

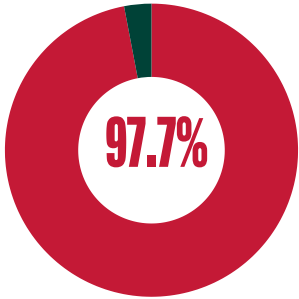
Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers



**Addressing public awareness
of CPR & defibrillators**



Introduction



Of WI delegates voted for the WI to adopt the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers national campaign at the 2025 NFWI Annual Meeting.

There are over 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests a year in the UK, and less than one in ten people survive. Women have a lower chance of surviving than men. Early cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillation can more than double the chances of survival. We call on WI members to work together to increase public confidence and training in the delivery of CPR and to work with local organisations to help improve access to defibrillators in their communities to give every person the best chance of surviving a cardiac arrest.

**Margate WI
East Kent Federation**

A cardiac arrest is caused by an electrical problem in the heart. A person undergoing a cardiac arrest will be unconscious and failing to breathe, as the heart ceases to contract effectively. Cardiac arrest can be caused by defects to the heart, such as coronary heart disease or a heart attack, or external factors such as drug overdose, drowning, or choking. Without prompt intervention from a bystander, the likelihood of survival is minimal.

30,000+ Out-of-hospital cardiac arrests every year in the UK.

Less than 1 in 10 People in the UK survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest.

(According to the British Heart Foundation)



Over the course of this campaign, the NFWI is calling for WI members to learn CPR, know the location of their local defibrillators, and encourage their wider community to learn and do the same. In turn, this will improve community confidence in what to do when encountering cardiac arrest, making you, your loved ones, and members of your community safer should you find yourself in an emergency situation.

But there is so much more to this campaign than just learning CPR. In this action pack, we highlight the diverse ways members can support the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign, be that through auditing defibrillators, fundraising, raising awareness, or engaging in craftivism. Together, we can achieve so much and improve national survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests across England and Wales.

A Message from our Chair

If someone collapsed in front of you right now, would you know what to do?

Would you freeze? Would you wait for help? Or would you step forward and potentially save their life? I am proud to Chair the NFWI in this critical moment, where we have the potential not only to teach our members a new skill, but also the power to save lives.

Cardiac arrest can happen at any time, at anywhere, and to anyone. With four out of five of cardiac arrests happening at home, the life you could save is likely to be someone you know and love. That is why we, as a collective, need to know what to do if the worst does happen, so that we can protect each other and our communities.

Since the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers resolution was passed, I have been shocked to learn that women are less likely to receive CPR in public because people hesitate out of fear. Bystanders worry about touching a woman's chest, making women's survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests significantly worse than men's. This has to change, and I am thrilled that the NFWI will be changing public perception of CPR delivery for women over the course of this campaign.

Later this year I will be completing CPR training with my WI, Hampton Lucy & Charlecote, and I implore you and your WI to do the same. Do not wait for an emergency to happen for you to realise you needed this knowledge. Together, we can improve the national cardiac arrest survival rates and make our communities safer, stronger, and aware that Bystanders truly can be lifesavers. The power is in your hands.



**Jeryl Stone,
Chair of NFWI**

Case Study

You never know when you are going to need CPR skills. Below, we hear from WI member Kate Walsh, who saved the life of a fellow runner at her weekly club, showing how bystanders can be lifesavers.



In September 2023, I was finishing a weekly run with my running club. Tired but satisfied, I watched Pete, one of our members, sprint past me for the finish. Moments later, everything changed.

Pete's arms suddenly dropped to his sides, and his body slumped against a parked car before collapsing in the road. He wasn't moving.

I ran to him. Rolling him onto his back, I recognised the signs that his heart had stopped. I began CPR within seconds. Another runner called 999. Someone else ran to fetch the public defibrillator (AED) from the nearby park. Others contacted his family, gathered his details, and diverted traffic. What had begun as a casual run instantly became a lifesaving team effort.

We delivered two shocks with the AED before Pete began breathing again. By the time the ambulance arrived, he was groggy but talking. Afterwards, people thanked me because I'm a paramedic. But that day, I didn't have my kit, my colleagues, or my radio. I was just another bystander. The truth is, the difference wasn't me, it was us. Everyone played a role, and without that collective effort, the outcome could have been very different for Pete.

This is why this campaign matters. You don't need to be a paramedic to make a difference. CPR, using an AED, calling for help, keeping the scene safe, all of these things are vital roles and save lives. Every action counts and anybody can do something to help. Pete was 75 years old at the time. Since then, he has enjoyed holidays with his family and making memories with his grandchildren. And he is still running faster than me. Pete is happy to share his story because bystanders stepped up and saved his life. Learning first aid means you could do the same for a friend, a loved one, or even a stranger. Don't wait until you're faced with an emergency. Learn how to be a lifesaver.

Kate Walsh
Saughall WI
Cheshire Federation

Have you survived a cardiac arrest or delivered life-saving CPR at work, in your home, or in public? We want to hear from you! Email pa@nfwf.org.uk to tell us your story.

Cardiac Arrest is a Feminist Issue

The NFWI is concerned that multiple studies have shown that people are less likely to perform CPR on women compared to men in emergency situations. As a result, the British Heart Foundation has estimated that:

8,200+ **Women in England and Wales could have survived cardiac arrest if they had been given the same treatment as men between 2003 and 2013**

Below, we identify why cardiac arrest should be considered as a feminist issue:

Fear

St John Ambulance research found over a third of Britons fear giving CPR to women, and 38% feel uncomfortable using a defibrillator on them due to chest pad placement requiring bra removal. This hesitation costs vital seconds and can also lead to bystanders refusing to help during cardiac arrest.

Lack of public recognition

A common myth is that women have unusual cardiac arrest symptoms, though both sexes share similar warning signs and symptoms. This misconception leaves women less aware of their own symptoms, less likely to call an ambulance, and less often recognised by bystanders as experiencing cardiac arrest.

Biology

Menopause increases cardiovascular risk due to declining oestrogen, a hormone that protects the heart. Early menarche (onset of first period), polycystic ovary syndrome, high blood pressure in pregnancy, and oral contraceptive use are also linked to higher cardiovascular disease and cardiac arrest risk.

Training

The majority of CPR mannequins are flat-chested, and CPR training rarely use bra-wearing models. Using manikins that reflect women's bodies could improve bystander CPR delivery and survival rates for women.

Clinical Bias

Historically, women's cardiovascular health has been neglected due to unequal representation in research, trials, and the medical field, alongside workplace discrimination. A 2018 study found women in England and Wales were 50% more likely than men to receive a wrong initial heart attack diagnosis, often mislabelled as anxiety, leading to inappropriate care and a higher cardiac arrest risk.



FACTS:

Bras must be removed when using a defibrillator on someone in cardiac arrest, but bras and any other items of clothing can remain on the body whilst delivering CPR.



Coronary heart disease kills more than twice as many women in the UK as breast cancer each year.

Inequalities in cardiovascular outcomes

Whilst the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign focuses on the cardiac arrest outcome variation between men and women, there are several factors that cause disparities in cardiovascular outcomes, including income level, disability, ethnic background, and geography. To find out more, read the [British Heart Foundation's Bridging Hearts](#) report.

Myth Busting Cardiac Arrest

There are several myths and misconceptions around cardiac arrest. The following myth busters aim to challenge common misconceptions and provide life-saving clarity so you can feel confident identifying cardiac arrest and become a life-saving bystander.

"Cardiac arrest and heart attacks are the same thing."



A cardiac arrest is when a person's heart stops pumping blood around their body and they stop breathing normally. A heart attack occurs when one of the coronary arteries becomes blocked. Because of the blockage, the heart muscle can't get its vital blood supply and, if left untreated, will begin to die because it is not getting enough oxygen. A heart attack can lead to cardiac arrest, but they're not the same thing.

"Bystanders should not perform CPR on a woman because it might be inappropriate."



This is a real and deadly myth. Studies show bystanders hesitate to perform CPR on women, fearing accusations or embarrassment. In the UK, the Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015 protects people who act in emergencies. No one has ever been successfully sued in the UK for trying to save a life through delivering CPR or using a defibrillator.

“Men and women have different symptoms of cardiac arrest.”



Both sexes have very similar symptoms and warning signs of cardiac arrest, but women are often misdiagnosed with another condition.



“Young people cannot experience cardiac arrest.”



Whilst age is a risk factor for cardiac arrest, cardiac arrest can happen to anyone, including children and athletes.



“Bystanders can hurt the patient by performing CPR.”



Whilst this is possible, doing something is always better than doing nothing when encountering cardiac arrest.



“Only trained personnel are allowed to use defibrillators.”



Defibrillators can be used effectively by anyone who can follow visual and voice prompts.

Put your knowledge to the test!

The NFWI has produced a CPR and defibrillator quiz for members to use at WI meetings, to help bust myths about cardiac arrest and delivering CPR. Members can download the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers Quiz and answers on [MyWI](#).



What Can I Do?

There are so many ways you and your WI can engage in the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign, and encourage your loved ones and communities to do the same. Below, we outline how members can engage in the campaign on an **individual, local, and national level**.



Individual

Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)



We are encouraging all WI members to complete CPR training. It is quick, simple, and can even be completed online at home. There are so many ways you and your community can learn CPR. We have identified some options below:



Free Online Training: Online CPR training is a great way for you to learn first aid basics, especially if you're short on time or cannot find a suitable in-person trainer. The British Heart Foundation has created a bespoke link for WI members to take their 15-minute free [RevivR online training](#). You can also use this tool to learn CPR as a group; all you need is enough pillows and floor space for everybody.



St John Ambulance First Aid Training: There are local St John Ambulance groups all over the country who can deliver CPR training at your WI meetings. Use the [St John Ambulance website](#) to find and contact your local group.



Local Community Groups: There are a number of community groups that offer CPR training in their communities, including the British Red Cross, local First Responders, local Air Ambulance Services, and medical educational societies.

Reminder: Many people are concerned about their physical ability to perform CPR. In the case of an emergency, you may choose to deliver CPR, and the paramedic will be there to support you if you experience any injuries as a result. If you do not feel physically able to deliver CPR, it is still important that you know what to do if you encounter cardiac arrest, so you can guide someone who is physically able through the correct steps, identify the nearest defibrillator, and support paramedics with accessing the patient.

Completed CPR training? Don't forget to join our wave of awareness by sharing a photo of you and your WI making a heart shape with your hands, just like our campaign logo. Upload your image to social media with the hashtag #BystandersCanBeLifesavers. You can tag us on Facebook, Instagram, or send them to NFWI by emailing pa@nfwl.org.uk



**Margate WI,
East Kent Federation**



**Bawtry WI,
South Yorkshire Federation**

**Margate WI and Bawtry WI showing
that they have completed their CPR
training**

The NFWI is encouraging all of the staff team to become CPR trained, using the British Heart Foundation's RevivR tool. Why not challenge your WI to do the same?

Once you have learnt CPR:

1) Complete our short survey so that we can monitor the impact of this campaign. You can complete our survey on behalf of yourself or your whole WI by visiting <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7RZB2WP> or scanning the QR code below.



2) Share your learning experience with your loved ones and wider community, so they know how easy and important it is to learn CPR and access training.

Delivering CPR can be a highly stressful and sometimes traumatic experience, even for trained individuals. Across England and Wales the British Heart Foundation, St John Ambulance, the Resuscitation Council UK, and NHS support services offer guidance and emotional support for those involved in resuscitation attempts.

Learning CPR as a group? Why not open your training to the wider community, just like Abotts Leigh WI, Avon Federation, who are hosting a CPR event for their whole village in late September 2025. Not only does this improve the collective safety of your local area, but this is a great event for your community to learn about the power of the Women's Institute's campaigning work.

Achub Bywyd Cymru | Save a Life Cymru

NFWI Wales is working with Save a Life Cymru, an NHS Wales campaign encouraging everybody in Wales to learn CPR skills and to increase public confidence in using a defibrillator when they witness a cardiac arrest. To find out more, email walesoffice@nfwl-wales.org.uk.



A defibrillator is a medical device that delivers an electrical shock to the heart to restore a normal heart rhythm after someone experiences cardiac arrest.

Defibrillators are critical to use in an emergency because they can quickly restart the heart during sudden cardiac arrest, greatly increasing the victim's chance of survival.



If a defibrillator is used within the first three minutes of cardiac arrest, the person's survival rate increases by up to 70%.

The Circuit

The Circuit is the UK's national defibrillator network. It provides NHS ambulance services with vital information about defibrillators across the UK. There are currently over 110,000 defibrillators registered to The Circuit across the UK. Make sure you, your family, and your neighbours know where the nearest defibrillator is from your home, work, and community spaces so that you know where to go in an emergency. You can find out where your nearest defibrillator is by using The Circuit's website: <https://www.defibfinder.uk/>.

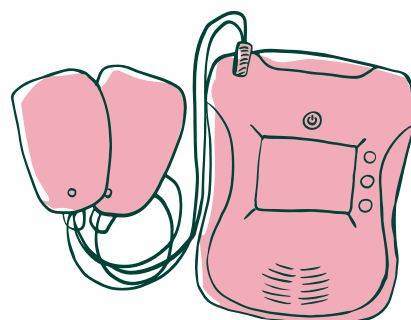


Local

Members can play a vital role in their local areas to improve their community's resilience to cardiac arrest. Here's how:

Defibrillator Guardianship

A Defibrillator Guardian is an individual who takes responsibility for the upkeep and monitoring of a defibrillator, ensuring it is ready for use in an emergency. This involves registering the defibrillator on a national database like [The Circuit](#) and regularly checking its condition to ensure the device is "rescue ready". Some defibrillators are managed by a Single Guardian, whereas others are managed by Multiple Guardians.



Defibrillator Auditing

The defibrillator network, The Circuit, is a fantastic tool for the public and for emergency services. However, The Circuit is not perfect, with many defibrillators not being registered to The Circuit, or defibrillators containing out-of-date batteries and chest pads, due to Defibrillator Guardians failing to maintain their defibrillators' upkeep. That is why it is important for volunteers to audit the defibrillators in their local area to ensure they are working, freely accessible to the public at all times, and registered to The Circuit.

To support the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign, you and your WI can support the auditing of defibrillators in your local area by identifying the following:

Registered Defibrillators:

- ☐ Are your local defibrillators registered to The Circuit, so emergency services know where to direct bystanders if they encounter someone experiencing cardiac arrest?



The public can contact the owner of the building where the defibrillator is placed and request that they register their defibrillator to The Circuit so that the emergency services can use the device.

Defibrillator Maintenance:

- ☐ Do your local defibrillators contain in-date batteries and chest pads?

Defibrillator Access:

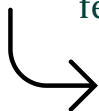
- ☐ Are your local defibrillators easily accessible at all times of day, rather than kept behind locked doors in private facilities?



The public can contact The Circuit's support team by emailing ndnsupport@bhf.org.uk, or calling the helpline at [0300 330 5482](tel:03003305482) and informing them about the issues you have identified.

Defibrillator Quantity:

- ☐ Are there defibrillators in your local area that you could easily and quickly fetch in the event of an emergency?



The public can contact their local council, councillors, and local charity groups to identify a strategy to increase the number of defibrillators in the area. Members can use the NFWI template email available on [MyWI](#).

Defibrillator Public Awareness:

- ☐ Does your local community know where their nearest defibrillators are?



Access our printable posters on [MyWI](#) to place in public spaces to raise awareness of your local defibrillator's location.

Fundraising

Fundraising is a key action to support the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign. We have the power to fund training equipment and sessions, public awareness campaigns, and life-saving equipment like defibrillators, as well as advance research in preventing and treating heart conditions. There are several ways WIs can fundraise in support of the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign:



Raise money to fund CPR training delivery for your local community.

Raise money to install more defibrillators in your local area and fund defibrillator maintenance.



Raise money for CPR mannequins with breasts to use at local community events.

Raise money for national organisations that are delivering life-saving CPR, training for the public, and funding research in heart health.

All fundraising activity must be in line with the NFWI's Fundraising guidelines which are available on My WI at <https://mywi.thewi.org.uk/running-your-wi/wi-finance/fundraising-guidelines>. Once your WI has chosen what you would like to fundraise for, you can now choose how you would like to raise the money. Below, we've highlighted some ideas you could use to hit your fundraising targets:

Consider holding raffles to support charities spreading awareness of cardiac arrest and delivering CPR training.



Participate in a sponsored walk, swim, or "craftathon" (craft marathon) where people sponsor you for taking part.



Run an event - e.g. a coffee morning, quiz night, or auction.



Research whether there are any local community trusts and charity grants you can apply to in support of the campaign. Some local councils and Mayors have community funding available for public health initiatives.



Consider selling items that utilise your WIs skills, be that creating a recipe book of your best family recipes, holding a cake sale or cooking class, or knitting items to sell at a local fair.

The British Heart Foundation is currently taking applications from community groups for free defibrillators. Margate WI successfully applied to the British Heart Foundation for a free public access defibrillator which is now located on the wall of a Margate library. The WI was also granted £500 from the Margate Mayors Fund, enabling them to buy a female mannequin and training defibrillator to use at community events.



Fundraiser Idea: Valentine's Disco/Karaoke

Why not host a Valentine's-themed event in February to fundraise for charities working on improving cardiac arrest survival rates? To keep your party on theme, you could play songs with 100-120 beats per minute, which is the speed at which you should deliver CPR chest compressions.

To help you, we've created a playlist on the NFWI Youtube Channel, which includes an array of songs by female artists from across multiple decades that can all be used as a basis to time your CPR compressions.



National Public Awareness Campaigning



There are so many ways you and your WI can contribute to the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign beyond your local area. Here are just some of the things you could do to contribute to the national campaign.

-  Use social media platforms, local broadcasters and newspapers to spread the Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers message, including highlighting the gender disparity in cardiac arrest survival rates.
-  Engage in community events outside of your local area to spread the news about why it is important for everyone to learn CPR.
-  Speak to WIs and Federations near you to discuss larger-scale joint campaigning activities.
-  Align with existing national campaigning moments, including Restart a Heart Day.

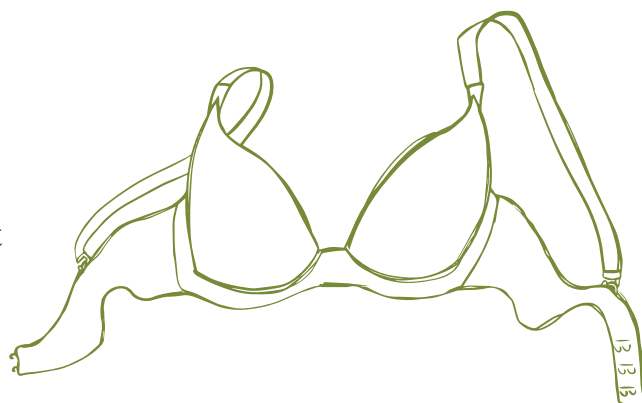
Join Restart a Heart Day

October 16th

Restart a Heart Day is an initiative led by the Resuscitation Council UK, which aims to increase the survival rates from out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. Across the country, multiple charities, local community groups, and campaigners combine forces to spread awareness about the importance of knowing what to do when you encounter cardiac arrest. Why not join in on the action and run an event, campaign stunt, or social media campaign on the day?

2025 Restart a Heart Day Stunt: Uncover to Recover

To bring attention to the gender disparity in cardiac arrest survival rates, Thanet WIs are performing a striking awareness demonstration on the sands of Margate by forming a large heart shape while wearing bras over their clothing, captured via drone photography from above. This visual statement aims to draw media and public attention to a critical issue: in public cardiac arrest incidents, women are significantly less likely to receive bystander CPR than men.



Why not replicate this in your WI to bring attention to the issue on Restart a Heart Day? You could organise a photo stunt by gathering in a public place and forming the shape of a heart, and capture photos of yourselves or invite local media to attend.

References

With thanks to the British Heart Foundation, St John Ambulance, the Resuscitation Council, and others for providing useful resources and information to inform this action pack.



Please see the next page for vital information about what to do if you witness cardiac arrest.

Cut these out and place them on your village noticeboard, your fridge, or your WI noticeboard - so you, your loved ones, and your community can respond to cardiac arrest.

If you witness Cardiac Arrest:

Cardiac arrest doesn't wait, and neither should you. If someone experiences cardiac arrest, every second counts.

- 
1. Check for danger and shout for help.
 2. Recognise the emergency. If someone has a cardiac arrest, they will be unresponsive, they won't be breathing normally, and will show no movements or signs of life.
 3. Call 999. Put them on speaker phone and listen to the call handler's instructions.
 4. Begin CPR immediately.
 5. Use a defibrillator if you can, swiftly and confidently. The 999 call handler will tell you where the nearest defibrillator is. If someone is with you, ask them to fetch it and bring it back.
 6. Continue using a defibrillator and/or CPR until a paramedic arrives.

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