

Kiaya Jones, Firefighter, Workington and Whitehaven Fire Station

What/who inspired me to become a firefighter?

After becoming pregnant at a young age I was highly motivated to achieve more than everybody expected me to. There is still a lot of prejudice around young mothers and I was determined to break that stereotype and prove people wrong, but more than that I was determined to be the best person I could be – both as a mother and in my career.

I have always loved the thought of being a firefighter as it encompasses everything I love in life: helping others, doing something physical, working as a team, and so much more. However, as a 5 foot 6 female weighing only 9 stone, as well as being a mother of a 2 year old I struggled to see myself as a valid candidate for the role. I found myself following the same stereotypes by assuming that firefighters had to be big strong men, and it was only after attending an open day at my local fire station that I began to realise that the job role was changing and they needed to incorporate a more diverse workforce into their service – not to fill quotas or to make a point about being diverse, but for a practical reason to fulfil the wide spectrum of the role.

During the open day I met Station Manager Owen McCarney who explained to me how vital it is to have a diverse team with a multitude of skills, as he explained “if we arrived at a crumpled car with hardly any space and I needed somebody in that car to support the casualty, who am I going to send in? You or a 6ft tall 100kg person?” I also met a firefighter named Kasey Grainger who explained to me a bit more about the entire role and how it now involved a lot more community work. Kasey was a similar height and weight to me and I couldn't help but compare myself to her – not in a negative way but in a very uplifting and positive way. I began to think that if Kasey could put her mind to it and do it then what was stopping me?

I went away from that open day feeling inspired, motivated, and determined that I was going to work for Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.

How did I prepare for the recruitment process?

Kasey supported me right through the application process by providing me with strength training regimes, practice tests for the online exams, and by simply being there if I ever needed her for anything.

The online assessments were quite daunting but the practice questions that Kasey had given me helped me to feel a bit more prepared and confident about what was to be expected. The main thing about this service is that there is always somebody who has been in your position, and there is an abundance of help available if you ask for it.



For me, I was most nervous about the physical tests. I have always been physically active but more in the way of sports and cardiovascular fitness rather than strength building, therefore my upper body strength was not where I wanted it to be. With being a young working mother I struggled to find the time to spend hours and hours in the gym lifting weights – it was a lot easier for me to do HIIT workouts at home or go to netball for an hour a night. However, after the open day I met up with a firefighter from my local station called Samantha Findlay who went through some of the physical tests that required the upper body strength. I struggled. I felt disappointed and disheartened about it, but Sam recommended I began attending Crossfit sessions to build my strength quickly. I began doing around 3 or 4 sessions a week (they were only an hour long so it was easy to nip out and leave my daughter with her dad for an hour) and after a few months I could notice the difference massively!

When it came round to the day of the fitness tests I still struggled with the strength components, but the feedback I received was about my determination and willingness to improve – the main thing they were looking at was attitude.



How was the firefighter training course?

I loved the training course from start to finish! There were days that were hard and draining – both physically and mentally – but the end result overrides every memory of hardship or stress. Having all of our families there to support us and having my little girl telling me how proud she was of me was one of the best moments of my life.

Throughout the course I made bonds and relationships that I know are going to last forever, but I also feel that I developed as a person as I learned so much about my own behaviours and personality.

How do I balance my job and my home life?

As a single mother I felt a lot of guilt about leaving my daughter for such long amounts of time, but I am lucky that I have a vast network of people around me to support me. I always tell myself that I am doing the best that I possibly can for her and I know that she looks up to me as a role model – she is always saying she wants to be a firefighter when she grows up “just like mammy”.

The initial course was extremely challenging for me with regards to being away from home as I had never left my daughter for more than 24 hours prior to the course. I came home most weeks around the middle of the week and relished every minute of the weekend with her, but there were still days that I cried because I missed her and I felt guilty about leaving her. The support from the training team was unbeatable, Watch Manager Colin Wright and Watch Manager John Lynch became my go-to support team whenever I was having a wobble and they always reminded me why I was doing this. I was doing this to give her the best possible opportunities that I could, and in a few years she wouldn't remember the patch of time when mammy wasn't around much, plus even if she did remember it then she would understand why I did it.

Now that I am on my watch I find the shift pattern brilliant, it allows an immense amount of quality time with my daughter and I enjoy taking her away to different places and making the most of the time that we have.

The main advice I would give to anybody who is interested in applying is to simply do your research. Know what to expect at each stage, talk to as many people as you can to get the most accurate picture of what you're applying for, and try to know yourself as much as possible. Acknowledge what your strengths and weaknesses are, aim to develop your weaknesses, and most importantly try to have a positive attitude and just be yourself.