

Networking Women in the Fire Service

CHAIR'S REPORT DECEMBER 2006

Hiya folks.

The 2006 AGM was hosted by East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service at their HQ in Eastbourne. Delegates were very impressed with the facilities at the HQ and the choice of workshops financial planning, conflict management and leadership. I was also delighted with the feedback from the delegates who told us the following:

- ☺ 92% of delegates said that they would be able to implement what they learnt back at work or home
- ☺ 100% of delegates said that they had benefited personally from attending the event
- ☺ 83% of delegates said that their organisation may benefit from their attendance at the event
- ☺ 92% of delegates said that they found the opportunity to network and share experiences with others useful
- ☺ 100% of delegates said that their overall impression of the NWFS was positive
- ☺ 92% of delegates said that they would recommend future events to others

So with the last smiley in mind, I am pleased to announce that the date for the 2007 Conference is 13th - 15th July which is to be held at the Fire Service College who have kindly agreed to host again. The South West region has offered to sponsor the event and the NEC has accepted this very generous offer. So don't forget to put the date in your diary and look out for further information in the New Year. Also if you have any suggestions or ideas for the conference please get in touch with your local or regional representative.

In October I took part in the Women as Leaders conference, which was held at Avon Fire & Rescue Service. It was a truly fascinating event and in the next newsletter will include an article on this. It's still a lonely place, whatever your role in the Fire Service, being a leader just brings other pressures and speaking from personal experience of recently taking part in assessment & development centres, brings to the fore these issues. However, having said that I would urge of you to consider whether you are using your skills and capabilities for the best.....the best for you and the best for the Fire & Rescue Service. If you want to know more about ADC's and what's involved, give me a call - I will happily share my experiences.

It's been another successful albeit busy year for the NWFS and your NEC. We hope that 2007 will be even bigger. So don't forget to let us know what you want, what you think and what we can do on your behalf to try and make the service a better place for women and men. Perhaps if we collectively made this our new year's resolution, who knows?

Best wishes for Christmas and wishing you a safe and healthy new year.

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contribute to your newsletter

If you have any news, views or problems you would like to share please write to:

Karen Smith, PO Box N0 41, Downham Market, PE38 9XW.

Tel: 01366 381 237 or Email: khsmith@tiscali.co.uk



Share your knowledge, experience and skills!

Become a mentor

Reserve you place now for courses starting January 2007

Since 2004 NWFS has been running mentor training programmes in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University and we are delighted with the progress of the scheme as there are now 65 mentors up and down the country.

The mentoring programme seeks to explore the development of mentoring as an example of best practice in supporting and encouraging people within the work place and as they progress in role development or change. The programme assists people in understanding the relationship between the mentor and the line manager, its relationship to IPDS, looking at the skills needed to be a mentor and understanding the roles of the organisation when they adopt a formal mentoring process.

The mentoring scheme is open to all men and women working in any role within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Five day programmes are being run at the Fire Service College

Eight day courses (broken down into four blocks of two days) are available on site at the University in Essex.

In addition we can also organise five day programmes at your sites, details are available on request.

**To receive an information pack please call
Karen Smith on 01366 381 237
or email Khsmith@tiscali.co.uk**

NWFS Conference 2007

13-15th July

Fire Service College

We have just confirmed the date for next year's conference. The conference will consist of a combination of workshops and social events that provide delegates with the rare opportunity to train with other women, share their knowledge and experience and develop their skills. Some of the workshops on offer will be:

Incident Management, Abseiling, USAR, Driving Fire Appliances, The Diversity Game, Conflict Management, Partnerships, Mentoring, After the Fire, Advanced Fire fighting Skills, Canoeing, Maternity and return to work, A new road to success, Women as Leaders, Presentation skills, ADC and Personal Development, Personal Finance Planning, Be a firefighter for a day, Indian Head Massage, Cycling, Walking.

And many more.....details soon to be released.



Networking Women in the Fire Service

AGM

This years AGM was hosted by East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and was held at the Service Headquarters in Eastbourne. ACFO Gary Walsh joined the delegates at the Cavendish Hotel for a meal and social the evening before.

After a welcome from Dany Cotton, Chair of NWFS, the day's events started with two interesting presentations on Assessment Development Centres, which was followed by Mentoring. Regional meetings then followed which allowed delegates to get to know those in their regions a little better, which had the added bonus of several new local reps coming forward, well done to you!

The formal part of the AGM saw a welcome to Headquarters from ACFO Gary Walsh who accepted a gift from Dany Cotton on behalf of ESFRS.

Following lunch the delegates split into groups and took part in one of the 3 workshops that were on offer. I took part in the leadership workshop which proved to be interesting and thought provoking.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF NWFS

I was asked as a mentee to be a willing volunteer to present to a large group of NWFS members on my perspective of the mentoring scheme which has been run in conjunction with NWFS and Anglia Ruskin University. My mentor Jon Doherty, who some of you will be acquainted with, asked me to join him on an 'adventure' which is still continuing

Those who were present at the AGM will have first hand experience of my performance, bearing my soul by recounting my childhood experiences in front of, what was then, approximately fifty total strangers; I thought I was on Jerry Springer or Trisha. I managed to overcome all nerves and foreboding and before I knew it, our spot was over.

The feedback I had from the day was overwhelming and words such as 'moving' and 'inspiring' were remarks used to describe what I had said. The reaction I received has made me feel humbled; that anything lil'ol me could say would have such an impact on so many people.

The photograph, taken after the presentation, shows me much more relaxed than at the start of the day, and I am wearing the NWFS cap which Jon so kindly presented to me. In giving me my cap he declared that it was time to cease our mentoring sessions and the thought of this made me feel sad; the process has been such fun and this was emphasised by the realisation of what I had just achieved.

My 'adventure' was about to take another turn when, almost without realising it, I had got myself a job-share with my Chief Fire Officer, David Johnson, as joint Essex representatives of NWFS. I am keen to get this launched within our Service and have already been approached by several interested parties.

I'm looking forward to getting to know NWFS, from what I've experienced so far, the support and inclusion which drives the network is a superb tool to achieve the harmony and professionalism to which NWFS aspires.

With best wishes to all of my new friends.

Linda Boar
Essex County Fire & Rescue Service.



My experience of the NWFS

My experience of the NWFS and the AGM is that it has helped to build my confidence in both socialising and learning various methods of dealing with different situations, both in work and at home. NWFS has given me the opportunity to meet people and the workshops have provided me with knowledge and confidence to be able to deal with various tasks that used to seem daunting.

Jenny Sooruth
Modernisation Implementation Team

'secret of my success'

After the morning's AGM business, a dozen of our more impoverished delegates attended a workshop entitled "Personal Financial Planning". This was presented by Ian Webb, of Close Wealth Management. We looked forward to the 'secret of my success' routine, along with the magic secret that would make us all millionaires overnight. Ian was entertaining, knowledgeable and (sadly) realistic. He let us down gently!

We did, however, learn that you are not handcuffed to your mortgage, insurance companies, bank or credit cards. We also got a few great tips on how to get the best out of financial institutions with little or no effort. A lot of the common sense advice Ian gave us seemed obvious once he had said it, but isn't that always the way? We also had the opportunity to share some tricks of our own – we can be a devious lot when we want to be! Overall, the session gave us all a few of the skills to look at our finances in a new way and I have tried a few of them already with varying degrees of success. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, I am sorry to admit that I am still insolvent (mostly due to the previous night's bar bill). Can't wait for the 'How to Look 10 Years Younger' workshop next time...

Chris Taylor - Lancashire

Dealing with Conflict Workshop

I was lucky enough recently to attend the AGM in E Sussex. We had been given three workshops to choose from:

- Leadership – Having just completed a DCLOG, 3 module course on Leadership I was a bit Leadershipped out!
- Personal Finance Planning - Two months before by two Grandchildren's first Christmas no one can help me!!
- Conflict Management – Very Interesting!!!

Now I wouldn't consider myself as someone who has a lot of conflict to deal with. After all people at work never get hold of the wrong end of the stick and my 14 year old never thinks she knows everything! Maybe I do get the odd bit then.

When the session started the chap told us that this was normally a two day course, so, I thought this is going to be a rush, he'll just talk and I'll lose interest. What a mistake, almost immediately we broke into small groups and started discussing difficulties' with complete strangers, how nice was that, they didn't judge, had no pre-conceived ideas etc. There was a lot to fit in the afternoon but I came away with much more than a handout. I had some practical solutions and lots of very good things to try. I would definitely recommend this workshop for the Conference next year.

So, my 14 year old tidied her room without me getting angry or upset..... How did I do it.....

I bribed her of course..... I know my limitations!!!

Lindsay Turner, Control Rep, LFEPA

Visit to Girton College, Cambridge

Chris Duncan and Julie Sandbrook recently visited Girton College.

Girton College, formerly Girton Ladies College, was the residence of the first known female firefighters in Great Britain. In 1878 a group of students watched a stack fire at the farm opposite the college and discussed what would happen if there were a fire at the college. The horse drawn fire engine based at Cambridge had trouble getting up Castle Hill and the Mistress and Fellows had been warned that they might not be able to get to the college in time. There were hand pumps in the corridors of the college but no one knew how to use them. The women decided to set up their own fire brigade and two of them went to London to visit Captain Shaw the Chief Officer of London Fire Brigade and seek his advice. His initial surprise and disapproval soon dissipated when he watched the students climb ladders – albeit in long skirts! He arranged for an officer to give the ladies proper drill instructions and other practical advice.

The ladies returned to the college and set up the Girton Girls Fire Brigade. Three corps were formed one for each corridor. These were headed up by a captain and sub captain, with a head captain elected to be in charge of the whole Brigade. They drilled once a week doing bucket and ladder drills, running hoses, tying knots and practicing lifting and lowering casualties. The alarm was raised using a wooden rattle. The archives in the new library at the college have many wonderful pictures of the GGFB practicing their drills – in long dresses – and the rattle that was used to rouse the students from their beds for a practice as well as the written records of the meetings and annual inspections that were conducted by officers from the London Fire Brigade.

In the Michealmas term of 1932 The Girton Girls Fire Brigade drilled for the last time. The introduction of motorised fire appliances meant that Castle Hill no longer posed a problem and the college came under the protection of the Cambridge fire station.

Many thanks to Kate Perry the Archivist for her time and to the Mistress and Fellows of Girton College.

Julie Sandbrook
NWFS Asst Treasurer



Networking and Team Building

"On 7 April 2006, the London Region of Networking Women in the Fire Service held a Networking and Team Building day at its training centre in Southwark. The event was attended by approximately 80 delegates including two delegates from other fire and rescue services.

The event provided an opportunity primarily for women staff from all occupational groups to learn from each other and share experiences. Abseiling was one of the highlights for staff who attended the event, along with sessions on the Authority's flexible working arrangements, maternity provisions and the issue of dyslexia.

Feedback from the sessions was encouraging and positive. Consequently more London staff have become members of the NWFS and a record number of delegates attended the National Conference held at the Fire Service College in July 2006.

The London Region now has 10 representatives on the NWFS National Executive Committee and members will continue to promote the work of the network and provide assistance and support in progressing the aims and objectives of this support group."

Jackie Adams-Bonitto
Employment Policy Manager
London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority



FITNESS WEEKEND

From the 6th – 8th October Camber Sands hosted a fitness extravaganza, and Cheryl booked a couple of chalets, which were soon filled by some of the networks finest fitness fanatics!!! As an incentive and by means of prompting some healthy competition, Cheryl had an idea of offering a prize to the person who completed the most classes during the weekend.

Classes were available from 0800 – 1900hrs and the choices ranged from body combat to beach circuits, power walking to pilates, camp aerobics to camber hash, you name it, they had it!

Claire started off well, completing several classes before some of the others had even arrived on Friday evening. We were all up bright and early on Saturday with everyone off to the first class of the day, whilst Mani and I popped back to Eastbourne for a hockey match (for which we were generously awarded 2 points for). On our return some were still going strong whilst Divine became the 'Knight Rider Queen', watching nearly every episode ever recorded! By the end of Saturday almost everyone was still in with a chance of winning the prize, but as we set off on Sunday morning there was one person who was always just one class in front of the rest of us and there was just no catching her. Monica was declared the winner and was awarded with a breast cancer T-shirt and a couple of fridge magnets.

A great weekend was had by all, albeit with slightly achy joints!!

Julie Gilbert-King



SEVEN (OR WAS IT 10) SISTERS!

After the recent NEC meeting in Eastbourne, some stayed over to have a walk on the South Downs as part of the preparations for the 3 Peaks Challenge next June. After a BBQ the night before, the team of seven left Old Town in Eastbourne at 0900hours. Divine headed for the railway station, whilst the remaining six headed for the South Downs.

The route took us through Jevington and through Friston Forest before arriving at Cuckmere Haven (near the start of the 7 sisters) where we stopped for a quick bite to eat. As we set off again, perhaps it might have been a good idea to have mentioned that the next two hills we were climbing, were not in fact part of the seven sisters (neither were the two at the end of the sisters), but in all the fun and laughter, we forgot!!

Walking the seven sisters were as beautiful as ever and we all worked really well together and before we knew it, we were on the home straight with just a couple more hills to finish us off. We arrived back in Old Town having completed 16 miles, and we had managed to avoid nearly all the rain that had obviously fallen everywhere else.

A very positive start to the training programme for the 3 Peaks, next stop Yorkshire!!

Julie Gilbert-King

England 1 Germany 1

Just to explain this is not a football score it's the amount of conferences I have attended as a new member of the Networking Women in the Fire Service, the first one this year at the Fire Service College in the UK which I enjoyed very much. The second one in Munster Germany from the 3rd – 5th of November which I have just returned from. It all started with an email from Amelia, (Networking London) asking if anyone was interested in representing the NWFS and the London Fire Brigade at the Women's networking conference in Germany, so I thought why not and jumped in with both feet and hit the reply button.

Before I knew it I was off to Germany, I travelled over on the Thursday night from Stansted and was met at the airport by the organiser Susanne Klatt, lucky for me Susanne spoke very good English which is a good job as my German consists of about three words! Susanne took me to the Institute de Feuerwehr NRW which is the fire service training college where the weekend conference was to take place.

Up with the lark on Friday the Germans certainly know how to pack in a whole day and breakfast started at 7am, the delegates were arriving from all over Germany and some from Holland but not until the afternoon, like all conferences there was a lot to do, so I pitched in and helped put together the badges and conference packs.



Delegates all started to arrive and next on the agenda were the icebreaker sessions! I started doing my own icebreaking by trying to find out who spoke English out of upwards of eighty women firefighters, I was lucky and found Sylvia and Heike and a few others who spoke good English and all became my new best friends for the weekend. After the icebreaking sessions we all went into the conference room for the official opening by the Chief, after which I presented the Chief with a plaque from the London Fire Brigade.

We all then went for dinner; the food was very tasty and plentiful and continued to be so for the whole weekend, next was the main icebreaking session otherwise known as everybody to the bar! Now as you know the Germans have a fearsome reputation for being able to drink and deservedly so, and after a little gentle ribbing from them about the English being able to keep up, the challenge was on, after a few beers and a few tequilas courtesy of Sonja! It was amazing how much my German improved!

The bar closed at 2am with me and three others left standing (just!) and having taught them the English term LIGHTWEIGHT! for anyone who left the bar early, off we staggered to bed. Saturday arrived much too early and I found myself in the breakfast hall at 7am don't ask me how but I managed it!

The rest of the day was taken up with practical exercises and workshops, because of my lack of German I participated in the practical activities, they were very similar to the firefighter for a day workshop in the UK and it was very interesting to see the different equipment and procedures that the German fire service uses. After the workshops finished we were all taken on a tour of Munster which is a very beautiful town and if you get the chance of a cheap flight I would recommend anyone to visit for the weekend.

After the tour we all returned for dinner and more icebreaking in the bar! I managed to last until midnight where tiredness had me heading for the door, as I said goodnight and opened it I was met with a chorus of LIGHTWEIGHT! who says the Germans don't have a sense of humour. Sunday the last day of the conference and I presented a workshop on the L.F.B the Arson Task Force and the NWFS, Susanne translated for me and I think it went down well, looking round at the end no one had fallen asleep or fell off their chairs so that was a bonus.

All too soon we were in the conference room and Susanne was giving the closing speech, then everybody was saying their goodbyes and looking forward to next year. A couple of tips for you if you ever go to a conference abroad, take some spare uniform as they love to swap t shirts with you, and lots of your contact cards as you will be giving them out a lot to keep in touch. To end I would say that if you ever get the chance to attend a conference here or abroad do like I did jump in with both feet you won't regret it.

I would like to thank the NWFS for giving me the opportunity to attend the conference and I hope I did you proud, a big thank you to Susanne and her team in Germany for looking after me so well, and to all the women I met at in Munster see you next year mine's a tequila !

Best Regards

Sue Douglas Arson Task Force London Fire Brigade

Coming soon in the North West:

North West Region (Cheshire, Cumbria, Isle of Man, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northern Ireland) will be hosting a Regional Event in the Spring (late April/early May). Fabulous location (?) to be announced.

Proposed sessions to include: Women's Safety, Firefighting (for Non Ops staff), USAR Intro/Practical Session (for Ops staff), Stress Management and/or Massage.

Details will be distributed via Brigades and Reps before Christmas – watch this space...

For further details, please contact Chris Taylor (Lancashire) on 07963 811096 or christaylor@lancsfirerescue.org.uk



EVENTS 2007

NWFS/ARU Mentoring Courses

29th January - 5 day course

Fire Service College

25th, 26th January (first two dates of 8 day course)

Anglia Ruskin University, Essex

Spring - date to be released shortly

North West Regional Event

13th - 15th July

NWFS Conference

Fire Service College