

KEEP THE BEAT

Vari Benson Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Project

An initiative of The
NOLA Network



On the Road to Prevention! NO OTHER LIFE AFFECTED

HEART SAFE SCHOOLS

By using Project Adam's trusted Heart Safe Schools Certification method, we provide safety plans & emergency training to create heart safe schools.

CARDIAC EMERGENCY TRAINING

We have created informational training sessions to create awareness of SCA & empower students, school officials, and the community to respond in case of a cardiac emergency.

PREVENTATIVE CARDIAC SCREENINGS

We work with youth serving organizations, school districts, & communities to provide low cost, preventative, cardiac screenings to students.

OUR COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Though our founders already understood the devastation that Sudden Cardiac Arrest presented, research showed that Covid 19 increased the chances of SCA. Though colleges and universities have expanded their guidelines and recommendations for NCAA athletes, we recognized that there was no such push to ensure the safe play for students involved in recreation, middle, and high school sports and virtually no protocols in place for students that do not participate in athletic activities. That is where we come in. Through collaboration and connection, we've formed a network that allows us to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the epidemic of sudden cardiac arrest in youth. We've formed relationships with several universities, medical professionals, nonprofit agencies, and community stakeholders, to support our efforts to eradicate preventative sudden cardiac arrest in youth and young adults.





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We begin by working with school districts and youth serving agencies to ensure that they become certified as heart safe and properly prepared to respond to a cardiac emergency. Along with that certification, we aim to empower youth by educating them to ensure that they themselves are CPR trained. Along with CPR and AED trainings, we encourage and assist schools in preparing students and staff, by creating practice drills that will decrease response time and save lives in case of a cardiac emergency. Students will be empowered to serve their school and communities as heart ambassadors, so that they become leaders of heart health & safety within their communities.

Through our collaborative efforts, we created a network that allows us to provide students ages 11 through 22 with low cost, preventative ECG screens. We also work with physicians and school districts to offer middle and high student athletes with athletic physicals that include ECG's.

Though a preventative screening can be lifesaving, we recognize that a diagnosis can be life changing. Having experienced this firsthand, we want to assist those students, families, schools, and communities that may be affected by an abnormal screening, diagnosis, or SCA. That is why we offer peer support groups of other youth who have been affected and mental health support services for youth and their community, if needed.

We understand that many families face financial barriers which limit their access to follow up care. That is why the final component of our program is to provide assistance for students and families, that increases their access to services. Though the cost of further medical attention may seem unaffordable for many, the loss of a young life is too great a cost for any family to pay. Our program was created to ensure that no other family pays that price. With your help, together, we can ensure that no other life is affected by sudden cardiac.

FINISH THE RACE

by *Lekesha Benson*

NOLA-no other life affected, is our war cry and the pledge we made after our lives were devastated by sudden cardiac arrest, (SCA). We know this won't be an easy journey, but we pledge to finish the race!

Our race began in 2017 when NOLA's founder, Lekesha Benson, lost her son Javaris to a Sudden Cardiac Death death on the campus of Chowan University. He was playing a game of pick up basketball with his roommate, best friend, and several students and community members.

Javaris, known to his friends & family as Vari, had been a lifelong athlete and had no health conditions; however, he had experienced one other episode of chest pain that had been written off as anxiety by medical professionals.

Though Vari's story could have been just another tragic news story, for me it wasn't. Vari was my son. Losing him impacted our family in a way that I could not explain; however, we promised to be loyal to his memory and honor his legacy of compassion and community service, by educating others and providing support so that no other life was affected by Sudden Cardiac Arrest.

While attending South Carolina State University as a student athlete, Vari's brother Jacory and I began working on this initiative. In 2020, after a local 8th grade student by the name of Kirsten Volzka also suffered a sudden cardiac arrest, we determined that this could not wait. Through grassroots efforts, collaborations, and community support, our goal is to bring this program to every community within South Carolina and beyond. For Vari, Kirsten. For us all students in South Carolina...until the race is won.