

# Best Practice

## Emergency Medical Service Support

### CONTACT

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Project Date: Ongoing

### THE PRACTICE

In the spring of 2015, a new Health Center facility had recently opened in the Town of Radville. The former health center provided space for temporary housing for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) staff before it was closed and torn down. The new Health Centre; however, did not provide adequate temporary housing space for EMS staff. This lack of suitable temporary housing was identified as an issue for EMS staff providing services on a temporary basis or for EMS staff covering shifts from outside the community. The only short-term rental accommodations available in the town are the hotel, which is aged, and a bed breakfast attached to a bar and restaurant.

At this time, the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) coordinator was overwhelmed with the workload caused by the limited availability of qualified EMS staff. The coordinator was having difficulty recruiting local individuals to staff the two community funded ambulances available. The situation had reached the point where the ambulances were only locally staffed periodically and ambulance services were outsourced to neighboring communities when local staff was unavailable, thus greatly increasing response times. The EMS Coordinator reached out to the Health District for assistance, but options for resolving staffing and lodging issues were limited. As a result, other organizations were approached to provide assistance to ensure a sustainable ambulance service remained in the Town of Radville.

A solution that was proposed to promote recruitment and retention of EMS staff was to provide suitable local lodging, as well as, an honorarium to qualified EMS staff that were willing to be on call to provide ambulance services.

To resolve the issue of providing suitable local lodging, a Radville office building donated to the Health Centre foundation was renovated and set-up to provide a quiet location within close proximity to the Health Centre that could be utilized by medical and emergency medical staff while on call. The “EMS Building” has been available for use to EMS staff from September 1, 2016 until present.

As an additional incentive to EMS staff, an honorarium was proposed based on standby hours worked. This honorarium has been available to EMS staff since February 2015 and continues to be offered. This incentive is supported by donations from surrounding municipalities and private donations.

### THE PROCESS

EMS Building

The Councils for the Town of Radville and RM of Laurier No. 38, as well as, the Radville and District Health Centre Foundation were approached by retired Lawyers Roderick and Lynn MacDonald to see if they would be interested in accepting the donation of their former law office located at 621 Healy Avenue, Radville, Saskatchewan, for use by the municipality or the Health Foundation, in exchange for a tax deductible receipt. The intent of the donation was to renovate the building to provide lodging for EMS staff.

The Town of Radville and the RM of Laurier No. 38 provided funds for the renovation and set-up of the EMS Building, with a large portion of the renovations and furnishings being donated by various parties.

The Long Creek Rodeo Association currently funds a significant portion of the annual operating costs associated with the EMS building. The Town of Radville and the RM of Laurier No. 38 provide additional funding, as required, to operate the building.

#### Ambulance Honorarium

A former RM of Laurier No. 38 Councillor, and now Chair of the Missouri Coteau Ambulance Committee, proposed to the RM of Laurier No. 38 that an honorarium be provided to EMS staff as an incentive. The idea was supported by the RM of Laurier No. 38 and the idea was brought forward to additional municipalities which led to the establishment of the Missouri Coteau Ambulance Committee.

Both Town of Radville and R.M. of Laurier Councils' appointed two members to form a committee to ensure the success of the project. The Town of Radville Administrator, Shauna Bourassa, oversaw the transfer of property titles, ensured the property was valued and donation receipt issued and researched and executed the required paperwork for tax exemptions. R.M. of Laurier Administrator, Ursula Scott wrote the bylaw and agreement between the Town of Radville, the R.M. of Laurier No. 38 and the Radville and District Health Centre Foundation to ensure the project is properly funded on an on-going basis. Town Councillor and Chair of the Radville and District Health Centre Foundation, Hal Hofmeister ensured his organization was agreeable with the arrangement. Mr. Hofmeister's role was to administrate the financial end of the agreement -collecting and receipting donations and paying accounts. The "EMS Building" committee created by the two municipalities consisted of Town representative Councillors Lynette Kotz and Warren Wudrick. The R.M. of Laurier No. 38 representatives were Councillors Bev Pirio and Rick Ricard. Together this committee of four ensured the renovations to convert the building from a law office to a "home away from home". Removing the office desks, and office furnishings including a huge safe, as well as painting the interior, changing the flooring, creating a kitchenette and installing a shower and hot water.

The other organization involved was the Radville and District Health Centre Foundation. They ultimately became the owners of the building and are now responsible for the financial accounting, and ensuring the building is utilized in the manner it was designed for.

The success of the entire initiative draws on the strength of a core of dedicated elected officials, volunteers, and business people who are committed to keeping a fully functioning ambulance service in the area. Local government negotiated agreements, titled property and ensured funding. The donation of the facility and operating funds from local government, businesses, individuals and community organizations has greatly contributed to the success of the project.

The project was developed through consultation with local EMS and local government. These discussions led to the formation of the Missouri Coteau Ambulance Committee which oversees the project. The operation of the committee is ongoing.

## **THE RESULTS**

Ambulance service has been restored to full 24 hour a day on-call service, with two Emergency Medical technicians on call. The local volunteers have increased and when local staff is not available EMS staff from other communities volunteer their services. Some of the volunteers who are coming from other communities are Primary Care and Acute Care paramedics and not only share their knowledge with local volunteers but also assist in the medical facility's emergency room and assist the nursing staff when the need arises. Nursing staff have also stated how having the more highly trained paramedics has boosted their confidence and given them a greater sense of security.

Each year the Missouri Coteau Ambulance Committee meets to see if any adjustments need to be addressed. The Committee has lobbied the province for higher standby wages for paramedics and has participated in reviews conducted by the Health district.

When renovating the office building into a suitable home for the EMS staff, there were some structural challenges as the building was made of cinderblock and had developed a leak in one room. Wiring and plumbing in a kitchenette was also more of a challenge and venting the dryer outside of the building also presented a bit of challenge. The contractors and volunteers however worked together and were able to overcome these with great success. A system was also developed to ensure each team of volunteers could access the building and a protocol was developed to ensure the building was left tidy as volunteers came and went. The honorarium funding challenge was met by talking to other municipalities and showing them how "extra" money draws in the enthusiastic volunteers to staff the ambulance.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Don't wait for the provincial government to solve local problems. Be creative with how you solve your local problems. When looking for services for projects talk to contractors and suppliers, you may be surprised how many will donate products and services to your cause.