

Heather Smart

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue

“Being at Jubilee House was like being wrapped in a warm blanket, where I could focus on myself and getting better”



Heather Smart was the first female firefighter in Northern Ireland. Often finding she would assume a maternal role to her colleagues, when she faced her own mental health issues, she turned to The Fire Fighters Charity for help.

During her 27 year career, Heather helped save many lives and attended many traumatic incidents. A few years ago, the emotional accumulation of these caught up with her.

“When I first started there were no debriefs after tragic incidents,” she says. “Because of my age and gender I became something of a mother figure to some of the firefighters I worked with and provided a listening ear. The tipping point came a few years ago when I realised my colleagues were coming to me to talk, but I couldn’t listen because of how I was feeling. It was affecting my ability to help them. I had started to get symptoms that made me realise I needed to address how I was feeling. I was getting smells and taste sensations that were intruding on my normal life.”

She contacted the Charity for support, and spent two weeks at Jubilee House, our centre in Cumbria. “Being there was like being wrapped in a warm blanket,” she says. “At home, I was doing all the looking after, but there, it felt like a safe space where I was taken care of, and given permission to concentrate on getting myself better. I found it was okay to be focused on myself, make myself better and rely on others, so that when I got back to real life, others could once more rely on me. It’s very hard to help other people when you’re broken yourself.”

Heather recently received an MBE from HM The Queen for her ‘trailblazing’ efforts in leading the way for Northern Irish women to follow in her footsteps. and for her work in schools to show children that gender shouldn’t be an issue when it comes to your career.

www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/heather-smart

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