



# Inspiring story



## **Graham Richards, 41, Oxfordshire**

As Graham and Heather Richards celebrated 10 years of marriage with their three beautiful young children on holiday in Scotland they had a lot to be happy about.

Little could Heather have known the family's world was about to be turned completely upside down.

Graham, a fit 41-year-old, was out on his daily lunchtime run when, without warning, he collapsed with sudden cardiac arrest.

Though bystanders were on hand to administer CPR, no AED (automated external defibrillator) was available to shock Graham's heart back into normal rhythm.

And despite being rushed to hospital he tragically passed away.

Just over a year on from his death, Graham's wife Heather tells Arrhythmia Alliance about the impact losing him has had on the family and of their determination to do something positive in his memory.



Heather Richards reflects on the tragedy which so violently ripped her beloved husband away from her and the couple's three young children with a candour that's both remarkable and touching.

In August 2012 Heather and Graham had been celebrating ten years of marriage on holiday in Scotland. Work commitments led Graham, a software engineer, to return to their Oxfordshire home leaving Heather and their three young children, Dylan, Rosie and Felix to enjoy a few more days.

Little could they have known as they waved Graham away it would be the last time they would see him alive.

"I can remember receiving the first call that something was wrong," recalls Heather.

"It was from Graham's mum, she was worried because his work had contacted her to say he hadn't returned from his lunchtime run.

"Then I had another call to say he was in the hospital. Obviously I was concerned but cardiac arrest was the last thing on my mind, I just thought he would have fallen over and hurt himself or something like that.

"It was really frustrating and I started to get quite worried because I was finding it so hard to get answers and we were so far away.

"Then the final call was from a police officer. He told me Graham had collapsed and that despite efforts to revive him he hadn't made it. My reaction was just one of total disbelief."

Graham had collapsed with sudden cardiac arrest while out on his regular lunchtime run. A bystander intervened with CPR and an ambulance was called. Crews battled to save his life but were unable to restart his heart.

"I didn't know what to do at first, I just felt completely helpless. We were all still in Scotland, seven hours away from Oxfordshire so we had to get in the car and come all the way back knowing that.

***'I can remember receiving  
the first call that  
something was wrong'***



“I didn’t know whether to tell the children first or wait until we got to the hospital, it was just horrendous.”

For Heather and the rest of the family Graham’s death had come completely out of the blue. Like many victims of sudden cardiac arrest he had no warning signs.

“Graham had never had any problems with his heart and he was such a fit man.

“He always used to joke about how he never needed to go to the doctor. He used to take part in triathlons; he really was the last person you would have expected this to happen too.”

***‘Graham always used to joke about how he didn’t ever need to go to the doctor’***

Though a bystander performed CPR on Graham an AED (automated external defibrillator) was not readily available where he collapsed and could only be used on him once ambulance crews had arrived.

AEDs don’t guarantee survival but they increase the chance of an individual surviving a sudden cardiac arrest from 9% with just CPR to 50%, on average. The first few minutes are key and with every minute without defibrillation a person’s chance of survival decreases 10%.

Since his death, Heather and the rest of Graham’s family and friends have been determined to do something positive in his memory. This led them to sign up to Hearts & Goals to place an AED in their village in memory of Graham.

“The defibrillator is a legacy for Graham,” continues Heather. “He was the kind of person who always got involved in good causes and would have liked the idea that he could make a difference.



“I suppose there will always be that doubt that an AED could have saved Graham but we will never know for sure. But these devices do increase the chance of someone surviving so dramatically we wanted to make sure our village was protected in his name. We hope it never needs to be used but if it ever did it could save somebody’s life.

“It has provided a real focus for the children as well. It means they can remember their father in a positive way and his name is attached with something positive and allows us to try to move on as a family. I can’t think of a better tribute for Graham.”