

For the record, my name is Margaret Laggis and I am an EMT with Hardwick Rescue Squad. We cover the towns of Stannard, Craftsbury, Greensboro, Hardwick, Walden, Wolcott and Woodbury with a small part of Cabot. We have two ambulances, one on-call and the second for second calls that is staffed by members willing to have their radio on even when they are not on-call. 10 years ago Hardwick responded to about 300 calls a year and we are now up to over 600.

We have a very large territory geographically with a lot of dirt roads and difficult locations to get an ambulance. In those outlying towns we have First Responders who go directly to the house and start an assessment and then leave when the ambulance crew take the patient into their care.

I have been doing this for over a decade and am on call for the first 32 hours of each week and every three weeks I add an additional 12 hour shift. So basically, an additional full time job. I joined HRS in response to wanting to do something for my community and not wanting to serve on a Board. I have fallen in love with this service and when I moved to Derby last March, I kept my affiliation and my shifts and HRS put a bed into the bay and I stay there every Sunday and Monday night.

The challenge for rural rescue squads is not just getting new members, the initial training is 6 months long at 6 hours/week, it is keeping people because of the difficult social situations we get involved in. Most people tell me that they couldn't do this work because they imagine that what we do is deal with a lot of blood and bones, but in truth, what we deal with much more frequently is the sad, difficult relationships and living situations that Vermonters find themselves in.

We share in the death of friends whether that is sudden with suicides or heart attacks or long term through a progressive disease. We respond to the families of our children's friends or our children's friends themselves. I have gone to calls where the pt was a good personal friend of a child of mine and they have passed away. We get involved in sad personal situations where the 911 call was probably not medically necessary but was socially necessary. We will help families figure out how to move through the first hour of the death of a loved one with calling a funeral home staying through the police investigation and the arrival of the Medical Examiner. We also are very involved in the decisions that families make to move a family member to assisted or long term care or a mental

health facility. These are very trying circumstances and can be exceptionally emotional.

The next day, if we see that person or their family in the store, we have to act like nothing happened.

You would be shocked at how deeply personal these often 40 minute transports to the hospital can be. It often becomes clear that this is the first time that this pt. has had someone hold their hand and just listen to them. They pour their hearts out to us and most often, there is nothing much we can do to help them. So, we just listen. After a lot of years of this, it becomes heavy to carry and we start to lose members.

The things that keep members are the wonderful opportunities that we have to make an actual difference in the lives of our community members. The time that you get called to an attempted suicide and the person lights up when they see you walk through the door. The heart-warming cards we get following some of these cards. They make all the difference. The other things are the rare times that we get to participate in a birth. There is a sweet young girl in Hardwick who carries Margaret as a middle name because of a very close personal connection her mom and I formed through a very difficult, life threatening pregnancy where just through a fluke of scheduling, I was on each of the four calls that took her to the hospital including the final successful one!

What can Vermont do to make all of this easier? Some of it is happening with more training online. But some kind of financial help would be nice. Whether it is a property or income tax break or some other tangible benefit. Shortening the initial training would be huge benefit because the work that a new EMT will do when they become licensed is always supervised with an experienced EMT for up to 6 months. Once people become an EMT and join a squad getting additional training is easier. The very long commitment time to become initially licensed deters a lot of great people from joining.

Truly, the most important thing that an EMT needs is a big heart and a lot of compassion.