

Sadly it is a local tragedy of young man that brings the issue of sudden cardiac arrest back to the front of our minds. This paper reports far too often than anyone would wish the passing of a child or a young adult who, despite being fit, healthy and active, suddenly died. Most recently it was the death of the young Tonbridge Angels footballer Junior Dian who collapsed on the pitch and died later, leaving a huge hole in the lives of his family, friends, club and community.

This is not the first time I have written about sudden cardiac arrest. I hope it is my last. I have campaigned for several years now to improve access to defibrillators in our communities and with it raise awareness of the hidden dangers of cardiac arrest. It is one of the worst statistics I know but despite it happening to people of all ages 12 children under the age of 18 die each week from sudden cardiac arrest. It was that stat that inspired me to get a defib in every secondary school in my constituency and then after that spreading them into the local community, including sports clubs and village halls, because access to a defib improves your chance of survival enormously.

But that is what happens post arrest. How can we reduce the risk of arrest in the first place? In Italy they screen their young athletes and as a result they reduced the rate of death by 89%. As sports minister I am looking at this as an example of best practice and what we should be doing in the UK. Locally I am supporting a campaign called Football Fightback, run by Roger Maddams whose own son Jack died suddenly of a heart defect, which Kent FA are also supporting. What can you do? Join us by raising awareness, fundraise for screenings and find out where your nearest defib is. You never know who might need it one day.