Stoughton youngsters attend 'READY' Camp

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Special to the Hub

Many of today's youth don't know how to react when facing an emergency involving injured victims who need care.

For instance, when the tornado came into Stoughton just about a year ago, young adults were unsure how they could help out their community in this disastrous time. This won't be an issue as a year passes after the tornado touched down, because just a week earlier, eight Stoughton girls completed a READY Camp (Responding to Emergencies And Disasters with Youth) emergency preparedness program.

These girls were Brianna Bower, Kayla Rowley, Cassie Dewey, Nancy Robinson, Mackenzie Bower, Rosie Beck, Chelsey Olson and Christi Krueger, along with their team advisor, Dianna Bower.

This camp was located at Volk Field and funded by Homeland Security and the Office of Justice Assistance. There the kids received training to become a Student Emergency Response Team (SERT). The students spent a week learning how to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from serious and unexpected situations. This included emergency preparedness, fire safety, incident command, medical operations, search and rescue, emotional responses and terrorism.

With all of the new skills I learned, I can be more helpful in medical situations at school and in my community as well.

All of the campers attending READY Camp learned emergency health skills and were trained in safety and injury prevention, First Aid, CPR and how to operate an automatic external defibrillator (AED).

Not only am I certified to use these skills, but I also have become more comfortable and confident performing them in a real life situation. The training also covered crime prevention, school security issues, and disasters.

During the camp, we got to participate in the LDC (Leadership Development Course), which is a series of tasks that must be completed with your team. You were given a time limit and certain materials that you could use to get you and your team to a destination. These courses help to strengthen our communication, leadership, and teamwork skills. When our camp was taking part in the LDC, we had the privilege of receiving a visit from Wisconsin's First Lady Jessica Doyle. After talking to and observing us she was very impressed with our efforts.

The only way I could possibly be ready for a natural disaster or an emergency situation is if I was properly trained to handle the problem. With the knowledge I gained at camp, I feel like I'm ready to handle whatever situation is thrown my way.

Stoughton READY team members are pictured at the UW Hospital and Clinic, where they visited Med Flight and the Emergency Department. Pictured are (front, left) Chelsey Olson and Nancy Robinson; (back, left): Cassandra Dewey, Christi Krueger, Mackenzie Bower, Brianna Bower, Rosie Beck and Kayla Rowley.

– Submitted photo

All of the knowledge that campers learned throughout the week was demonstrated in the mock disaster exercise at the end of the week. In this activity, a real disaster was simulated with the camp staff portraying the victims and the surroundings messed up as if a real disaster had occurred. The teams were equipped with medical, triage and search and rescue equipment that we could use in the exercise. The idea of seeing injured people coming out of the building made us a little nervous at first, but we warmed up to the idea and soon were running all over treating the patients, making it controlled chaos for a while. All eight Stoughton girls enjoyed this exercise very much.

I'm glad I was able to come back to my community knowing that the knowledge that I now have can be used to help others. We hope to pass on our knowledge to others and help them realize the satisfaction in knowing that you are prepared to help out in an emergency situation no matter where you are.

"In any community, the local emergency teams are contacted, but it may be a few minutes until professional help comes. There should be some people who could help until the arrival and the students who participated in the READY Camp can fill that need," says Rosie.

We are proud to say that we are the only SERT team in Stoughton at this time, but we do hope that others take the initiative to become a SERT team.

As a part of completing the READY Camp experience, each team is asked to complete a project in their community using the knowledge and skills they gained. When the team finishes their project they are given a banner saying "We Are A READY Community" to hang wherever they please to show that the community in which they live is prepared to face any natural disaster and respond to any emergency that they may encounter.

After we complete our project, I can't wait to be able to go by that banner and remember that I was able to help my community and be a part of the READY program.

We all had so much fun at this camp. The knowledge we now have about communication, leadership, and teamwork we will carry our whole life. This experience was unbelievable and we all want to do it again sometime.

(Brianna Bower is an eighth-grade student.)