



A SERIES OF STORIES BEHIND THE SIRENS

Having returned to our screens recently for a third series, TV3's 'Paramedics' goes behind the scenes yet again with the HSE National Ambulance Service, to give viewers a keen insight into the hectic routine of Ireland's frontline emergency medical service, reports Lorraine Courtney.

Phones ring off the hook, voices can be heard talking briskly into receivers, there's the unrelenting sound of fingers tapping on keyboards, and the hub-hug rises with more calls coming into the dispatch centre. And then more still.

The protagonists in this real-life drama play their roles with extraordinary composure, even as the tension increases and the exchanges take on ever greater urgency.

"For over four years now, our camera crews have been filming day and night across the entire country to capture our frontline emergency services like never before, what they face, and how they cope.

"It's been a hell of a journey across three landmark series that we hope has given the public the greatest insight into the operations and the lives of our first responders and given the NAS staff something to be truly proud of," says series producer and director Rob King.

SPECIFIC THEMES

The series itself has a great deal of detail involved in its structure. Every episode has a theme, like the chapter of a book, and we follow that throughout. For example, the episode "Right of Way" from the current series, focuses directly on road traffic collisions and how ambulance crews cope at the scene of an accident.

"Once filming concludes we work on the specific themes and titles to ensure that the programme flows well and although themes change dependent on the content filmed, we always want to ensure that the story is both fresh, relatable and is narrated throughout by the Paramedics and call takers themselves, from their perspective," says Rob.

The characters in the series such as the call takers and paramedics were chosen over several months before the series began filming.

"Although everybody knows a guy or girl who'd be 'great on TV', we tend to look for those who have no real interest in the limelight or the cameras, they are themselves on and off camera and nothing is put on for show," says Rob.

"When making a series like this, you need to ensure the actuality, honesty and relatability of your characters. They need to be like your on-screen friends and be able to both have a bit of fun when not on a call, but also be 100% calm medical professionals the moment the lights and sirens start.

"Although there is a countless number of incredible paramedics and call-takers who could have featured in the series, we're truly blessed by the team of people who do feature and their honest dedication to their job, and the series."

PROMOTING THE SERVICE

One of the characters is Jim – an advanced paramedic stationed in Loughlinstown, Dublin. He's been in the service for the past 18 years and was approached by his operations manager a couple of years ago.

"I said I'd be up for it – anything to promote the service. We were traditionally known as ambulance drivers but today we're university-educated practitioners and we do so much more than just driving. I have an MSc in emergency medicine."

Jim said that he also wanted to show a different side to his work, away from the negative publicity. "It's a fantastic job. In my day-to-day life people would often ask me what my job actually involves. So, I wanted to use this opportunity to show my work life to the wider public."





sensitivities with making the series that you have to bear in mind throughout. Seeing trauma and a patient in distress is not easy for anyone.

“Our crews are trained like the paramedics in critical incident stress management and we work closely with the ambulance service like a filming family to ensure peer support throughout,” says Rob.

Logistically, Paramedics is a technical marvel and minefield in equal measures. Each ambulance is fitted with five remote cameras and a follow camera crew, and then replicated across a multitude of ambulances and bases the length and breadth of the country.

The result is the largest amount of HD content that TV3 has managed in its 20-year history and is a mammoth task for

A BIT OF PALACE INTRIGUE

“For some, it is a little bit of palace intrigue, they see an ambulance pull up to the top of their road and wonder what’s happened and if the person is okay. For others who have a distinct interest in perhaps joining the ambulance service or a voluntary group like Community First Responders or the Civil Defence, it is an exciting insight into their area of interest. But for most I believe it is the characters themselves and the incredible work they do, every day and every night.”

We all take things for granted, all through our lives and we assume that we’ll never need the help of any of our emergency services, but when we do, they are all we depend on.

Most viewers are taken aback by the honest, heartfelt and candid nature that our paramedics and call takers speak about their lives, their careers and bond that binds them together as an emergency service family.

“I think the most frequent compliment we receive about the series is how real to life it is. No show boating, no glamour, ordinary people doing extraordinary things, for complete strangers and being able to take pride in knowing they have done everything humanly possible to help each and every patient”, says Rob.

DELIVERING A NEW LIFE

There are many calls that come to mind, but the scene in the current series that stands out most for the producer is the delivery of a baby boy on



the side of a dual carriageway.

"Our Dublin crew had been filming for a week of nights and we were completely exhausted, this night in particular was no exception. The shift had been a harrowing one, with many sad and traumatic cases that left crew moral quite low.

"With minutes to the end of our shift the call came in for an 'imminent birth' just a mile or so up the road from the base and that another ambulance crew required assistance. We respectfully let the ambulance crew do their job and we filmed shots of the ambulances as the sun (and a perfectly timed rainbow) rose over the roof of the ambulance.

"I don't have kids of my own, but that day, you'd swear I did. Having seen so many traumatic and heart-breaking scenes throughout making the series. We were so very proud and honoured to have been present at a new life being brought into the world."

A LANDMARK SERIES

The series has been a landmark for TV3 and for Rob it has been the most captivating, inspirational and life affirming thing he has ever had the opportunity to have done. A truly incredible honour that he doubts they'll ever be able to replicate again.

"We will of course, be so very sad when it finally comes to an end, but just this morning I received

an email from the mother of a nine-year-old girl, who has watched the series from start to finish, and is now determined to become a paramedic. That is a sentiment that we have heard of from many people over the past number of years.

"And if our little series can inspire that one little girl to go and become a paramedic, to go and save a life someday, then it'll have been worth it all... for that one little girl."

