Kate's Story: "Don’t wait for a tragic event to happen to get trained to save a life. It is very easy to learn"



In the early 2000’s Kate and her family emigrated from Canada and decided to explore the South Pacific on a family holiday to Vanuatu. Kate and her family were staying at a resort, where during the first few days of the trip she had noticed an elegant woman who reminded her of her grandmother.

One morning Kate was enjoying breakfast with her family in the resort restaurant. The woman whom she had been admiring came into the restaurant.

Suddenly, the woman collapsed, falling backwards. “Her knees did not even bend, hitting her head on the tiles! I was about 3 meters from her - my feet did not even touch the ground, it was just instinct to go and help. I was on my feet before she hit the floor”.

Kate followed her training. She checked for a response and to see if the woman was breathing. When there was no response and no sign of breathing, Kate began CPR.

Prior to performing CPR, Kate called to her fellow holidaymakers for help and was met with a crowd unwilling to help.

“I was yelling out – ‘I need help now’ - again, got blank stares - it was like a dream, and not a good one!”

“I yelled out 'I need help now!’, I made eye contact with a woman at back of the room. She came forward and said, I'm a midwife - don't know much about CPR. I told her “you do the breathes and I’ll continue with compressions’ ”

“We did one round of CPR together (2 minutes), then suddenly the woman became responsive and said very calmly exclaimed, "I think that's enough now". Even the moment of a medical emergency which required CPR, this elegant woman remained polite and held her dignity!” Kate recalled with a laugh.

When Kate asked for assistance, she was met with people who were afraid to help, scared that they would do something wrong and get in trouble. She believes that a lack of training was what created this barrier. Kate later discovered that the staff at the resort were not up to date with their CPR training.

Kate wanted to share her story with the New Zealand Resuscitation Council for World Restart a Heart Day to encourage others to seek training and limit potential barriers to response.

In the years following the event, Kate became a First Aid Instructor, and is passionate about empowering people to respond.

“I encourage my students to respond, if they see someone in their community that doesn’t look right, go up and ask that person 'are you ok?' ”.

Many of Kate’s students have recently experienced medical emergencies within their own whānau, and are encouraging the people in their social circle to get CPR trained.

“One student shared that a family member collapsed, and no one knew what to do. Don’t wait for a tragic event to happen to get trained to save a life. It is very easy to learn."

In New Zealand we have a “she’ll be right attitude”, however we never know when we might be called to save a life. This could be at work, home, in our communities, or even on holiday.

Kate is passionate that all people should have a foundation of life saving training, especially school age students. “CPR is a life-skill that we should all have known from school. I’ve been a part of training surf lifeguards who are often teenagers to respond in a medical emergency. They know that if they were in a situation where they have to respond - they would know what to do, they are empowered by their training".