



St John

first to care

DVD transcript

St John celebrates 125 years of serving New Zealanders

St John began in New Zealand at St Mary's Church, Christchurch in 1885 to meet the community's need to provide its own ambulance and first aid services.

St John started as an entirely volunteer organization. As the value of its services became known, St John soon spread throughout the country to become the caring and vital organisation it is today.

When St John first began in New Zealand, ambulance volunteers would rush to the aid of their patients and bring them to a hospital on covered stretchers on trolleys called hand-wheeled litters.

Ten years later, St John made a breakthrough by introducing horse-drawn carriages which were much faster, more comfortable and less demanding on the volunteers!

By 1920, most horse-drawn ambulances had been replaced by motor ambulances.

Volunteers operating the earliest motorised vehicles would tend to patients with the aid of two stretchers, a box of bandages and splints, a bottle of brandy and a bottle of smelling salts...a far cry from our modern and specialised ambulances of today! Now St John provides first aid and emergency care services at more than 8,500 public events a year.

Things have progressed in the area of ambulance communications and dispatch. In the very early days ambulance officers would be summoned by sirens or messengers and even flags on top of hotels and other local landmarks.

Establishing emergency ambulance communications centres revolutionised the way St John dispatches ambulances and communicates with officers.

These days St John uses the latest technology to dispatch not only road ambulances but also air ambulances, Coastguard and other emergency resources to emergencies.

Fundraising and community support has always been crucial to St John. From the earliest times, the support of local communities to help fund the range of services that St John provides in their community has been vital.

Still now, St John relies on the public to support it in its work. Funding for community care services comes from individual and community donations and contributions from our health-related commercial activities. Ambulance funding comes from a wide variety of sources - including government contributions, donations, bequests, businesses, grants, and patient part-charges.

Today St John is one of the country's largest charities, touching the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders every year.

In 2010, St John provides ambulance services to more than 85% of the country's population and more than 95% of New Zealand's geography. St John has more than 900 full-time paid ambulance officers and over 2700 volunteer ambulance officers.

Our community services include Caring Caller - a telephone support service; Health Shuttles to help people get to medical appointments; Friends of the Emergency Department - a programme where volunteers help patients and their families; St John Safe Kids - teaching young people what to do in a medical emergency and St John Youth – one of the largest and fastest growing youth programmes in New Zealand.

St John is committed to ensuring it applies its experience and learning from the past 125 years to continuously develop and improve its services for New Zealand communities.

St John in New Zealand today draws on the experience and values of its rich heritage and looks forward to continuing to serve the people of New Zealand.