

Survivor joins appeal for defibrillators that saved his life

March 23, 2017, by Melissa Yeo

THE crush of a crowd, the quiet of a home or the thrill of a junior-league soccer final — a sudden cardiac arrest can happen anywhere and at any time.

It's a fact 54-year-old Eric Knowles knows all too well, collapsing in the grandstand at his son's soccer final in September 2015.

The last thing he remembers is stepping over the seats to leave then, waking up in intensive care after a triple bypass at Westmead Hospital five days later.

If it wasn't for the quick thinking of two off-duty nurses and the shock of a nearby defibrillator, chances are Mr Knowles would not be alive to tell the tale.

"The odds of a person surviving a Ventricular Fibrillation arrest — which is what I had — are nine per cent," he said.

"I believe that if all public venues had defibrillators installed, that percentage would be greatly increased."

He still lives with the effects of the attack with constant tiredness and ongoing aches and pains, but is a vocal advocate for the Michael Hughes Foundation — the very group whose device saved his life.

Since 2014 the group has worked to install defibrillators at sporting grounds and community halls across Sydney's west, including the one used to save Eric.

Foundation director and Dundas resident Julie Hughes — wife of the namesake who died of a sudden cardiac arrest in 2013 — stresses it is not just the equipment but the attitudes towards CPR that are vital in ensuring more positive outcomes.

Alongside the placement of automated external defibrillators (AEDs), the foundation works to educate the public on how to use the technology at free community training sessions.

"The first eight minutes after someone has a cardiac arrest are the most critical," Mrs Hughes said.

"Brain function decreases by 10 per cent for every minute a person does not have blood pumping around their body.

"To make the critical difference we need to have people nearby able to being CPR and use the AED within the first few minutes."



Eric Knowles knows first-hand the benefits of a defibrillator. Picture:



A simple device like this was vital in saving Eric's life.

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In a workshop organised by the Michael Hughes Foundation, Julie Hughes shows how easy it is to use an AED.

Starting close to home, with the help of the State Government and Parramatta Council, they have rolled out a series of training sessions aimed at creating a HEARTsafe community in the local area.

"We have the technology, it's about getting the technology to the people when they need it most," foundation director David Lamond said.

"More work is required to provide a service to ensure that users are confident to respond in medical emergencies for the citizens that they represent."

Parramatta Council administrator Amanda Chadwick recently awarded the Michael Hughes Foundation \$50,000 as part of the Stronger Communities Fund Community Grants program for its Heart of the Parramatta Community awareness and training campaign.

"City of Parramatta is delighted to support the work of the Michael Hughes Foundation, which will ultimately help to save lives," Ms Chadwick said.

"The grant will go towards training the community in how to use the 40 Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) that they are rolling out across the Parramatta Local Government Area."



Julie was awarded Parramatta Citizen of the Year in 2016.



David Lamond, Julie Hughes and daughter Georgia and Kevin McSweeney from the Michael Hughes Foundation. Picture: Toby Zerna.

Training sessions will be held this month:

March 27 — Reg Byrne Community Centre, Wentworthville at 7pm

April 8 — Don Moore Community Centre, Carlingford at 9am

To submit an expression of interest at your local club or sporting ground visit the [Michael Hughes Foundation website](#).

Critical Response

There are 33,000 out of hospital events of sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) each year in Australia

Out of hospital survival rates for SCA is currently less than 9% and success declines at a rate of 10% with each minute delayed.

Up to 4 Australians, under the age of 35, die every week of SCA

Without early CPR and defibrillation, brain damage can occur after 4 minutes. After 8 minutes there is little chance of survival

Average response times of NSW Ambulance is between 9 and 11 minutes.
