

Heather Freligh: Teen SCA Survivor and Hearth Health Advocate

How one survivor's leadership is transforming SCA awareness and AED accessibility.

Heather Freligh, a 15-year-old student-athlete from Tracy, California, survived a sudden cardiac arrest in 2023 thanks to quick CPR and emergency intervention, later receiving an ICD and making a full recovery. She has since become a passionate advocate for youth heart health, partnering with the American Heart Association and helping pass California's AB2887, now known as The Heather Freligh Act. Her advocacy has taken her to Washington, D.C., and earned her recognition such as the 2025 Young Survivor Champion award and a donated Avive Connect AED® to support her ongoing work. Now a National Youth Ambassador for the American Heart Association, Heather continues to lead efforts in raising awareness, improving emergency preparedness, and expanding AED access.



Where
Tracy, CA

Avive Connect AEDs
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“The principal had just had CPR training two weeks prior. The fire truck was already loaded up around the corner responding to another call. Everything had to go perfect that day in order for Heather to be saved. The school didn't have an AED on campus — they didn't think that a child would need an AED device.”

Derek Freligh | Heather's Father, First Responder, US Marine Corp Vet

Heather Freligh is a 15-year-old high school student-athlete from St. Mary's High School in Stockton, CA. A dedicated basketball player and strong academic performer, she is known for her passion for sports, advocacy, and community service. Heather is the middle of five children, with two older and two younger brothers, and she is passionate about learning ASL so she can better serve the deaf community and help others with her caring nature.

On September 22, 2023, Heather experienced a sudden cardiac arrest while attending class at her then elementary school in Tracy, California. After collapsing at her desk and losing consciousness, she received immediate assistance from classmates and school staff. The school's principal had recently trained in CPR and initiated life-saving measures until first responders arrived. Without an AED available on campus, nearby first responders administered multiple shocks once paramedics brought their device, ultimately reviving her after four attempts. Heather was stabilized after multiple seizures and placed in a medically induced coma, airlifted to UCSF Children's Hospital, and later underwent a heart surgery to receive an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD). She spent over two weeks in the heart intensive care unit (ICU). On October 5, 2023, Heather walked out of UCSF Benioff's Children's Hospital and made a full recovery, nothing short of a miracle.

Following her recovery, Heather has transformed her experience into a purpose-driven advocacy journey focused on youth heart health and sudden

cardiac arrest (SCA) awareness. She has partnered with the American Heart Association, speaking publicly at schools, fundraising events, and legislative hearings. Her efforts have contributed to the passing of California's AB2887—now renamed The Heather Freligh Act—which strengthens emergency response planning, CPR training, and AED placement in elementary and middle schools. She later traveled to Washington, D.C., to advocate for national legislation, including the HEART Act and the AED Act.

Heather and her father, Derek, were introduced to Avive and CEO Sameer Jafri at the Parent Heart Watch Conference in early 2025, where Heather was receiving the "2025 Young Survivor Champion" award. Avive donated an Avive Connect AED to the Freligh family to help protect Heather and those around her during her athletic travels and advocacy work. Heather and her family appreciate the device's portability and its clear LCD screen, which makes the instructions and information easy for anyone to follow.

Heather's leadership has earned recognition at local, state, and national levels. She has spoken at major events, helped raise nearly one million dollars for heart-health research and training, joined advocacy and research initiatives through organizations such as the Kyle J. Taylor Foundation and Yale University, and supported community heart-screening programs. Now selected as one of only ten National Youth Ambassadors for the American Heart Association for 2025-2026. Heather remains committed to using her voice to inspire others and advance lifesaving heart-health initiatives.

"I hope that people are inspired by me. As someone who's still so young, the opportunities through this tragic incident have been amazing. You don't have to be an adult to actually make change, even locally. Sharing that sudden cardiac arrest is the number one killer in youth, do you know what an AED is? Do you know what CPR is? I can teach you!"

Heather Freligh | 15 year old SCA survivor

