

## Andy Stark, Firefighter, Penrith Community Fire Station

Yesterday I helped 41 people, not in a big way, then again, who am I to say what is big or little to someone who receives the help.



Yesterday I delivered flowers.

Now I know what you are thinking.

'Andy, you're a firefighter, shouldn't you be fighting fires and rescuing people from car crashes'.

My answer to that is, 'well yes, but we do so much more'.

'Oh yay, what do firefighters do?'

'We serve the community'.

And we do. In the 6 months since I joined Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service I've rescued people and animals who were stuck on islands or in flood water, searched for missing people and assisted the ambulance service move people who are stuck or injured to name a few. And I've put out a fire or two and helped release a number of people stuck in cars. Some people might

consider these things the big things, and I guess they are to the people they happen to.

But I've also visited people in their homes and places of work to provide fire safety information and advice. I've shown school children, brownies and cubs groups around our fire engine and delivered flowers to people. Are these little things or big things? Sitting in a fire engines wearing a fire helmet with the lights and sirens going may be a big thing, if you are 5 years old.

I joined the fire service relatively late in my life being nearly 40, after a 20 year career as an outdoor educator. It was a great job, which I enjoy. It was a job that also involved helping people. But something was missing. Eventually I realised it was the community aspect that was missing, so when the opportunity to apply for the fire service came up, I jumped at the chance.

Some on-line tests, lots of running, a few interview question and a 2 and a half months' intensive training course later, here I am. One firefighter in the making, ready to do my bit. If I made it sound easy, it wasn't, but then it shouldn't be. There's a lot to learn and I'm still learning it. It's a job with a great amount of responsibility. A responsibility

for the big things, a responsibility for the little things and a responsibility to serve the community.

Anyway back to the flowers. Yesterday Flower Bank, Wreay dropped off a large number of flowers to our fire station that they were unable to sell, being closed due to COVID 19. We decided we should deliver them to as many local care homes as we could make contact with. We imagined the residents all stuck inside and thought that we could help a little by allowing the outside to come in. After a quick ring around to see who was happy for us to visit, we set off, gloves on to make our deliveries. We left the flowers on the door steps and made our way back to the fire station.

Today we received a message from one of the care homes passing on the thanks of all 41 residents, who each received a bunch of flowers.

A community effort with the majority of the thanks going to Flower Bank, Wreay.

A big thing or a small, I'll leave it to you to decide, but either way yesterday I helped 41 people. I helped our community.

Just one final thing which I think is real cool, It's a little thing, but to me it's a big thing and maybe it is to the person I share it with. When we are driving through town on the way back from a call out, I often have children waving at me and smiling, and I wave back.

