



**HEROES FOR LIFE™**  
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

## COMMITMENT TO SAFETY SAVES EMPLOYEE'S LIFE

Ricki Avery is no stranger to managing crisis. As a supply chain professional in the supermarket fresh foods industry, he works hard every day to ensure the freshest meat is delivered to the stores' shelves. Having been recruited by his employer from the U.K. about five years previously for his supply chain expertise, Ricki regularly handles challenging situations with confidence and grace, keeping both his employer and its customers happy and satisfied.

But none of that crisis management experience could have prepared Ricki for the morning of July 18, 2019, when he suffered sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) at work. Fortunately, his employer, Coles Group, was prepared.

When Ricki stepped off his bike after his spin class that morning, he felt a little light-headed. "I remember I didn't feel well after my class, but I shrugged it off, knowing I had a lot to take care of at the office," says Ricki. He went upstairs to his desk at the Coles Store Support Centre (SSC) just outside of Melbourne, Australia.

Ricki was meeting with his colleague, Erick Salgado, in the busy balcony area when he felt a sudden pain in his chest and collapsed. Given Ricki's jovial personality, Erick at first thought he was kidding

around, but Ricki's lack of responsiveness quickly made it clear that he was in serious danger. Ricki's colleagues immediately sprang into action, calling the paramedics and starting chest compressions.

Fortunately, Coles had installed several ZOLL® automated external defibrillators (AEDs), which both Ricki and the paramedics credit for saving his life. "I don't remember anything from when the chest pain began until I woke up as the medics were carrying me into the ambulance," Ricki recalls. "It took them about 20 minutes to resuscitate me and restart my heart. I'm thankful that I didn't suffer long-term brain damage."

### Connecting the dots

"I had chest pains and went to the hospital back when I lived in the U.K., but the doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong," he says. While Ricki was at the hospital in Melbourne following his collapse, he suffered two additional SCA incidents. This led doctors to a diagnosis of cardiac arrhythmia, a condition in which the heart beats irregularly, either too slowly or too fast. They did surgery to implant a pacemaker that regulates his heartbeat, and he hasn't had any issues since.

Ricki, his wife, Lisa, and his grown children, Alannah and Harry, are all immensely grateful that he not only survived the SCA but has fully recovered. He's back to working full time, but his doctors are recommending light exercise, such as walking, rather than the rigorous spin classes he used to do.

"Now that I'm in my 50s, I understand the importance of taking care of myself and my health in the right way, including exercising and eating well," says Ricki.

"Having the defibrillator available and the actions of my Coles colleagues when I passed out are the reasons I survived my cardiac arrest," he adds. "Their support was amazing, and it makes me feel part of the Coles family."

### A new outlook

Prior to Ricki's SCA, Lisa had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer. During that stressful time, he promised himself that he would exercise and get healthy so he could take care of her during her treatment. The combination of his wife's illness and Ricki's SCA have changed his outlook on life.

"You can't take life for granted," he says. "I've learned that my family is the most important thing in my life, and I'm drawing closer to them. About six months after my cardiac arrest, I went back to the U.K. to see my family for the first time in several years. My mother isn't doing well, and I was so happy to see my family and my wife's family – they warmly embraced me. This makes me realize how important we are to each other and how much our relationships matter."

He is grateful to the first responders from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) for their efforts. MFB firefighter Thomas Farrelly told a local TV news station,

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*"Having the defibrillator available and the actions of my Coles colleagues when I passed out are the reasons I survived my cardiac arrest."*

— Ricki Avery

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SCA survivor Ricki Avery and Ambulance Victoria community capability and response coordinator Danielle Saxton

"It's really satisfying to see him up and about and so healthy. His colleagues saved his life."

Ricki also feels immense gratitude toward Coles – by having the ZOLL AED Plus® available when he most needed it, providing financial

support for his wife while he was in the hospital, and supporting him upon his return to work – and toward his co-worker, who had the courage to step in and provide CPR before the ambulance arrived.

"Coles has installed defibrillators in all supermarkets, and they are regularly used in an emergency," Ricki reports. "I am very proud to work for Coles, as they really stepped up to support me and my family and continue to support the people in our local communities by having defibrillators in every store."