

Fast-acting police save teen's life after heart attack

By Athena Jones, CNN | Updated 4:11 PM ET, Fri May 24, 2019



Jackson, New Jersey (CNN)

It's a typical scene at the Jackson Skating Center on Friday nights: crowds of teenagers whiz around the skating rink to the steady beat of loud music.

But for Victoria Pyott, it's where her life changed forever. The 15-year-old, who has a pacemaker because of a heart condition, had just arrived with her dad on a recent Friday night when things went terribly wrong.

"Victoria had skated up to where I was sitting at to give me ... her bag (with) her shoes and stuff in it, and she just skated away," Robert Pyott said. "And then 30 seconds later, her friend Jane comes skating up to me. She says, 'Victoria fell.'" Pyott immediately rushed to where his daughter was laying on the rink, surrounded by people.

"I rolled her onto her back and I tried to revive her and I'm saying 'Victoria, Victoria' ... and she's not responding," he said. She had collapsed, lost consciousness and stopped breathing. "I couldn't find a pulse," Pyott said. "And then when I realized that her heart had stopped, that's when the police showed up."

Right place, right time

There were a lot of things that went right in the moments that followed: a team of Jackson police officers happened to be only a mile away, and arrived within minutes. And -- unlike many police departments across the country -- they were equipped with a defibrillator.

"When we arrived there, she was blue, cyanotic," Officer Cassiopeia DeLaTorre recalled. "We didn't want to waste any time knowing that she needed CPR."





DeLaTorre, and her fellow officers Anthony Riso, Randall Trasky and Sgt. Michael Grochowski, went right to work as a team to deliver chest compressions. Then, they hooked Victoria up to the defibrillator.

They managed to detect a pulse after one shock, but then lost it. After two more shocks, they were able to get a steady pulse back. Victoria's pacemaker later showed her heart had raced up to 280 beats just before she collapsed. That's about 200 beats faster than normal. Her heart essentially short-circuited, her father said.

"One of the doctors explained to us that the heartbeat doesn't pump any blood at that rate. It's just so happening so fast," Robert Pyott explained. "And then that racing causes the heart to eventually stop, which is why I couldn't find a pulse."

After she was revived, Victoria was eventually transferred to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia where she spent 26 days -- a recovery made possible by the lifesaving efforts of the Jackson officers, with the help of the first aid squad.

"I think it's really important that police officers have medical training in some way, like the fact that they were able to perform CPR and that they had a defibrillator, that was really key," Victoria said. "(The doctors) said that because the police officers performed the CPR perfectly, not just good, but perfectly -- that saved me."

A lifelong bond



Victoria Pyott

The Pyotts are a family of faith and believe it was no accident that the Jackson officers happened to be in a nearby church parking lot when Victoria needed them.

"It could have happened to her sleep when nobody's around. She was just on a youth retreat up in the Poconos -- it could have happened up there," Robert Pyott said, ticking through the possibilities.

He also credits the Jackson Skate Center for wasting no time in calling 911.

"It all contributed to her being alive," he said.

Victoria -- who has had multiple procedures on her heart over the years but had never suffered a heart attack -- has been fitted with a new pacemaker with a built-in defibrillator, able to provide a shock to her heart if a situation like this ever arises again.

She missed 46 days of school and is working hard to complete all her assignments. She is looking forward to summer vacation, during which she hopes to spend plenty of time at the roller rink.

Sgt. Grochowski, a father of two teen daughters, said Victoria was the youngest person he has ever saved. He called it the most memorable lifesaving moment in his two decades on the force. Grochowski and the other officers have seen Victoria a few times since the incident and hope to keep up with her.

"There's definitely going to be a lifelong bond between us," said Grochowski. "I'd love to see her progress in life and follow her dreams."

