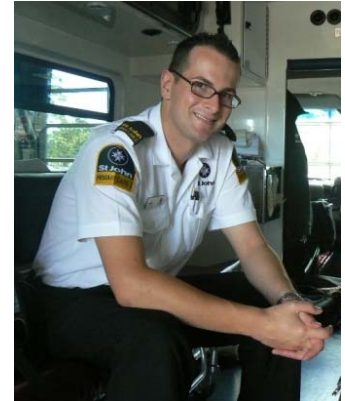


CASE STUDY

TRISTAN SAMES

AMBULANCE OFFICER



How did you get started with St John?

I volunteered for three years while studying for a Bachelor of Arts [Psychology], then became a full-time ambulance officer in late 2007. It was something I'd always wanted to have a look at as my mother's a nurse and I have an uncle who's a doctor.

I'd recommend doing a stint with St John as a volunteer as it's a good idea to take the time to see how things work. It prepares you in some ways about procedures you'll have to do and to make sure it's something you want to do.

What appeals to you about the role?

You get to help people in a unique way, often when you walk into a situation you're the one who's providing the stability and calm among the chaos. For me, part of it is the unpredictable nature of the job, and there's also the opportunity to have on-going training.

What national qualifications training are you doing?

I recently completed the National Certificate in Ambulance [Patient Care and Transport] [Level 4]. There were several components in achieving the qualification which included assignments, completing a logbook, and a six week block course.

The block course was an informal classroom situation, with only eight other students. It was good to be able to talk through things and help each other along, as a learning approach it was a breath of fresh air.

What has come out of the training for you?

It's a supportive learning environment and the course draws on all the fundamentals of what you need to know: physiology, conditions we deal with all the time and the tools we need to be able to do our job. It makes use of all of our other experiences as well.

We're given the tools to assess a situation, not just a process to learn. It's not a case of A, then B happens, you should do C. It's more a case of A is happening because of this, which will lead to B because of this – and this means you could do C, D or E.

What makes a good ambulance officer?

The ability to be adaptable and flexible. You need to be able to adapt to uncontrolled situations, and you need to be flexible because what you get isn't always what you've been told to expect. To a certain extent you have to enjoy that unpredictability.

Because of the situations you find yourself in, you also have to have a real interest in helping people. Sometimes it's just sitting down with someone and making sure they're ok. Having a sense of humour and thick skin will also go a long way.



What's the biggest challenge you've faced as an ambulance officer?

Dealing with what we see can be stressful, but St John has procedures and processes in place to help you through it – you're not on your own. There's a good debriefing system, you're given time to deal with any traumas, and there's always the more experienced team members around, who have been there done that. This staff support system is taken seriously and there's also a clinical psychologist available if needed.

When you're dealing with trauma you have to take a philosophical approach - people do die. You do the best for them you can, you care for them and the people around them. A lot of it's recognising what you can and can't control. Provide comfort when and where you can, this is a big part when dealing with death, you can help them with the grieving process.

Then at the other end of the spectrum, you also have to deal with the routine requirements of the job like cleaning and auditing of paperwork. However, this time can also be used to study.

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

Becoming an ambulance officer is a lifestyle choice. You need to take the time to think about it. Initially people relate to what they see on the TV which is a superficial reaction. The reality is it's not all blaring sirens and flashing lights.

People call for an ambulance because they don't know what to do, so you need to approach everything with maturity as you're the one who needs to be the calming influence. There's also the challenge of balancing the adrenalin with the requirements of the job.

What's the best part of the job?

Every day you do something new, there's always something to learn. There are people who have been on the job for 30 years and they're still seeing new things.

There's as much satisfaction in making sure someone is ok after a fall and having a talk to see if they're fine – it's not all about the trauma call. We're there to provide peace of mind for people. It's a responsibility and a privilege to see people at their most vulnerable and intimate moments.

In general, the response from the public is good. There can be a bit of a generational thing, people see a uniform and may not respond that well, especially the younger ones – there's ego involved. You need to be able to shrug things off.

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

You need to get a balance, get home take off the uniform. And make sure you have friends and activities you're involved with outside the station. For me it's great to be able to get out and go mountain biking or climbing.

One of the disadvantages was the impact it can have on your social life outside the station. However there's the upside of being able to have four day weekends – you do get to do the shopping when it isn't crowded.