

FREMR, Sally

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By Luke Hendry
THE INTELLIGENCER

CORBYVILLE — Thurlow Ward resident Sally Fremr is the first-ever CCARES volunteer of the year.

And, Fremr has seen people at their worst.

Children in crisis, newly bereaved families, victims of horrible crime. In each case, Fremr has helped them get through the night, to make sense of tragedy and to cope in whatever way they can.

It sounds like a dramatic, high-stress job, but Fremr and many others do it for free.

She is one of 47 active volunteers for CCARES, or Community Crisis Assistance, Referral and Emergency Support (CCARES). The agency helps roughly 1,000 victims of crime and trauma each year, and is funded by the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General's Victim Services Secretariat.

Fremr first applied to CCARES in Sept. 2003 and has never regretted the choice.

"I'm a real people person and I like to help people wherever I can," Fremr said. "I was a volunteer firefighter for three years, and it's just in my personality to help people. I really enjoy it."

Married with a 10-year-old son, Fremr worked until at Procter and Gamble before going back to school to become a paramedic. She is studying part-time at Loyalist College's Bancroft campus.

Donating her time to CCARES has been "a really good fit" because it allows her to volunteer when she's available. Each volunteer is required to do three 12-hour shifts per month, but Fremr has done much more, giving the agency more than 1,300 hours in the past year.

While Fremr may downplay her role, CCARES staff haven't overlooked her work.

"We've never had someone volunteer as many hours as Sally," said Lisa Warriner, executive director of the Napanee-based CCARES Victim Assistance. The office serves Hastings, Prince Edward, and Lennox and Addington counties.

"There's only a select few who can make it through the training and do this kind of volunteering," said Warriner.

The sometimes heartrending situations Fremr encounters haven't discouraged her from the work.

"There have been a few calls that have been tough," said Fremr, explaining some involve extreme emotional or physical trauma.

Calls for victim aid include cases of domestic abuse and other violent crime, traffic accidents, fires, robbery and accompanying police when they must tell someone a relative has died. Fremr said some of the most unforgettable cases involve children in tragic situations.

"Then I come home and see my little boy asleep in his bed, in a room bigger than mine, full of everything a kid needs," she said. "It really puts things in perspective. It's made me realize a little bit more about my own life — that I am privileged."

Realizing that, she said, only makes her more dedicated to her role.

"It's good to know that we're there for those people," Fremr said. "They're very receptive and thankful there's somebody there. I want to do more."

The CCARES agency can be reached at 1-866-680-9972 or ccaresvictimassistance@bellnet.ca.

"She's dedicated, she's always there to help, she's reliable ... and she's so personable," said Warriner.

Victims who are assigned to Fremr's care "get the best of the best," she added.

"Sally's there to guide them through the night."

Warriner describes CCARES volunteers as "amazing people."

"What person wants to be thrown into tragic circumstances of people's lives — for free?" she asked. "We're not traditional volunteers."

She said about 100 people apply annually, but only about 25 are accepted. Each must pass 40 hours of training.

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