



**A Year in Review: Summary of Activities for the
2023-24 Peer Wellness Education Program at
Ontario Tech University**

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

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.

A team of 15 students (10 students in the Fall semester and 14 students in the Winter semester) worked together to implement various social marketing campaigns and distribute health promotion resources during the 2023-24 academic year. Throughout the year, team members contributed almost 500 hours to implement various display booths, health promotion events, and workshops organised by the Peer Wellness Education Program and Ontario Tech Health Promotion. The Peer Wellness Education team volunteered at over 50 health promoting events, interacted with over 2450 students, and disseminated over 3,400 health promotion resources. The team also created social media posts on Instagram to promote the program, created blog posts for Ridgeback Student Voices, and created two new display boards during this time. A quarter of 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, and the majority of surveyed students had seen or heard about a health promotion activity. After volunteering with the Peer Wellness Education team, team members reported increases in knowledge of health promotion concepts, and development of skills related to engaging students in conversations about their health and creating informative, appealing health education resources.

The Peer Wellness Education Program has been a success and will use the momentum achieved over the past year to continue promoting health on campus in the 2024-25 academic year. Over the next year, the team will increase the number of hosted events, student interactions, and resources disseminated, and will increase their presence at the Downtown Campus.

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Introduction

Physical inactivity, poor diet, stress, and substance use are well-known correlates of 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. 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 health programming is required.

Education strategies can be an effective method to reach students on campus, and peer-to-peer programs can help to foster a campus community, increase knowledge and awareness of healthy behaviours, and help peer educators recognize and refer students to appropriate resources.¹ In addition, through their involvement in such programs, peer educators may change their own behaviours and develop their own skills.^{2,3}

The Peer Wellness Education Program, established in May 2022, provides opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in the field of Health Promotion, while learning interactive presentation skills. The Peer Wellness Education Program also provides students with a chance to meet and collaborate with other students and to learn health tips that can be used in their own lives. The skills gained in this program are valuable for any career and can 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 Program that occurred between September 2023 and April 2024.

Highly Qualified Personnel Involvement

The Peer Wellness Education Program is supervised by Dr. Adam Cole (Faculty of Health Sciences) and Sienna Smith (Athletics and Recreation). In 2023-24, 15 students were part of the Peer Wellness Education Program. The recruited team members represented various programs (Public Health/Human Health Science, Nursing, Science) in various stages of their degrees (2nd-4th year). Table 1 presents the number of students who contributed to the program by semester. In addition to student volunteers, 2 work study students were hired through

¹ Shook JL, Keup JR. The benefits of peer leader programs: An overview from the literature. *New Dir High Educ.* 2012;2012(157):5–16.

² McKeganey SP Neil. The Rise and Rise of Peer Education Approaches. *Drugs Educ Prev Policy.* 2000 Jan;7(3):293–310.

³ 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.

Athletics and Recreation to support Ontario Tech Health Promotion, and 4 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			
Winter 2024	0	8	4	2	14
Fall 2023	4	4	0	2	10
Winter 2023	0	6	7	2	15
Fall 2022	5	4	0	2	11
Spring/Summer 2022	5	0	0	1	6

As part of their role, Peer Wellness Educators were expected to complete the Leadership Foundations training course (as part of Student Life) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act training course (as part of The Office of the University Secretary & General Counsel), attend the Peer Wellness Educator training session (2 hours, in-person), 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. During Peer Wellness Educator training, 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 committed nearly 500 hours to implementing 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
2024 Winter Semester	188.75
2023 Fall Semester	280.75
2023 Winter Semester	118.5
2022 Fall Semester	165.5
2022 Spring/Summer Semester	89.0

Programming Details

A team of 10 students in the Fall semester and 14 students in the Winter semester implemented social marketing campaigns and distributed resources. The main focus of the Peer Wellness Education team was hosting weekly display booths at the North Campus to raise awareness of various health topics. New in the Winter 2024 term, nursing practicum students conducted monthly outreach activities at the Downtown Campus.

Outreach Activities

Over the 2023-2024 academic year, the team ran various display booths and promoted a diverse range of health workshops and health promotion events. As shown in the table below, the team generally conducted two outreach activities per week to ensure continuous programming throughout the term.

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

Semester	Total Number of Display Booths	Total Number of Workshops	Total Number of Events	Total Number of Supported Events
Winter 2024	24	3	4	3
Fall 2023	17	1	1	5
Winter 2023	27	7	14	N/A
Fall 2022	9	6	14	N/A

Display Booths

The team ran 17 display booths in the Fall semester, including the *Catch Some Zzz's*, *Snack for Success*, *Party Smart*, and *Stress Busters* social marketing campaigns, and 24 display booths in

the Winter semester, including the *Snack for Success*, *Know the Flow* (developed in the Fall semester), *Let's Talk About Safer Sex*, *Party Smart*, and *Stress Busters* social marketing campaigns. Figure 1 below presents the number of student interactions at display booths over time. The team was very successful in interacting with students in both the Fall and Winter semesters.

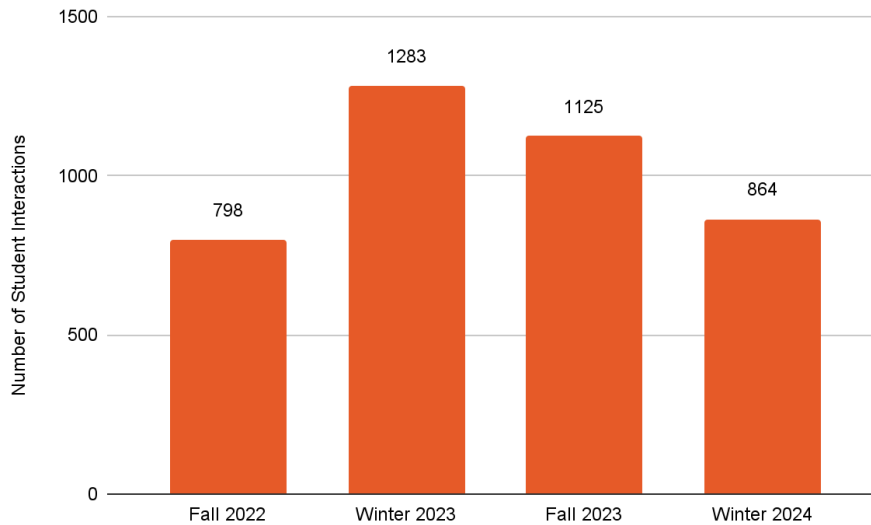


Figure 1. Number of student interactions with Peer Wellness Educators at display booths, by semester

Health Promotion Workshops

The Peer Wellness Education team helped to promote and support health-related workshops arranged by Ontario Tech Health Promotion. Two workshops ran in the Fall semester and four ran in the Winter semester. Workshops included an educational component delivered by an expert in the field pertaining to each workshop. *Nutrition Sessions* 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*, *Cravings and how to satisfy them*, and *Healthy snacks* sessions were held. *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. Each meal came from a different culture each session, with the goal of highlighting the diversity of students on campus. Over the past academic year, students learned how to cook Greek, Mexican, Sri Lankan, Guyanese, Korean, and Lebanese meals.

Health Promotion Events

The Peer Wellness Education team also helped to promote and support health promotion events organized by Ontario Tech Health Promotion and Student Life. One health promotion event ran in the Fall semester, and four events ran in the Winter semester. Health promotion events provided

regular opportunities for students to practically apply what they learned through health promotion outreach. A *Paint Night* event was hosted by Health Promotion ahead of final exam season in both the Fall and Winter terms. These events were offered to provide students with an opportunity to use their artistic creativity, relieve stress and anxiety, and meet and socialize with their peers. During *Wellness Week*, Health Promotion and the Peer Wellness Educators hosted a *Positivi-Tea* event. Free tea and dry ingredient meal jars were available to all participating University community members, as well as opportunities to share positive messages on the message board and to participate in the nutrition-based trivia game. Two *Wellness Walks* were hosted by Health Promotion in collaboration with the Human Resources department during the Winter term. These 30-minute walks provided staff and students with an opportunity to take a nature break during the busy school and workday.

New this year was the *Period Project Donation Drive*, run by Health Promotion in January. In support of the Ontario Tech Student Union's Period Project, the Peer Wellness Educators developed the *Know the Flow* campaign to raise awareness about menstrual health, and to collect donations of period products from the University community. In addition to the regular weekly display booths, Peer Wellness Educators also ran the *Know the Flow* display booth at select Ridgeback varsity home games.

Health Promotion Supported Events

New in 2023-24, the Peer Wellness Education team provided health education resources (and in some cases, volunteers) for other health-related events occurring on campus. Health Promotion supported events included the *Get Involved Fair*, *Ontario Tech MyStart* events, the staff *Health, Safety, and Wellness Fair*, the Downtown Campus *Self-care Conference*, *Afternoons with SEE: Exam Prep*, *Campus Rec Day*, and *Long Day Against Procrastination*. These interdepartmental events not only helped to increase the visibility of the Peer Wellness Education Program, but also supported dissemination of health promotion resources.

The figure below presents the number of student interactions at both workshops and health promotion events over time. 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.

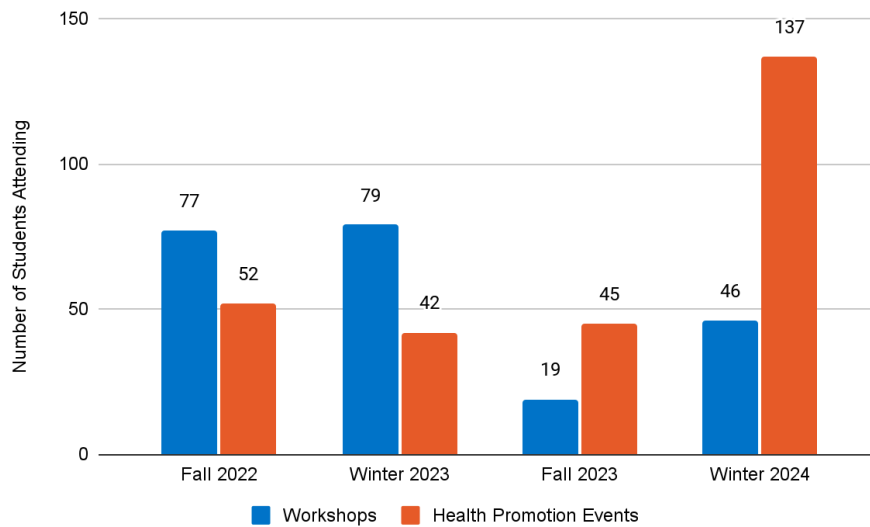


Figure 2. Number of student interactions with Peer Wellness Educators at workshops and health promotion events, by semester

Resource Dissemination

The table below indicates the number of educational resources and giveaway items given out to students at display booths, workshops, events, or Health Promotion-supported events. External resources included items such as Good2Talk wallet cards, opioid overdose cards, and a DrinkSmart standard drink wheel. Internal resources included *Ridgeback Wellness Reminder*, *7 Dimensions of Wellness*, *Body Break*, *Snack for Success*, and *Sleep Well* tip palm cards. Giveaway items included various DrinkSmart giveaway items, ear plugs, Health Promotion pens, and healthy snacks. This year, during the *Stress Busters* campaign, students were invited to the booth to create an exam kit that included palm cards and giveaway items intended to support stress reduction. Students were encouraged to write a supportive note on the exam kit bag and leave it for another student. The team was successful in disseminating resources to students and ensuring that giveaway items were paired with an educational resource.

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

Term	Number of Resources	Number of Giveaway Items
Winter 2024	133 External Resources 1279 Internal Resources	1516
Fall 2023	202 External Resources 1809 Internal Resources	2231
Winter 2023	517 External Resources 2,334 Internal Resources	1,106

Term	Number of Resources	Number of Giveaway Items
Fall 2022	218 External Resources 1,389 Internal Resources	734

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. Promotion efforts included posts, reels, and Instagram stories that helped to increase name recognition of the Peer Wellness Education Program and Health Promotion among students. Pictured below are some of the posts and reels uploaded to Instagram. In total, over 111 posts, reels, or stories about health promotion events, activities, and information were shared through these channels.

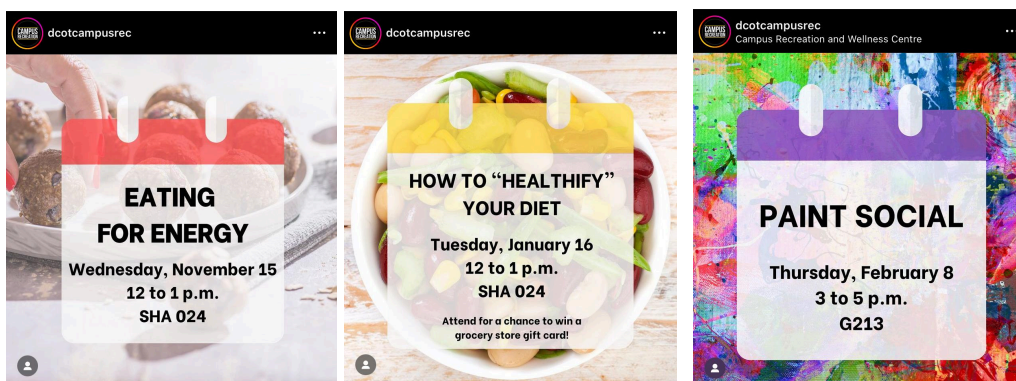


Figure 3. *Eating for Energy* post (left), *How to “Healthify” Your Diet* (middle), and *Paint Social* post (right) uploaded to the *Campus Recreation and Wellness Instagram page*

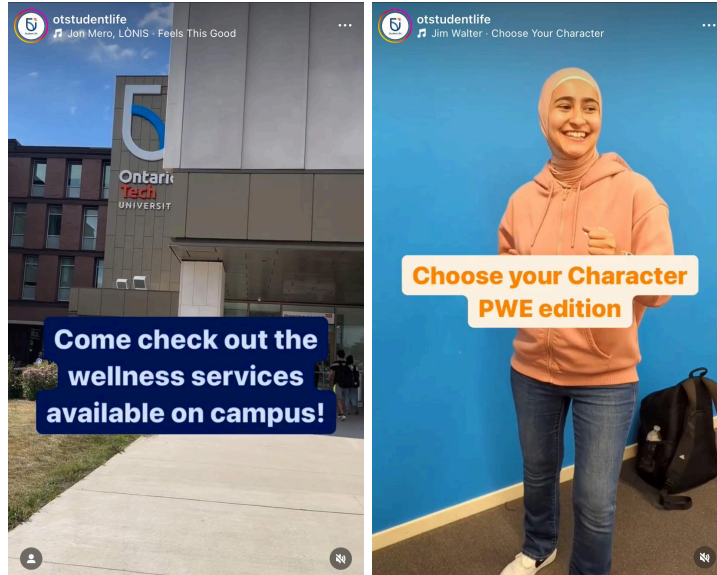


Figure 4. Come Check Out The Wellness Services Available on Campus Reel (left) and Choose your Character, PWE edition (right) uploaded to the Ontario Tech Student Life Instagram page

Writing Blog Posts

Some members of the team researched topics of concern for student health and wellness to create blog posts for [Ridgeback Student Voices](#). Previously posted blog posts include *How to Grocery Shop Effectively* and *Q and A with a Sleep Expert*. Listed below are the blogs written by the Peer Wellness Education team during the 2023-24 academic year, which will be posted in the upcoming year.

- *Vaping: What It Is? What are the Risks? How Can I Quit?*
Vaping, often seen as a healthier alternative to smoking, involves inhaling nicotine and other chemicals from electronic devices. This blog explores the different types of vaping devices, the reasons people vape, the associated health risks, and offers resources for those looking to quit.
- *Social Media: Are You Addicted?*
Scrolling addiction, a common issue among teenagers and young adults, involves excessive social media use driven by the brain's desire for dopamine. This blog discusses its impact on daily life and offers strategies to manage screen time, such as setting app limits, using Do-Not-Disturb mode, and understanding that social media often presents an unrealistic view of life.
- *Germ Hotspots: Navigating Campus with Caution*
Germs thrive in common places on campus, including washrooms, door handles, cafeterias, and even on personal items. This blog highlights the major hotspots for germs and offers tips for maintaining hygiene, such as using hand sanitizer, avoiding bringing

personal items into bathrooms, and regularly cleaning frequently-touched objects. Following these practices can help reduce the spread of germs and protect your health.

- *All About Emotional Health*

This blog delves into the importance of emotional health, often overlooked in favour of its physical counterpart. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and managing emotions in navigating life's challenges. Practical tips for maintaining emotional health are provided, along with information on accessing mental health resources at Ontario Tech.

- *Campus Health and Wellness Centre: Ontario Tech's Health Hub*

Through this informative blog, discover the array of health services available at Ontario Tech's medical clinic, the Campus Health and Wellness Centre. From medical care to pharmacy services and therapeutic treatments, students can conveniently access comprehensive services and resources that support their overall wellbeing.

- *Achieving Vocational Wellness at Ontario Tech: Career Centre Support*

This blog delves into how students at Ontario Tech can achieve vocational wellness with support from the Career Centre. The blog highlights Career Centre services like resume writing, interview help, LinkedIn workshops, and career counselling to address students' common concerns about what the future might hold once they've graduated. Additionally, it encourages participation in campus activities and job fairs to enhance readiness for post-graduation employment.

Creating additional social marketing campaigns

1. Know the Flow display board

During the Winter semester, students created and presented *Know the Flow*, a Period Project display board. The campaign highlighted the importance of menstrual health, and how maintaining menstrual hygiene can reduce risk of infections and odours, and can increase comfort. Period poverty is also addressed. It can be defined as the lack of access to safe and hygienic menstrual products during monthly periods and inaccessibility to basic sanitation services or facilities as well as menstrual hygiene education. With information regarding menstrual hygiene, costs, and period poverty, the display board (figure below) provides an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning on a highly stigmatised topic. In addition, the board provides information about the Ontario Tech Student Union's (OTSU) Period Project, which allows students to gain equitable access to period products, free of charge. The team created trivia questions to be used with the trivia wheel to encourage student engagement. Team members encouraged students to donate period products to help with OTSU's Period Bank while at the display board.

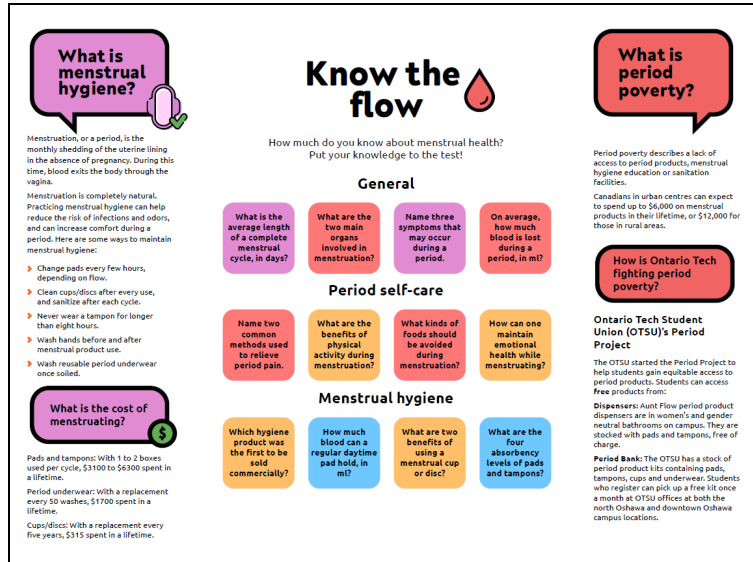


Figure 5. Know the Flow (Period Project) display board

2. Physical Activity display board

During the Winter semester, Peer Wellness Educators worked on a display board focused on how students on campus can stay active and avoid a sedentary lifestyle. This display board is being finalized to be used in the upcoming academic year. The display board highlights Canada's 24-hour Movement Guidelines and the benefits of having an active lifestyle. Staying physically active can help keep students feeling energized, support good health and reduce the risk of disease, and is also an important part of academic success. The goal of this campaign is to teach students the benefits of being physically active and to find ways they can be active on campus. To facilitate student interactions, the display board includes an activity where students can write what their favourite way of staying active is and post it on the display board for others to see.

Program Evaluation

In addition to data about student interactions and resources disseminated during outreach events, Peer Wellness Educators provided feedback about their volunteer experience as part of the program evaluation plan. 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 at the beginning of the school year, and again at the end. This survey is intended to help program supervisors understand how the volunteers' level of knowledge and skill associated with different aspects of health promotion have developed over the course of the year. The baseline survey included 17 questions; the follow-up survey included the same 17 questions, 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 on a five-point scale (1 being a low level of knowledge or skill and 5 being a high level of knowledge or skill). Twelve students completed the baseline survey and nine students completed the follow-up survey. Some students were not able to continue volunteering with the team over the Winter semester, and thus 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. The largest changes were observed in knowledge of health education campaigns, campus health and wellness resources and services, and general health and wellness.

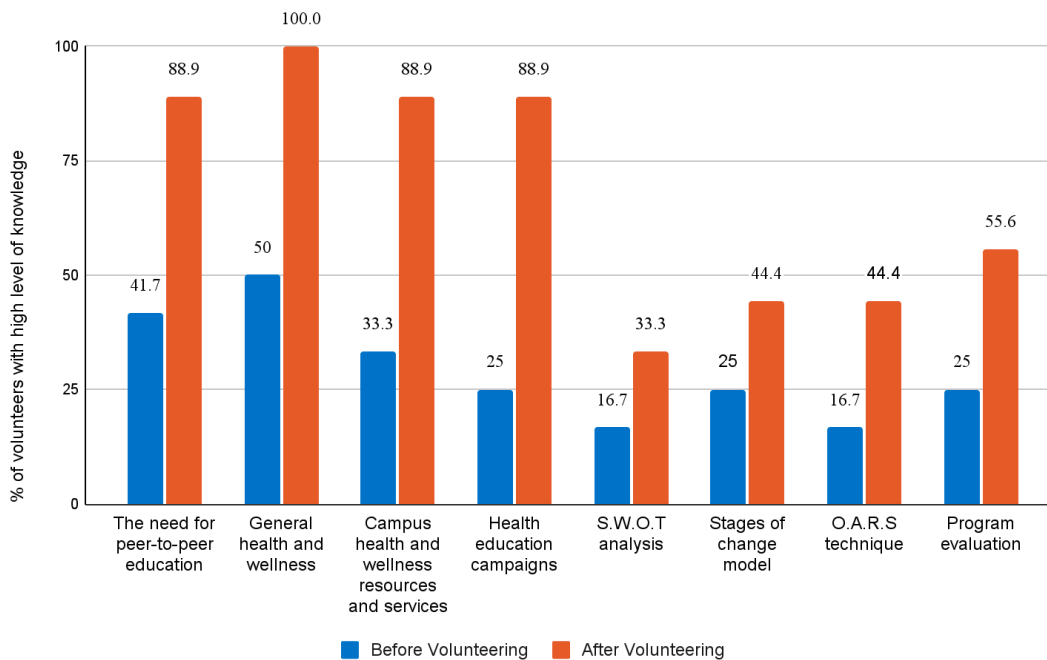


Figure 6. Percentage of Peer Wellness Educators indicating a high level of knowledge of health promotion concepts at baseline and follow-up

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, leadership, engaging students in conversations about their health, planning a health education campaign and collecting and reporting evaluation data.

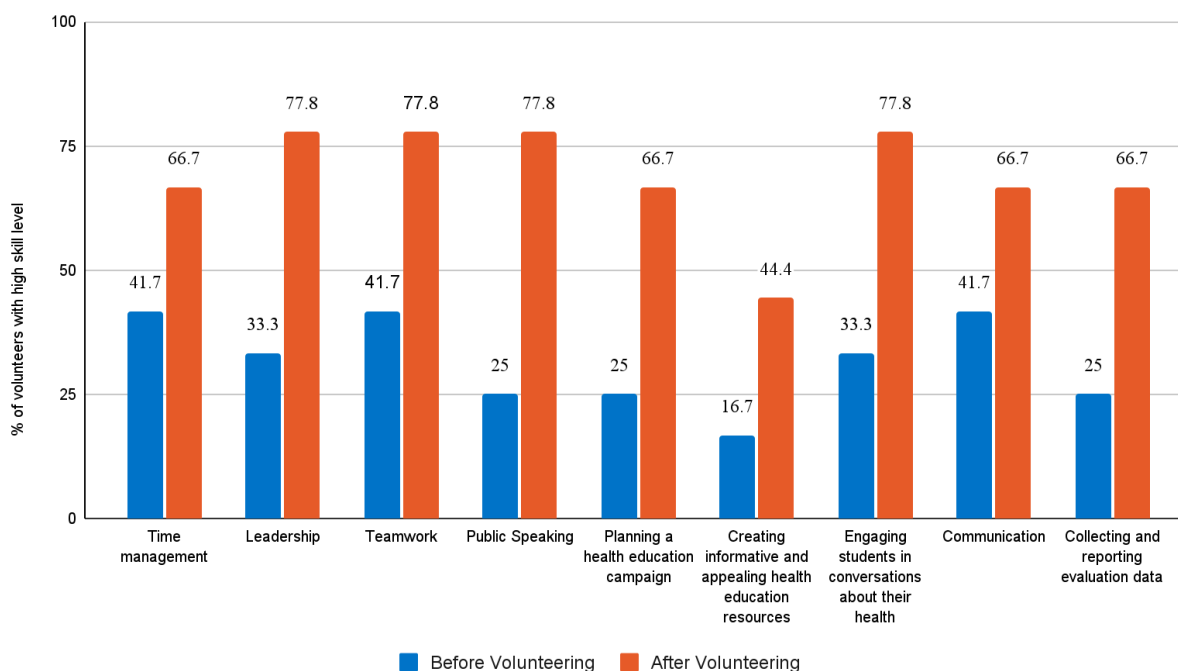


Figure 7. Percentage of Peer Wellness Educators indicating a high level of skill at baseline and follow-up

When asked to rate the success of campaigns over the last year, 88.9% of Peer Wellness Educators thought the campaigns were successful (a 4 or 5 out of 5). Team members suggested continuing to increase the range of health topics discussed at display booths in order to increase engagement and maintain interest from students.

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 80 individual students at a variety of locations around North Campus and 20 students at the Downtown Campus at various times of day. Once they agreed to participate, students were asked a series of questions regarding the program and its associated campaigns and programming. 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 *Ridgeback Wellness Reminder*, *Sleep Well*, or *Snack for Success* tip palm cards on campus and whether they thought these resources

were appealing. There were also questions about the student's age and gender. About half of students (57%) identified as women, and the average age was 21.3 years (range: 18-39 years).

While only one quarter of students (26%) 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 (82%) had seen or heard about a health education display (about sleep, safe drinking/marijuana use, Period Project, or nutrition), had seen one of the tip palm cards on campus (80%), and some reported attending a Health Promotion event (24%, including Wellness Walks, Wellness Week, Nutrition sessions, Paint Night, and Touch of Culture).

Next Steps

With the momentum built over the past two years, the Peer Wellness Education Program will continue programming into the 2024-25 academic year. Over the next year, the team plans to:

Expand the reach of the Peer Wellness Program by:

- Hosting at least one event per term with an on-campus partner/service/club
- Increasing the number of outreach activities to an average of 3 per week
- Increasing the number of student interactions by 5%
- Increasing the number of student volunteers by 20%
- Increasing the number of social media posts to an average of 2 per week
- Hosting 2 outreach events per month at the downtown campus

Expand Peer Wellness Programming by:

- Investigating the development of a Wellness certificate or micro-credential for students

Prioritize wellness resources for students by:

- Achieving a 2:1 ratio of disseminated resources to giveaway items