

How seeing female firefighter inspired Jo to join the service

A specialist rope rescue firefighter has told how seeing a female firefighter gave her the boost to join the emergency service

Firefighter Jo Turnbull also has specialist driving and turntable ladder skills learned during her time as a firefighter.



Photo Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Joining the profession in 1998, Firefighter Turnbull has spent the last 23 years protecting communities in Edinburgh on the frontline.

The now 48-year-old started her career at Newcraighall Fire Station, before moving to Tollcross Fire Station – Scotland's busiest station a short time later.

Jo recalled: "I'd always been more of a hands-on type person and enjoyed getting stuck into things but I'd never really thought about the Fire Service.

"Until one day, I was watching a fire appliance drive past me with blue lights on and I noticed a female firefighter sitting

in the back.

“That’s when I thought ‘I’m going to have a look into this’.”

After making a few enquiries at her local fire station Jo submitted her application and later passed each stage of the process.

She explained: “Initially, when I first applied I thought I had no chance.

“I’d never even told anyone I was applying so it was a big shock to everyone.”

At the time there were over 3000 applicants and out of 71 successful candidates, Jo was the only female to be accepted.

Now, in 2021, less than five percent of firefighters in Scotland are female.

However, Jo explained many people still get surprised when she drives the appliance past them.

She added: “You still see people turning to their partners or whoever they are with to say ‘that’s a girl firefighter’ and have a surprised look.

“Before I started driving fire appliances the biggest thing I had ever drove was my parents Land Rover, so it was a bit of a change!”

As well as being qualified as a blue light response driver, Jo has also equipped herself with the additional specialism of Turntable Ladder platform operator – something a limited number of firefighters in Scotland are trained to do.

She is also part of the Rope Rescue Team at Tollcross and has attended incidents all over Scotland to provide specialist help.

Jo explained: “Rope rescue was something I had never really

considered before or really knew much about.

“I mean, I think I had tried abseiling once before but it wasn’t something I’d ever really thought about.

“But, being a firefighter gave me the opportunity to develop and use skills to help people and it’s a great feeling.

“Not only that, but I’ve also been able to abseil down some real unusual places like Arthur’s Seat for instance.”

Jo continued: “There is never a day where I can’t be bothered going into work, it’s just a huge family – you spend a great deal of time with everyone and get extremely close with the watch.

“It’s a feel good job as a whole, you do see some horrible things but you see a lot more brilliant things and you’re always there to help people.

“I’d honestly encourage anyone to join, I feel that the job is even better than when I started.”