

CASE STUDY

JACKIE KRAMMER

AMBULANCE OFFICER – VOLUNTEER



How did you get started with St John?

I started as a volunteer in April 2005, I'd recently had a baby and wanted something to do outside of the home that was flexible and used my brain – this does both. I can work ambulance around my other commitments – if I'm on night shift my son and partner don't even miss me!

The only previous experience of St John I'd had came from tagging along with my sisters when they'd attended St John cadets. I had a general awareness of them within the community.

I work at the local Dairy Company and they're supportive of my role with St John, if they're having a quiet time I can be on call from work. You do commit to giving a minimum amount of time but it's flexible and you can do more if you like.

What appeals to you about the role?

Hokitika is a small community and becoming a volunteer was a way of becoming more involved in the community and helping people.

What national qualifications training are you doing?

I have just completed my road time on-job assessment for National Certificate [Patient Care and Transport] [Level 4]. I'm taking some time to consolidate what I've learned and then hope to continue on to Paramedic training sometime next year.

When I started to get into the training and had been to a few jobs I saw what I could be doing in terms of treatment. Once you've been out to a variety of jobs and you see what people with higher ambulance qualifications can do it makes you want to continue training to be able to provide more treatment yourself.

Being a volunteer gives you a feel for what it's all about and I would thoroughly recommend it.

What has come out of the training for you?

I have loads more confidence with patient assessments and dealing with people – it's given me new skills for patient treatment.

The interaction with people on the courses is great as you get to see how other ambulance officer's deal with situations. St John utilise staff with a particular knowledge of a subject to teach where possible – this is great as they generally have a wealth of personal experience to draw on when putting together the training.

I have a Post-Graduate Certificate in Biochemistry so I've spent a fair bit of time sitting in classrooms. The training we have is well aimed and the skills we're taught are practical and relevant.



What makes a good ambulance officer?

Having empathy and compassion, being flexible and having a sense of humour are essential. Leadership skills are really important as you need to have the ability to take control in seemingly chaotic situations and sometimes make the tough calls. Maintaining patient confidentiality and dignity is a must.

Being a team player is really important because you work with your partner to assess and treat patients and also support each other when the outcome is not so good.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced as an ambulance officer?

Dealing with death is something you never get 'used to'. When you attend a death you have two roles. First there is your care of the patient – we do everything we can but sometimes it's not successful. When that is the case your second role is to care for and support those who have been left behind.

It can be difficult dealing with aggressive patients and distressed families, but that comes with experience.

St John has excellent support services in place. There is a Peer Support group, Employee Assistance Programme [EAP] and access to counselling available if you need it. You are never left to deal with things on your own.

What advice would you give anyone interested in becoming an ambulance officer?

When you join you do a basic Workplace First Aid Certificate and following a Police clearance you are able to start observing on an ambulance. This is when you can attend real ambulance call outs to observe what happens. If, at the end of the observing, you decide ambulance really isn't for you then you haven't lost a thing but you will have gained a First Aid Certificate.

Go for it! Being an ambulance volunteer is one of the most valuable things you can do within your community.

People expect that there is a lot of blood and guts but this isn't the case. Lots of our patients are medical so although their condition is serious it is not necessarily the result of major trauma. Because you are trained to deal with trauma you just get in there and do your job.

You need to be prepared to make hard decisions and take control. You're expected to walk onto a scene, ask the right questions, listen, know what the important pieces of information are and then make an assessment and treat based on your findings.

What's the best part of the job?

The opportunities you get. You're more involved in the community. We're let into peoples lives at really important times. You can see the effect of your treatment and care on the patient and their family.

Helping people is great. It's a buzz when patients say thank you, its cool when people say there's that lady who helped us. Hokitika people are really supportive; they know most of the staff at the station are volunteers.

The opportunity to continue training is fantastic.

How has being an ambulance officer affected the rest of your life?

I have a busy family & work life and I can work around it. My family see the importance of this service to our community and are really supportive.

It has made me more patient and tolerant, and taught me not to sweat the small stuff. When you help someone who is really sick, or comfort the family of someone who has just died, you realise that most of the small stuff really isn't that big of a deal!