

Fourth R program gets A+

Planned, designed and tested in London, it teaches Grade 9 students about relationships.

BY KATE DUBINSKI
Free Press Education Reporter

A London-designed education program, tested on area high school students, has proven so effective in reducing dating violence that it may

one day be expanded nationwide.

The Fourth R program, which teaches Grade 9 students about drugs and alcohol, positive relationships, violence prevention and sexual behaviour, was tested last

year by students in 22 high schools in the Thames Valley District school board.

The fourth R stands for relationships.

This year, all Thames high schools are using the program. Teens role-play, debate and discuss topics normally covered in Grade 9 health class.

"We try to engage the kids, because the topic is exciting to

them," said Wayne Wolfe, a University of Western Ontario professor and child psychologist. He helped develop the program in 2002 as academic director at the Centre for Research for Violence against Women and Children.

"They like talking about drugs, sex and violence, and it works better than if the teacher is just lecturing them."

A survey found students who took part in the program were 50 per cent less likely to push or shove a boyfriend or girlfriend to get their way.

Students who took the 21-week program, and those who took traditional health classes, filled out surveys at the beginning and end of the last school year to gauge its effectiveness.

Other key findings include:

► 81 per cent of Fourth R students said they learned effective violence prevention strategies, compared with 60 per cent in traditional health classes.

► 82 per cent said the new program gave them new information about drugs and alcohol, compared with 63 per cent in traditional classes.

See FOURTH R Page B10

FOURTH R: Aim to be nationwide

From Page B1

► 72 per cent of Fourth R students said they had strong conflict management skills, compared with 48 per cent in the traditional setting.

The test group of Fourth R students will be retested in two years to see how effective it is long-term, Wolfe said.

"We want to see what they do, not what they say," he said.

The students will be assessed after being put in role-playing scenarios with actors and with their dating partners, he said.

"The Thames Valley board is first off the block, but we're offering the program to all boards" in Ontario,

Wolfe added.

The program is funded by donations, including from its first major sponsor, the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation, which donated \$1 million.

Fifty-one schools, including some in Vancouver and Saskatoon, are using the program, with Wolfe and others hoping it can go nationwide by 2010.

Another \$2.3 million is needed to guarantee a cross-Canada rollout.

Wolfe said he also hopes the program can be expanded for Grade 10 and 11 students as part of the health curriculum, which in those grades focuses on conflict resolution and family and women's issues.