Figure 9 below provides an example of a post from the Campus Recreation Instagram page.

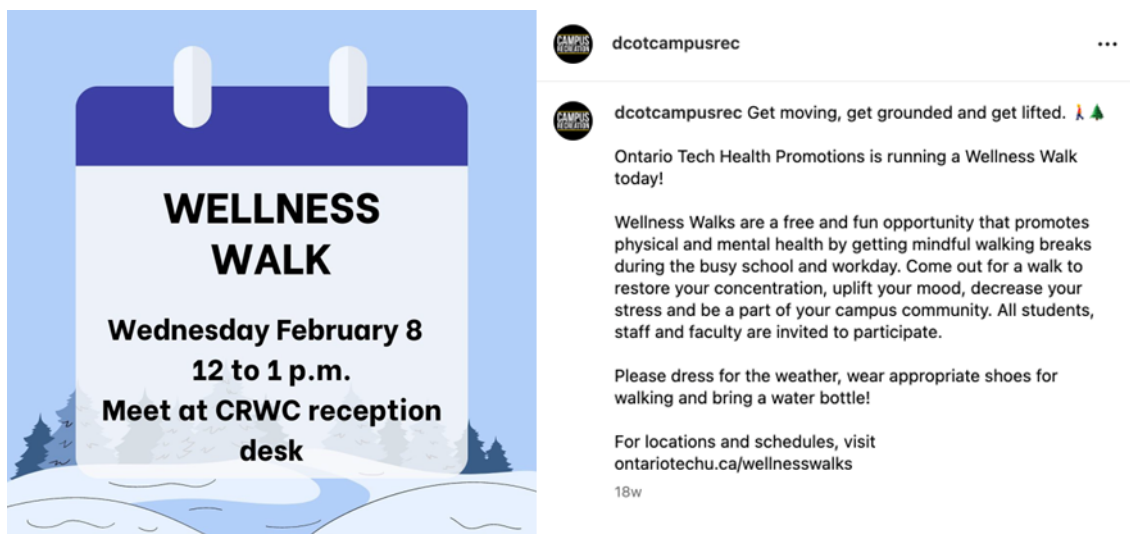


Figure 9. Example post (left) and caption (right) from the Campus Recreation Instagram page used to promote a health promotion event

The figure below presents the number of student interactions at both workshops and health promotion events in both the Fall 2022 and Winter 2023 semesters. While registration was required in advance for many workshops and events, students could also drop-in and attend these workshops and events the day they were held. While attendance at workshops and health promotion events tended to be lower, promotion and awareness activities by Peer Wellness Educators the day of the workshop or event helped to boost attendance.

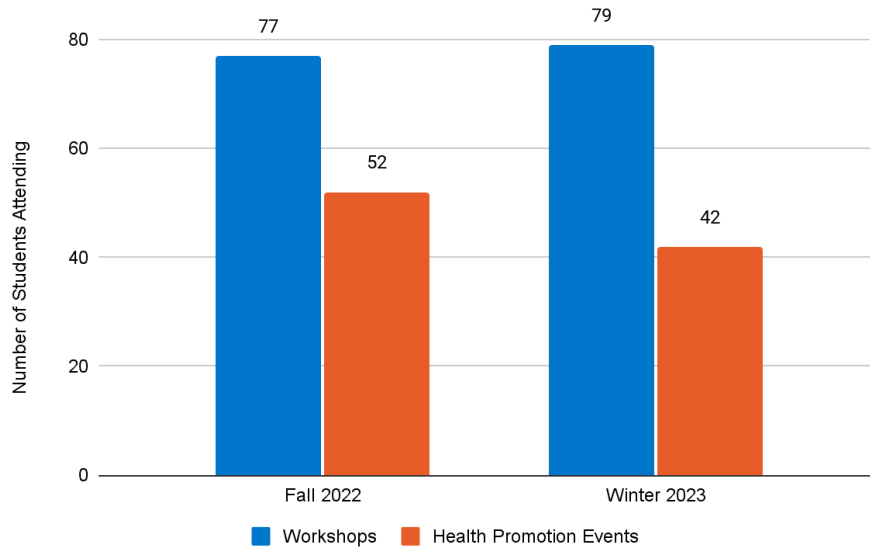


Figure 10. Number of student interactions with Peer Wellness Educators at workshops and health promotion events, by semester

The table below provides a summary of the number of display booths, workshops, and events hosted by the team during the Fall and Winter terms. The Peer Wellness Education team was quite active and generally hosted more than one outreach activity per week in both semesters.

Table 3. Number of display booths, workshops, and events hosted, by semester

Semester	Total Number of Display Booth	Total Number of Workshops	Total Number of Health Promotion Events
Fall 2022	9	6	14
Winter 2023	27	7	14

Resource Dissemination

The table below indicates the number of educational resources and giveaway items given out to students. External resources included items such as Good2Talk wallet cards, HPV vaccine palm cards, and a DrinkSmart standard drink wheel. Internal resources included items such as *Ridgeback Wellness Reminder* tip palm cards, *7 Dimensions of Wellness* palm cards, *Wellness Walk* palm cards, *Body Break* tip palm cards, *Snack for Success* tip palm cards, and *Sleep Well* tip palm cards. Giveaway items included DrinkSmart Halloween socks, ear plugs, Health Promotion pens, and candy. The team was quite successful handing out resources to students and ensuring that every giveaway item was paired with an educational resource.

Table 4. Number of resources and giveaway items disseminated, by term

Term	Number of Resources	Number of Giveaway Items
Fall 2022	218 External Resources 1,389 Internal Resources	734
Winter 2023	517 External Resources 2,334 Internal Resources	1,106

Other Activities

Creating Social Media Posts

Peer Wellness Educators used Instagram as the main social media platform to promote events and share health promotion content on both the [Campus Recreation](#) and [Student Life](#) Instagram pages. These promotion efforts included posts, reels, and Instagram stories that helped to garner a larger student audience. Linked and pictured below are some of the posts and reels uploaded to Instagram. In total, over 65 posts or reels about health promotion events, activities, and information were shared through these channels (this number does not include Instagram stories). Example posts are shown below in Figures 11 and 12.

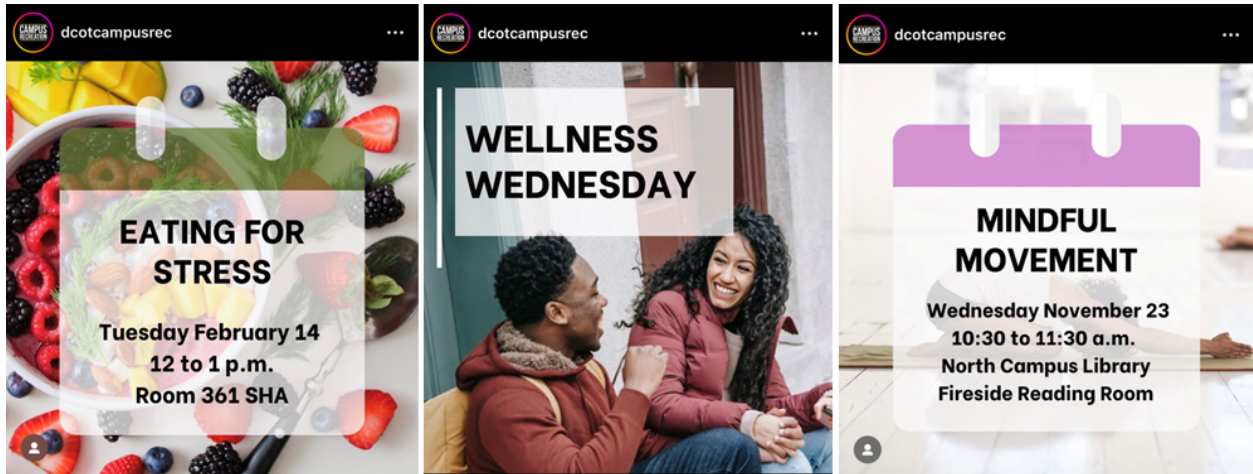


Figure 11. Eating for Stress post (left), Wellness Wednesday post (middle), and Mindful Movement post (right) uploaded to the Campus Recreation and Wellness Instagram page

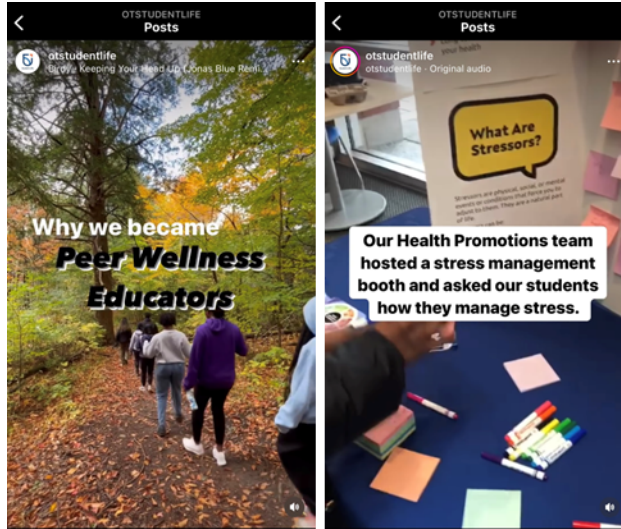


Figure 12. Why You Should Become a Peer Wellness Educator reel (left) and Stress Busters display booth reel (right) uploaded to the Ontario Tech Student Life Instagram page

Writing Blog Posts

Some members of the team researched topics of concern for student health and wellness to create blog posts for the [Ontario Tech Digital Community](#). Blog posts on the topics of grocery shopping effectively and Q&A with a sleep expert have been posted to this website. Other blog posts that have been written will be posted next year. Listed below are all the blog posts created by the Peer Wellness Education team.

- [Q&A with a Sleep Expert](#)

Balancing the demands of university, extracurriculars, as well as personal life can be challenging for university students and may cause them to sacrifice sleep. With information and advice from sleep expert Dr. Efrosini Papaconstantinou, this blog post highlights the importance of a good night's sleep, provides activities and routines that benefit sleep, things to avoid to promote better sleep, and information on strategic napping.

- [How to grocery shop effectively](#)

Grocery shopping for healthy food on a budget is a concern for many university students, and this blog post provides direction on how to shop effectively on a budget. With tips such as planning ahead, how to navigate the grocery store layout, and information on what to put in your cart, it supports students in making the best choices for their health and wellbeing.

- [Q&A with Ontario Tech Mental Health Services](#)

Mental health issues are of growing concern, especially within the student population. This blog post, with information from interviewee Bonnie Pedots from Ontario Tech Mental Health Services, describes habits that negatively impact mental health, students who are at higher and lower risk of mental health problems, the services available to students at Ontario Tech, and strategies to cope and prioritize mental health.

- Rating Popular Wellness Apps

Wellness applications serve a variety of purposes and tackle varying aspects of wellness. This blog post provides a review and testimonials on the following apps: nutrition apps, wellness apps, and sleep apps. The blog post stresses the importance of identifying the credibility of each app, as well as the potential benefits and shortcomings of these apps.

- How do I bounce back?

The obstacles that students face, derived from their academic journey or otherwise, test resiliency. With an interview from academic advisor Matt Luchesse, this blog post provides information on the definition of resiliency, the P's of resilience, the services that Ontario Tech Academic Advisors provide, and how students can bounce back from a bad grade.

- How to read food labels

A well known determining factor of health is diet, and the ability to read a food label is a skill that is vital especially for university students who want to eat well on a budget. With 4 easy steps to follow, this blog post outlines how to read a nutrition facts table and ingredients list, the importance of doing so, and advice on how to find the information to make the best choice for health.

- Q&A with a Personal Trainer

Students with brain fog, lack of motivation, or even trouble sleeping may be experiencing these symptoms due to lack of physical activity. This blog post, centered around an interview with personal trainer Eric Viana, stresses the importance of physical activity, identifies the common barriers faced, and ways to reduce sedentary time and be more active.

Creating additional social marketing campaigns

- 1. Let's Talk about Safer Sex display board**

During the Fall semester, students created a sexual health display board that was presented in the Winter semester. Embracing your own sexuality and sexual health is an integral component of health and wellness. The importance of sexual education is vital as some students may not have been taught about safer sex prior to attending university. With information regarding safer sex, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and contraception, the display board (Figure 13 below) provides an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning. In addition, the board provides resources and information for external resources to supplement the information. The team created trivia questions to be used with the trivia wheel to encourage student engagement. Team members offered students free condoms while at the display board.

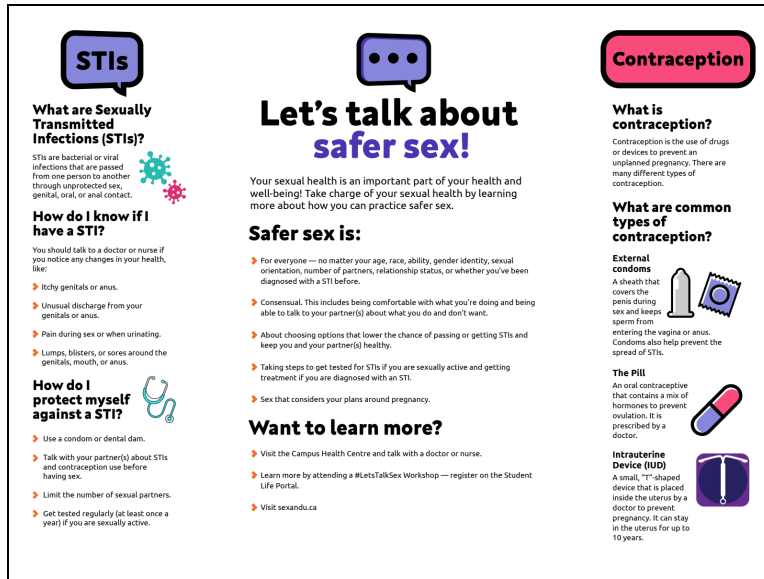


Figure 13. Let's Talk About Safer Sex display board

During the Winter semester, nursing practicum students created a nutrition display board focused on snacking that could be used to promote the *Snack for Success* tip palm cards. Healthy snacks can keep students energized, support good health, provide important nutrients, and help satisfy hunger between meals. A healthy diet is also an important part of students' academic success. The display board focuses on teaching students how to create a healthy snack according to Canada's Food Guide, by incorporating fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and proteins. To facilitate student interaction, the display board will also include an activity where students can create their own snack, modeled after Canada's Food Guide. The display board is currently being designed by the Communications Team at Student Life.

Program Evaluation

In addition to data about student interactions and resources disseminated during outreach events, students provided feedback about their volunteer experience as part of evaluating the pilot project. This feedback is summarized in the sections that follow.

Volunteer Experience

Members of the Peer Wellness Education team were asked to complete an anonymous, online survey prior to team training and at again at the end of the year in order to gain an understanding of changes to their level of knowledge and skill associated with different aspects of health promotion. The baseline survey included 17 questions; the follow-up survey included the same 17 questions as the baseline survey as well as an additional question about the overall success of campaigns over the last year and 3 open-ended questions. Questions about the level of knowledge and skill were ranked using a five-point scale (1 being a low level of knowledge or skill and 5 being a high level of knowledge or skill). Seventeen students completed

the baseline survey and 14 students completed the follow-up survey. Some students were not able to continue volunteering with the team over the Winter semester and they did not complete the follow-up survey.

The figure below presents the percentage of students who indicated their level of knowledge of health promotion concepts was high (a 4 or 5 out of 5) at baseline and follow-up. Knowledge in the following categories were examined as they directly related to the training provided: the need for peer-to-peer education, general health and wellness, campus health and wellness resources and services, health education campaigns, S.W.O.T. Analysis, Stages of Change Model, O.A.R.S. technique, and program evaluation. More Peer Wellness Educators reported a high level of knowledge in each of these areas after volunteering on the team. The largest changes were observed in knowledge of health education campaigns, program evaluation, and campus health and wellness resources and services.

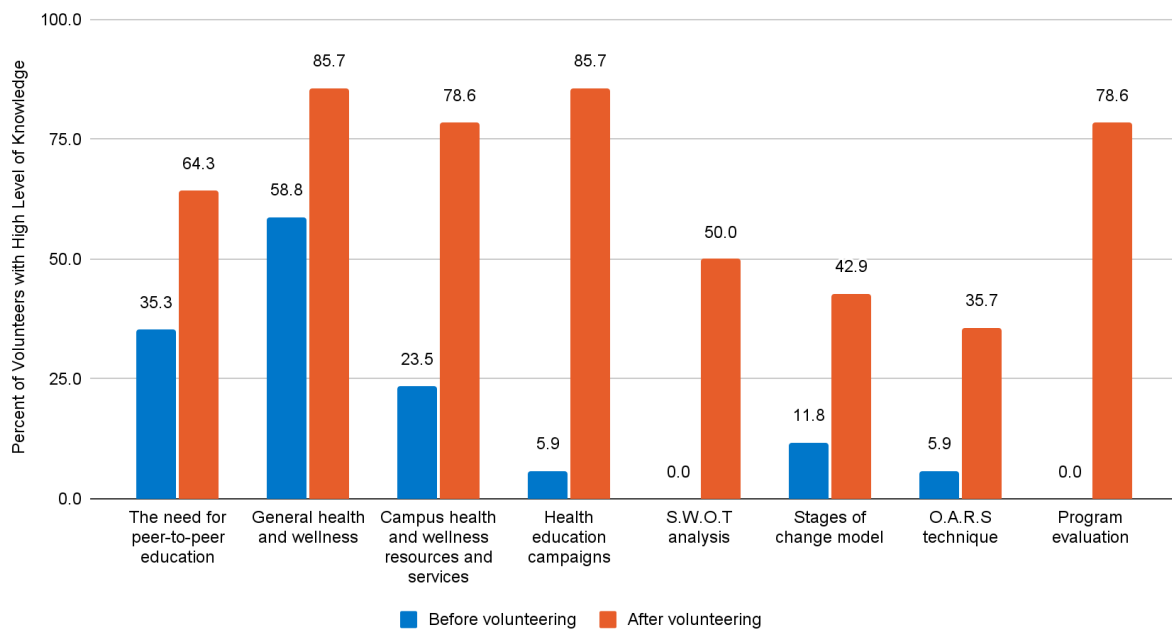


Figure 14. Percentage of Peer Wellness Educators indicating a high level of knowledge of health promotion concepts at baseline and follow-up

The figure below presents the percentage of students who indicated a high skill level in various areas (a 4 or 5 out of 5) at baseline and follow-up. The skills assessed included time management, leadership, teamwork, public speaking, planning a health education campaign, creating informative and appealing health education resources, engaging students in conversations about their health, communication, and collecting and reporting evaluation data. More Peer Wellness Educators reported a high level of skill in each of these areas after volunteering on the team. The largest changes were observed for skills related to public speaking, planning a health education campaign, engaging students in conversations about their health, and creating informative and appealing health education resources.

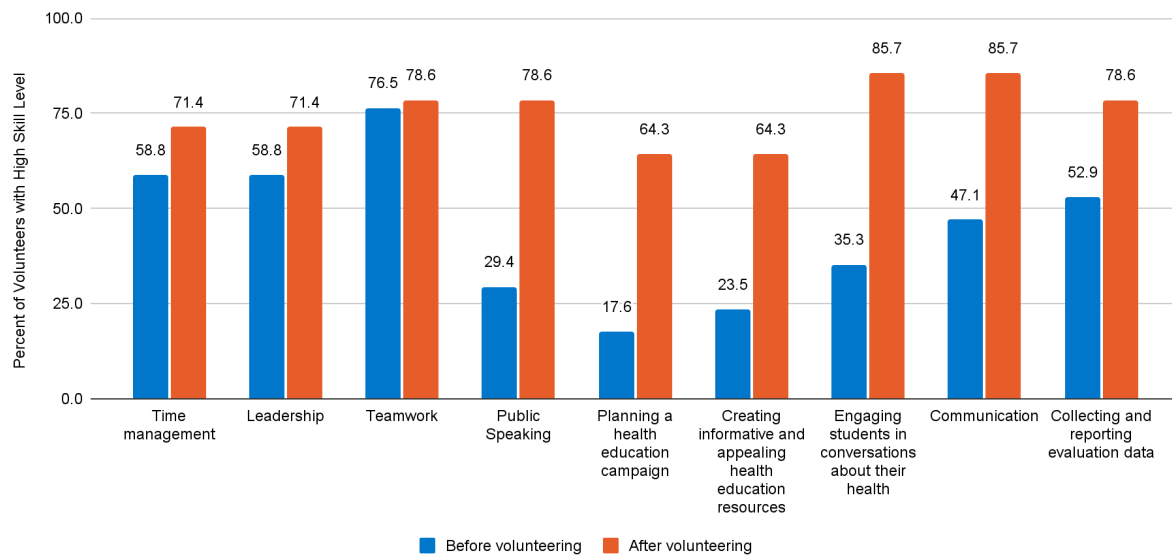


Figure 15. Percentage of Peer Wellness Educators indicating a high level of skill at baseline and follow-up

When asked to rate the success of campaigns over the last year, 78.6% of Peer Wellness Educators thought the campaigns were successful (a 4 or 5 out of 5). Qualitative data were collected by means of open-ended questions. When participants were asked what they believed to be the most important or helpful thing they learned while working on the Peer Wellness Education team, multiple volunteers indicated the execution of effective communication skills while conversing with peers about health was important. One Peer Wellness Educator stated that:

“Understanding your target population is imperative when providing health teaching. With this population, I had to ensure that my health education delivery was comprehensive but concise”

This team member was highlighting the importance of having effective communication skills, specifically pertaining to the target population: university students. When asked about certain challenges they faced while working on the team, a few students acknowledged that grasping the attention of students and engaging with less-interested students posed a challenge at display booths. One team member stated:

“I would say that the most challenging part about being a PWE [Peer Wellness Educator] is knowing when and how to communicate to students who approach display booths. Everyone is at a different stage in their wellness journey, everyone has a different communication style, so being able to recognize people's communication style and communicate effectively is definitely something to learn.”

Additionally, some Peer Wellness Educators acknowledged the practical challenges they faced.

For instance, 4 out of 14 team members indicated that setting up and/or closing display booths posed a challenge, likely due to the weight of the equipment and the distance that was required to carry everything. The team purchased a collapsible hand truck at the end of the year that will be used next year to help transport the equipment and resources needed for display booths.

Team members suggested increasing the range of health topics discussed at display booths in order to increase engagement and maintain interest from students and to better suit the needs of different students, including students of different cultural backgrounds.

Intercept Interviews

The team conducted intercept interviews with a random sample of Ontario Tech students to gather information about the overall reach of the program. Team members randomly approached 50 individual students at a variety of locations around North Campus at various times of day and asked a series of questions regarding the program and its associated campaigns. Peer Wellness Educators were instructed not to wear any Health Promotion identifiers (e.g., the Peer Wellness t-shirt) during intercept interviews. The first 6 questions asked students about health education programs, services, and activities that they were aware of on campus. The next 6 questions asked students whether they had seen the *7 Dimensions of Wellness* palm card, the *Sleep Well* tip palm card, or the DrinkSmart standard drink wheel on campus and whether they thought these resources were appealing. The final 2 questions asked students to indicate their age and gender. Most students (62%) identified as female, and the average age was 20.6 years (range: 18-29 years).

While few students (16%) could directly name (without prompting) the Peer Wellness Education team or Ontario Tech Health Promotion as a program or service on campus that provides information about student health and wellness, many more students reported seeing or hearing about outreach events on campus. The majority of students (88%) had seen or heard about a health education display (about sleep, safe drinking/marijuana use, managing stress, or safer sex), had seen one of the tip palm cards on campus (88%), and some reported attending a Health Promotion event (20%).

Team Successes

Overall, the Peer Wellness Education pilot project was very successful. Student interest in being part of the team was high, and we were able to recruit a number of high-quality and reliable student volunteers to create and implement the social marketing campaigns. Including nursing practicum students on the team was advantageous. Not only did these students gain hands-on experience conducting campus health and wellness activities, but the weekly practicum hours meant that the team could regularly host display booths on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in the Winter term. This drastically increased the number of outreach events the team was able to conduct and ensured consistent programming on campus. The large volunteer team meant that we were able to maximize our reach and engagement with students, as supported by the positive

results of intercept interviews. The team conducted more outreach activities and engaged with more students than expected.

Collaborating with Victoria, the newly hired Health Promotions Coordinator, amplified the impact of this pilot project. The Health Promotions Coordinator was a new role created by Athletics and Recreation and supported by Student Life. Through her role, Victoria had access to resources in both Athletics and Recreation and Student Life, which facilitated the ability to post health and wellness content on the social media pages of both University Departments. By posting health and wellness messages on pre-existing social media accounts, the team was able to reach a much larger audience than would have been achieved if the Peer Wellness Education Program had created its own social media account. Athletics and Recreation provided the necessary space in the Campus Recreation and Wellness Centre (CRWC) to store Peer Wellness Education resources (e.g., folding table, trivia wheel, display boards, resources/giveaway items) when not in use. Additionally, the Communications Team contributed their skills to design the display boards and team-created resources in order to align with Ontario Tech University branding and design features. As a result, all of the created resources had a professional, appealing, and cohesive appearance, which increased the credibility of the team.

The social marketing campaigns created were generally well-received by students. This was the first year that many students were on campus after the emergency remote learning that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students seemed to be excited to be on campus and readily engaged in conversations with student volunteers. Furthermore, purchasing a trivia wheel and creating trivia questions created natural opportunities for Peer Health Educators to engage with students.

Lessons Learned

Although the pilot project had many successes, the team learned a few lessons for future implementation. Ontario Tech University is a smaller campus with fewer locations for setting up display booths. While SHA was usually a high-traffic location, other locations (e.g., UB, ERC) had fewer students, which led to fewer student interactions. Additionally, the team initially only developed 3 display boards and some volunteers noted that there may have been saturation of some campaigns (e.g., *Catch Some Zzz's*) that were implemented more frequently. It will be important to continue to develop additional social marketing campaigns to maintain student interest in Peer Wellness Education activities.

The team found that it was important to have an engaging activity at the display booth to encourage student engagement. Creating trivia questions to use with the trivia wheel was an effective way to entice students to the display booth. However, there were challenges with including the trivia wheel, as it meant bringing another item to display booths (in addition to the folding table, bin of resources/giveaway items, and display board). As noted in the volunteer feedback, carrying all of the equipment from the storage locker in the CRWC to the outreach location was a challenge. The team purchased a collapsible hand truck at the end of the year

that will be used next year to help transport the equipment and resources needed for display booths.

Another challenge was coordinating student schedules for attending displays. Students have varying class schedules, and it was occasionally difficult to identify consistent display booth times. In addition, students can lose interest in volunteering midway through the semester, especially when the term becomes busier with midterms and assignments. Maintaining consistent programming throughout the semester is important for reminding students to attend to their health and wellness. Including nursing practicum students on the team was integral to filling gaps in programming and ensuring that outreach activities occurred at least weekly.

Next Steps

The Peer Wellness Education Program will maintain the momentum achieved over the past year and will continue programming into the 2023-24 academic year. Over the next year, the team plans to:

- Maintain an energetic team of student volunteers. We have recruited 5 new Peer Wellness Educators for the 2023/24 school year (8 returning volunteers). A similar process was used for recruiting additional volunteers for the 2023/24 school year, although the group interview was completed in-person, on campus.
- Continue involving nursing practicum students on the Peer Wellness Education team. We plan to have 4 nursing students complete practicum placements with Ontario Tech Health Promotion in each of the Fall and Winter semesters.
- Create additional training documents about each social marketing campaign for Peer Wellness Education volunteers. A work-study student is creating brief training documents to outline the rationale and important points for each social marketing campaign that can be used during team meetings to support volunteers.
- Create additional social marketing campaigns. We will finish and print the *Snack for Success* display board this summer in order to implement the social marketing campaign in the 2023-24 academic year. We plan to create a physical activity display board next year to use in future semesters.
- Investigate scheduling outreach activities at the Downtown Campus at least once a month in order to reach a wider student audience.
- Improve the team's social media presence to ensure that students are aware of the Peer Wellness Education Program and its associated campaigns. A work-study student is creating social media posts this summer that will be posted next year, and a small group of volunteers will create additional posts during weekly team meetings that can be used.
- Identify new, central space for storing Health Promotion materials and where Peer Wellness Educators can work on Health Promotion projects outside of team meetings.
- Create a name and logo for the Peer Wellness Education Program. An easily identifiable and relatable name and logo will encourage brand recognition among students.

The Peer Wellness Education Program will receive some continued funding through Ontario Tech Health Promotion, which is primarily funded by Athletics and Recreation. This funding will be used to create additional display boards and resources and purchase giveaway items and larger incentives for Health Promotion workshops and events. This report will be shared with Athletics and Recreation and Student Life to highlight the initial impact of this pilot project. We hope that this report and the success achieved thus far will support additional health and wellness initiatives for students.