



Profile photo/Brit Mott

KAREN SCHRAH'S arresting green eyes gaze toward a picture hanging on a wall at THE HEART HOSPITAL Baylor Plano. Her 16-year-old son Zachary wears a Plano East Panthers uniform and is kneeling down holding a football. Karen holds 16 years of precious memories with him. Less than two years ago, on April 2, 2009, Zac collapsed on the football field from Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) and was rushed to the hospital where he quietly passed away.

Zac was a sophomore at Clark High School, played tackle on the junior varsity offensive line at Plano East, and was slated to play varsity during the 2009–2010 season. His coaches described him as an athlete with “integrity” and “determination.” Karen describes him an “all-American boy.”

Holding back tears, she chooses her words carefully.

“He was the happiest kid on earth...very laid back, and always a good student. People raved about his personality, how he was well-rounded. He loved football and baseball. He loved to hunt and fish. He loved life.”

Two months after Zac's passing, Karen founded Living for Zachary (L4Z), a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of SCA, as well as undiagnosed heart complications in youth. Many youth go undiagnosed because they have

no family history of heart disease.

Like Zac. He had no family history. “It was a complete shock,” says Karen, reflecting on The Day. “I was in the parking lot waiting for him to come to the car.



Zachary “Zac” Schrah.

Practice was ending and his dad called me because one of the coaches had called his dad. He said, ‘Something’s wrong, go around to the back of the school.’ And when I pulled around back, there was an ambulance.”

Trying to cope with Zac's death, Karen and a group of mothers began researching incidents of SCA in student athletes and





During the football game on October 22, 2010 between Plano East and Flower Mound, the cheerleaders, drill team, and football players wore red wristbands, socks, or tape in memory of Zac. Photos courtesy of Karen Schrah

discovered through the American Heart Association that nationwide, 10,000 young people die from it each year—28 people a day.

L4Z has partnered with THE HEART HOSPITAL Baylor Plano—the first full-service hospital in this region dedicated solely to heart-health care—to offer heart screenings on Saturdays for youth ages 13–22. While insurance doesn’t cover this preventive screening, it is only \$100 and includes a blood pressure screen, electrocardiogram (EKG), and a 2D echocardiogram. The screenings have served 386 youth since L4Z’s inception, and 35 have been referred on for further evaluation and treatment.

Living for Zachary has also purchased AEDs (Automated External Defibrillators) to give back to the community. An AED is a portable electronic device that automatically warns of life-threatening cardiac arrhythmias through defibrillation. Defibrillation is electrical therapy that stops the arrhythmia, allowing the heart to reestablish an effective rhythm.

How much does an AED cost? “Close to \$1,500,” answers Karen. “We’ve given them to Plano East Senior High School, to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Collin County, and we gave one to MADFROG Volleyball,

where a 9th-grade girl from Allen recently had SCA, so we donated an AED to them in her honor. She

survived. We’ve also sent one on a medical mission to Haiti.”

One of Living for Zachary’s long-term goals is to purchase a mobile unit in which volunteers can travel to different schools and football camps to administer screenings. But for now, Karen said, “there is still so much work to do in our own backyard.

“My 16-year-old daughter, Sarah, works at a local Tom Thumb and customers ask her all the time about her L4Z wrist band. It surprises me how many people still don’t know about it. It just seems like everyone in our community should know.”

Karen’s frustration is only motivation. She draws strength from family and friends and admits that Living for Zachary is what gets her out of bed in the mornings. It keeps her going, and in some way, it keeps Zac alive.

New this year, Living for Zachary has organized a fundraising gala, as well as a scholarship program. “Our goal is to give \$15,000 in scholarships, which includes \$2,500 to three graduating seniors from all of the senior high schools in Plano,” says Karen, “and \$1,000 to a graduating football player at each of the schools, as well as \$1,000 to a

trainer at Plano East.” An additional scholarship is being reviewed and will be finalized this spring.

At the close of our conversation, we asked Karen what Zac would say if he were alive today to see the community’s efforts in raising awareness for SCA. She glances back at the picture hanging on the wall. “I think he would say it’s amazing—what we have done, what we can do, how many doors have opened, who we’ve met....”

How many lives may have been saved?

“Yes, it’s overwhelming, the idea of us saving lives through him,” says Karen. “After he passed away, I was sitting in the hospital and thought, ‘There has to be a reason for Zac’s death, some sort of purpose... that something good was going to come from this.’ She takes a deep breath and declares, “This is it.”

To learn more or to donate to Living for Zachary online, visit living4zachary.org.



Close to 1,000 registered participants joined in **The Living for Zachary Heart Run** held on October 23, 2010 at The Shops at Legacy.

HeartBeats Gala: Bright Lights, Broadway Nights

Living for Zachary’s first HeartBeats Gala is Saturday, February 19 from 7 p.m. to midnight at the Marriott Plano at Legacy Town Center. Themed “Bright Lights, Broadway Nights,” the black-tie event will include a gourmet dinner, live music, and dancing. The gala raises funds for local scholarships and much-needed, life-saving AEDs for local children’s organizations and schools. Guests will enjoy live music by Goga while browsing through silent auction items from autographed sports gear to luxury hotel getaways. Big board offerings will include a home theater package and a landscaping package. A live auction will consist of Caribbean vacations and fine jewelry. Dancing to the music of Limelight (an Emerald City production) will complete the evening. The gala is sponsored by THE HEART HOSPITAL Baylor Plano, and tickets can be purchased by calling 214.514.0368 or at living4zachary.org.