

Just 18 short months ago, Darius Jones, 15, suffered sudden cardiac arrest and died while playing basketball at Diablo Valley College in front of about 100 people, including his mother Monique Bradley.

Rather than dwelling on the loss of her son, Bradley was proactive and started a foundation, in her son's name, to help raise awareness about sudden cardiac arrest.

"I wanted to make sure that a parent never feels as helpless as I did that day," Bradley said.

The day that Bradley is referring to is October 11, 2009.

Jones, who was a freshman at De La Salle High School, was playing basketball, just as he did on most weekends, and was attempting to defend the opposing team from inbound the ball when he suddenly and unexpectedly fell to the ground.

"We all thought he had gotten hit by another player and would get back up, but instead he started having a seizure," Bradley said. "That's when I knew something was terribly wrong with my son. Darius died on that court in Concord that day, but if we would have acted faster, and had an AED, it could have given my son a better chance of survival."

Darius is not an isolated case, as approximately 7,000 youth die of sudden cardiac arrest each year, which is exactly why Bradley, with the help of De La Salle Basketball coach Frank Allocco, created the Darius Jones Foundation in December of 2009.

"There's certain people you meet that you're just drawn to," Allocco said. "I was just blown away by [Monique Bradley] and I could not believe how she was coping with it. Her first thoughts were, 'I want to make sure this does not happen to anyone again.' Never has she expressed bitterness, it has always been about making this into a good thing."

The numerous deaths caused by heart problems could be reduced simply through the use of Automated External Defibrillators, which automatically analyzes a victim's heart rate and prompts the user to provide an electric shock if necessary.

"Defibrillators are very easy to use and in Darius' case doctors say there was a very good chance that the heart could have been restarted," Allocco said.

According to the foundation's website, it has been shown that having AEDs in public locations can save lives, which is why the foundation has distributed 27 AEDs to local schools in its first year of operation. The Darius Jones Foundation raises awareness about the importance of Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation and AEDs by giving presentations to several local organizations and health and safety officials.

If just one life is saved then everything will be worth it, as Bradley does not want the "lights" to go out for any parents in the same way they did for her on October 11, 2009.

"That was the day the lights went out of the room for me," Bradley said as she described her last day with Darius. "It was like being in a room with the door closed and only having a candle and then, all at once the air is sucked out of the room and the candle is longer lit for you to see."

There is certainly no guarantee that AED's can save every person who experiences heart problems, but they do provide a chance and an opportunity for a life to be resurrected.

"They provide hope," Allocco said. "She had to watch her son die while no one could help. You don't know if [AEDs] will always work, but they at least provide an opportunity."

While no one fully recovers from the devastation of losing a child, Bradley, with the grace of God, was able to begin her new life after about six months.

"I knew that God had a purpose for me, not to feel sorry about losing my only child, but to get up and turn this tragedy into something that will help others," Bradley said.

Bradley not only believes that God helped her cope with her loss, but that he had a plan for Darius as well.

"About three weeks before Darius passed away, he took a great interest in religion class," Bradley said. "Darius would stay on the computer reading about different types of religions and people and how they all knew that there was a higher and greater power than themselves. I feel maybe God was preparing him for his services that he would have to perform for God."

Bradley, who still attends as many De La Salle basketball games as she can, hopes her foundation reflects the kindheartedness and compassion that her son lived with.

Darius Jones was a loving and friendly individual who enjoyed helping others and while he may no longer be able to help people directly, the foundation that bears his name will allow him to not only help many individuals, but to save lives as well.

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