

Team Merit Award 2009
Chris Eledge, Rissa Budensiek, and Staci Gray

In the early hours of January 17, 2009, while most of the city was sleeping, Lubbock Police Department's Chris Eledge received the call every dispatcher dreads: a desperate, suicidal person calling on a wireless phone. The caller was clearly in anguish and trying to end his life while on the phone with the one person who answered his call for help.

Chris answered the call as she does every call she takes, inserting a positive note into the greeting. When Chris answers a call, there is no doubt she is ready to help. The man on the other end of the line told Chris he was cutting his wrists. He wanted to kill himself. He wanted to die. Chris immediately asked him his name, hoping to be able to establish some bond with him, but he would not give that piece of information. All he would say is he wanted to kill himself.

Chris understood that if this was the real thing, and she could not find him, it was almost a sure thing the caller would die. Chris continued to talk to the caller, trying to persuade him to give her an address. Finally, the man told Chris he was at a friend's trailer house near the intersection of 122nd St and Frankford Avenue. Once the man gave his address, Chris knew he was outside the Lubbock city limits and the Lubbock Sheriff's Office would need to be involved immediately.

Without losing her focus on the conversation, Chris immediately entered the cell phone coordinates into the mapping software to see if she could obtain a more accurate location. As Chris was searching for an address, the caller continued to tell her he wanted to die. He stated he had been telling his friends and family he was going to carry through with it this time.

As Chris continued to reassure the man help was coming, Rissa Budensiek contacted the Lubbock Sheriff's Office to advise them of the situation. At the same time, Staci Gray took over the mapping system to help pinpoint an exact location. Was he really in a trailer? Was he in a car? Was it moving? They hoped the real address could answer those questions.

Despite being out of their jurisdiction and having already notified the Sheriff's Office, the team did not give up in attempting to locate the address. Finally, working together and using multiple resources, Chris and Staci discovered a trailer park located on 122nd St, just east of Frankford Avenue. The new location was relayed to the Sheriff's Office, who then sent deputies to locate the caller. EMS was also notified and made their way to the address. If deputies located the caller and he had been slicing his wrists as he had told Chris, he could then quickly be transported to a hospital to receive medical care.

Twenty minutes had now passed since Chris answered the initial call for help. She continued to speak with the man, hoping he could understand how badly she wanted to help. The man continued to cut himself, telling Chris about it over the phone. Her heart broke over the pain he must have been feeling to have reached a point where cutting himself and bleeding to death was preferable to life. Suddenly, the caller disconnected the phone.

Fearful of what losing the connection might mean for the caller, Chris tried calling him back. No one would answer the phone. After an agonizing few minutes, the man called back. Chris immediately jumped back into the call. This call lasted an impossibly long four minutes for Chris. The deputies found the trailer and took over. The man received both the medical attention he needed to attend to his physical wounds and the chance to deal with his emotional ones.

Dispatchers handle stressful calls on a daily and nightly basis. It is difficult to stay calm in the face of such situations. It takes a tremendous amount of hard work and emotional output to help a person who is intent on harming themselves. Without the dedication and teamwork these three dispatchers displayed during the call, this man could have easily been successful at ending his life. This team worked as hard as they did to find a location and dispatch the correct agencies to help this suicidal man, not just because it is their job, but because they truly care. It is for this reason I am nominating Chris, Rissa, and Staci for the Team Merit Award.

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