

Students asked to take 'moment of silence' in crossing streets

By Tabitha Wells

Area students are being asked to take a 'Moment of Silence' from their smartphones and personal sized technology when crossing the streets.

A survey, conducted in partnership between Parachute (a national safety charity) and FedEx Express Canada, found that more than 51 per cent of the 510 teens surveyed had either come close to being hit or have been hit by a vehicle while walking.

The survey, which was conducted online in early November, targeted teens between the ages of 13 and 18 and asked questions regarding their pedestrian safety – not just the actions of others, but their own actions as well.

According to the survey, the largest two factors that led to incidents or near misses were caused because the driver wasn't paying attention (72 per cent) or the driver was going too fast (30 per cent).

Only 20 per cent of incidents were reported by teens surveyed as a result of them not looking first, and eight per cent because they were distracted by their phone, music or another communication device.

"These numbers remind us that we need to educate Canadians on pedestrian and driver safety, including at intersections," said Parachute's President and CEO Louise Logan. "It's simple, make road safety part of the conversation and remember to take a moment of silence and pay attention, whether on foot or in a vehicle."

Parachute is moving forward with a national awareness initiative that encourages Canadians to commit to taking a Moment of Silence by putting down devices and removing headphones when crossing the street. The campaign was created in memory of the thousands of young pedestrians who are either killed or injured across Canada each year.

Part of the campaign includes a video statement from Ned Levitt, a Canadian man whose daughter was killed at the age of 18 in a pedestrian/motor vehicle accident. He recounts in the short clip how Stacey had gone for a run to blow off some steam after a hard day, and because of her headphones, wasn't aware of an oncoming vehicle as she stepped out into the road.

"Losing someone you love before their time is always painful," he said in the video. "But the pain of losing someone you love more than life itself, dying at the ridiculously young age of 18, just barely a woman with her whole life ahead of her and love and hopes for her future locked within her heart, that is truly beyond words."

Stacey was struck by that vehicle and died, before having a chance to graduate high school, go to college, or achieve any of the other milestones her parents had planned to celebrate with her throughout her life.

"The years of agony were made that much worse because it did not need to happen, it was preventable," Levitt said. "Stacey was immortal – at least to me – because I never thought I would be alive the day that she died."

He added that while the pain of losing his daughter will never subside, if it remains as nothing more than pain, it is also worth nothing, benefitting no one.

"If I take that pain and use it to help others see more clearly, the connection between their actions or inactions, and injury and death that is preventable – oftentimes easily preventable – then I honour Stacey and salvage something positive and important from her tragic death," he said.

According to statistics acquired by Parachute in their studies, on average, 30 child pedestrians are killed and 2,412 are injured every year in Canada. That means that statistically, a child pedestrian is either killed or injured once every three hours across the country.

In the most recent data collected, between 2010-2011, 376 youth were injured, and 36 were killed as pedestrians.

The vast majority of incidents, according to the survey, occur between 3 and 6 p.m., when drivers are on their way home from work and children and teens are travelling back home from school or after school programs.

"We all play a role in keeping our children and teens safe while they walk in their communities," said Lisa Lisson, president of FedEx Express Canada. "At FedEx Express, we put safety above all, both in the workplace and in the communities in which we operate. Our drivers know the importance of being extra alert around school and pedestrian crossings, since these are the most important stops they make each day."

Over the last decade, FedEx has funded Parachute to help deliver a program called Walk This Way, a nationwide campaign aimed at reminding both parents and drivers about road safety, and helping to ensure kids can walk safely both to and from school, from a friend's house, or anywhere else in their neighbourhood.

The Moment of Silence campaign falls under this initiative, and is aimed at helping children, youth, drivers and parents learn to understand how they can help prevent such incidents from occurring. Levitt has added his voice to the campaign, sharing Stacey's story and encouraging students and drivers to be more proactive towards their own safety.

"I speak to you today to challenge you – and Stacey challenges you – to take responsibility for your own safety, to be aware of your

surroundings, to not allow anything to distract you while walking or driving, and not allow anything to impair your senses or judgment,? Levitt said. ?But most of all, to teach your family and friends safety and be the role model they need.?
For more information on survey results, as well as additional tips for pedestrian and driver safety, visit the campaign website at www.parachutecanada.org/momentofsilence