Women in the Fire Service 2023 Award Recipients Announced

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News release

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Today, nominees and recipients of the Women in the Fire Service Awards 2023 are announced. The awards celebrate remarkable individuals who've shown exceptional commitment to their services, teams, and the communities they serve.

Nearly 70 nominations from 31 organisations, businesses and members of the public were submitted this year for consideration in five categories: The Bright Light Award, Dany Cotton Inspiring Leader Award, Exceptional Allies Award, Firefighter Rising Star Award, and Young Person Role Model Award.

Jules King, WFS Chair said: *"It was such a privilege to read and discuss the award entries with the panel this year – although incredibly hard to choose our winners. I would like to congratulate every single nominee for what they've achieved and also salute all nominators and thank them for leading the way – without you these achievements would not be recognized, shared or celebrated."*

Winner of the **'Bright Light Award'** is **Daisy Byron** from **Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service**. Daisy has been a WFS Regional Rep since June 2022, supporting and promoting the aims and values of WFS on a voluntary basis. Since taking on the role, Daisy has organised a number of WFS regional events including camping, walks and picnics to help build community networks and celebrate women in the fire and rescue service. In April this year, she will lead a WFS hike to the top of Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales. Daisy was described as "being an all round star", being "approachable, bubbly" and "going above and beyond" to help and look after her colleagues.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Alison Kibblewhite at Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) said: *"On behalf of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service we are hugely proud of Daisy and she richly deserves the award. Daisy attended last year's Women In the Fire Service weekend and was inspired to take up the position as the East of England Region WFS lead. She has put on a number of events to date including an amazing adventure for over 130 women from across the UK Fire and Rescue Services and police colleagues to climb Snowdon in April 2023. Her energy and enthusiasm is legendary and she inspires everyone she meets. She's a real credit to our Service and such a great person to be around. I know she inspires and helps others on a daily basis whilst being very humble about it. Huge congratulations to her."*

Speaking on the notification of her award, Daisy told us: "*Winning this award was a real surprise. I don't do what I do for recognition. Becoming the WFS Rep was an off the cuff, shoot from the hip comment last year that has taken off brilliantly. Reading the two nominations was heartwarming and I was taken aback by the very kind words that were written about me. I hope I can continue to support this network and my new friends in whatever capacity that may be. Thank you. I wouldn't be doing what I do, without the support from my family, friends, colleagues and the Fire Service."*

Emergency Services Times, sponsors of the 'Bright Light Award' category, commented: *"We are delighted that Daisy has won the Bright Light Award. Her enthusiasm is inspiring – it should make us all want to walk up Mount Snowdon too. Volunteers are the lifeblood of organisations like Women in the Fire Service and the efforts Daisy has made to engage members are impressive. Bright Lights bring others with them and while that may not always involve hiking up mountains, the fact that others wanted to share her experience demonstrates the depth of the impact she is having."*

Runner-up of the **'Bright Light Award'** is **Janette Morris** from **Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service**. Janette Morris, Area Manager at Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) who joined SFRS in March 2021, is a National Fire Chiefs Council Lead for HMICFRS/Inspection. She was described as "collaborative and supportive" and "exemplifying inspirational and inclusive leadership", helping support women to achieve their full potential. Her contributions to public speaking, where she promotes gender diversity in the Fire Service both within and outside the industry, was also praised. The award entry described how Janette's efforts to promote recruitment opportunities within the Service helped encourage recruitment, raise awareness and champion progression. Jan is also Shropshire Fire's Local Rep for WFS.

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Speaking on the notification of her award, Jan shared: *"It meant so much to me that someone took the time to nominate me for this award. I get so much out of supporting others and flying the flag for equity and diversity, it's a passion for me. Seeing others flourish through my support and the support of others is what makes the tough times worthwhile. I accept this award on behalf of those that have supported me and others. Together, we make a difference. Thank you."*

Simon Hardiman Chief Fire Officer at Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service said: *"We are thrilled that Jan has been recognised for her dedication to equality and diversity and being the shining example that she is. We are extremely fortunate to have Jan within Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, whose positive impact was felt immediately as soon as she joined us. Jan is a valuable part of the service but also her enthusiasm and passion for progression with the fire sector is to be commended. She is paving the way to improve the fire sector for women nationally as well as having a profound positive impact here in Shropshire. Her positivity and passion for all things fire service is infectious and inspires all who work alongside her. "*

Emergency Services Times, sponsors of the Bright Light Award category, commented: *"Runner-up Jan Morris features in the April issue of Emergency Services Times. Her great article about the challenges women face when it comes to well fitting uniform and protective wear should inspire all women to follow her bright light too."*

Winner of the **'Dany Cotton Inspiring Leader Award'** is **Deborah Davies** from **Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service**. Group Commander Deb joined Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in 2001 and was nominated twice in the national awards for remarkable contributions to the Fire Service. Deborah was described by members of her Service as "one of a kind", "a one-woman army" and "going above and beyond every single day". Deb, Chair of the Service's women's group works on improving opportunities for women, often in her own time. Her nominators noted how she went out of her way to support anyone within the service, was always looking to develop new initiatives to support staff in their personal development, and her passion to inspire female leadership through bespoke coaching and mentoring.

Jon Pryce, Chief Fire Officer at Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service said: *"Debs is an incredibly hard working, dedicated and professional female officer, who along with others has blazed a trail for women to follow, and I know she has been inspirational to many others, both male and female. Debs has shown not only commitment and passion in improving how women are treated in our workplaces, but above all she has shown true leadership in the way she has achieved this. She inspires some, challenges others and supports everyone with her drive, commitment and enthusiasm. Debs always manages to lead with both her heart and her head and I am truly proud to have her in our Service."*

Speaking on the notification of her award, Deborah said: "*I am incredibly proud and humbled by these nominations and winning the "Dany Cotton Inspiring Leader category". I work alongside a fantastic team within HWFRS and we all aspire to "Lift as we climb, taking others along with us". I am passionate about raising confidence, developing others and providing a supportive network and this award will allow us to share and recognise the amazing work of Women@hwfire and Women in the Fire Service."*

Dräger, 'Bright Light' category sponsor's Liz Millward, Marketing Manager Emergency and Rescue Services, commented: *"Deborah's endeavours to create change and promote diversity and inclusion within the Fire Services is inspiring. Dräger recognises the responsibility that manufacturers have in ensuring firefighter PPE and RPE suits all body types and doesn't create fatigue or back pain, and it is commendable to see leadership within fire services championing issues in a positive way and looking for proactive solutions."*

Winner of the **Exceptional Allies Award** is **Ashley Tugby** from **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service.** Ashley Tugby, Station Commander for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service joined NFRS in 2001 as a retained firefighter at Long Buckby. He was described as "an outstanding ally for equality and inclusion" and someone who "worked tirelessly" to improve opportunities for women, often in his own time. An LGBTIQA+, mental health and neurodiversity champion and ally, Ashley is a proactive member of the WFS Facebook Community Group. Here he encourages people to celebrate their individuality, shares positive success stories of women into recruitment and progression, and promotes the values and behaviours of the modern fire service. Ashley also volunteered to take drone footage at the WFS national event to create a film to promote it.

Rob Porter, Assistant Chief Fire Officer at Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service said: *"Ashley's unrelenting drive and enthusiasm in providing his support to women in the fire service, improving inclusivity throughout and championing diversity in recruitment is truly inspiring. Ashley doesn't just do this whilst at work and whilst also managing one of our busiest fire stations, he commits to devoting his*







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own time to deliver and support change. The award is truly well deserved and we are extremely proud to have Ashley serving with us all in Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service."

Speaking on the notification of his award, Ashley shared: *"This is the biggest compliment that anyone can give me. I am passionate about helping everyone be the best they can be and reach their full potential in the fire service. I am especially supportive of women and neurodivergent people who often need to work twice as hard to prove themselves. The fire service is a great place to work and I want everyone to feel part of something good, to feel proud of what they are doing and the difference they can personally make. It's your individuality that makes you amazing and a valued part of any team or organisation, never let anyone dull your sparkle".*

Exceptional Allies category sponsors, 3SFire Community Interest Company, commented: *"After recent scrutiny of cultural issues within fire services across the UK, Ashley is a most worthy winner as a role model leader in promoting and developing women in the fire service and also a more diverse and inclusive workforce in general."*

Runner-up of the **Exceptional Allies Award** is **Richard Henshaw** from **Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service**. Richard Henshaw, Procurement Manager since 2009 was described as "an exceptional ally for women". The award entry described how Richard always sought out feedback from staff networks, ensuring trials had participation from different genders and backgrounds, and always asking suppliers about maternity options, textiles more appropriate for those experiencing menopause symptoms, and styles taking into account cultural beliefs. When his team moved location, Richard placed motivational posters in changing areas promoting how it didn't matter who you were or where you came from, and that you could achieve great things within the Service.

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue said: *"We are exceptionally proud of Richard and his clear commitment to making inclusivity the heart of everything he does. He has led his team to be one of the first in the country to trial hijabs for operational personnel, been an active supporter of diverse issues by working with the Service's Women's Network, and has been vocal when supporting our uniform review. Richard is a model ally within Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, and he deserves to be recognised for his forward-thinking, thoughtful efforts."*

Category sponsors, 3SFire Community Interest Company, commented: *"Richard's procurement innovations have been making much appreciated improvements to everyday working life for women in the fire service but he should also be recognised for his insightfulness, empathy and desire to break down historical barriers that have impeded women's roles and job satisfaction as frontline firefighters."*

Caroline Anderson, WFS Award panel judge, added: *"Richard believes we can all achieve great things and gives his wholehearted support to improve kit within FRS. Richard has been instrumental in trialing hijabs for operational personnel, has an unending effort to improve clothing for those experiencing menopause symptoms, those going through maternity and those with different cultural beliefs. He takes action around issues of inclusivity and speaks eloquently and respectfully, researching and clarifying his understanding when making decisions to ensure different genders, backgrounds and cultures are all taken into account when making decisions. Richard is a very modern, forward thinking and exceptional ally."*

Winner of the **'Firefighter Rising Star Award'** is **Arwen Bailey** from **North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service**. Arwen Bailey, On-Call Firefighter at Skipton Fire Station, was described as someone who "delved deep into the local community, helping people make better choices". The award entry explained how Arwen developed and ran a new 6-week summer programme just 8 months after joining NYFRS. Aimed at girls aged 13-15 this included practical team building exercises designed to build self confidence and teamwork, appealing to those who thrive best when being active and away from the classroom. Arwen used her positive experiences of joining the Service to provide guidance she had felt lacking earlier in her own life and arranged for women from other Blue Light Services to speak during the programme. The project was a success, and senior leadership are keen for Arwen to develop it. Arwen is a volunteer Violence Against Women & Girls Ambassador for NYFRS, while being a single parent to two high school aged children.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's Chief Fire Officer Jonathan Dyson, said: *"We are extremely proud of Arwen. Her enthusiasm in using personal experience to support, develop and guide girls and young women to thrive and build confidence is fantastic. Arwen has made a hugely positive impact in her local community and across the service and we're honoured Arwen is part of the North Yorkshire Fire Service team."*

Speaking on the notification of her award, Arwen shared: *"I'm so proud and grateful to win the WFS Rising Star award against such strong competition and am delighted that NYFRS's support of my work*

with young women has been recognised. Working as an active firefighter in Skipton gives me a great deal of personal pride and satisfaction, and developing projects to show the young women and girls in our community that there's a whole range of options open to them in the Fire Service is such a delight. As a more mature (!) joiner to the service juggling parenting two young boys, it shows that anything is possible with enough resilience and determination. I'm enormously grateful to the judging panel for recognising this and for all of my colleagues at Skipton Fire Station and the wider NYFRS team for all the encouragement and support, particularly GM Peel and SM Hughes."

Steve Hamm, CEO of the Institution of Fire Engineers, added *"We're so pleased to be sponsoring the Women in the Fire Service's Firefighter Rising Star Award. It's heartening to see the sheer dedication and varied skill set of budding talent across the fire and rescue service. Our congratulations go to Arwen Bailey of North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, and runner up Jade Konkel of London Fire Brigade who have both excelled in their support of gender equality and empowerment issues which this award celebrates. The IFE continues to drive advances for women and champion female talent across the fire sector through the IFE Women's Networking Group and our Equality and Diversity Inclusion task group."*

Runner-up of the **'Firefighter Rising Star Award'** is **Jade Konkel** from **London Fire Brigade**. Jade Konkel, who joined the Red Watch based at Feltham Fire Station in 2021 as a Firefighter, is also an athlete and has made history as a rugby player. Jade was described as "advocate and ambassador for gender equality and empowerment" and someone who "never failed to shine". Interviewed for International Women's Day in 2022 Jade spoke about wanting to be a firefighter for the rest of her career, and wanting to inspire more women to join the Brigade. Since Jade was at school she'd always thought it would be a great opportunity to join the emergency services. After five years in the Army Cadets, she decided to apply with the aim to develop a long lasting career whilst being able to balance it with rugby.

London Fire Brigade Borough Commander, Peter Clark, said: *"Jade is an asset to LFB and a brilliant role model for women in the fire service and sport. During her time in the borough of Hounslow, we've seen what a positive impact she has on her watch, station and local community. She is consistently championing more women to consider a career in the fire service, promoting diversity in sport and giving back to the community she serves. We are extremely proud of Jade."*

Speaking on the notification of her award, Jade shared: *"I'm really honoured to be nominated for the Firefighter Rising Star Award. There are so many incredible firefighters out there, so it was a lovely surprise to see my name included. I love everything about my job, and within it comes a lifetime of learning, so I am extremely pleased to be nominated."*

Caroline Anderson, WFS Vice-Chair and award panel judge, added: *"Jade was an army cadet for 5 years and then while following a career in Rugby and athletics decided to join the fire service as a firefighter. We are thrilled to recognise her outstanding achievements and are sure Jade will continue to shine throughout her career."*

Joint winner of the **'Young Person Role Model Award'** is **Joolz Earley** from **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**. Joolz, aged 18, is a Community Volunteer and Cadet Leader at Uckfield Fire Cadets and it is her dream to be a wholetime firefighter. She was described in the award entry as "a role model" working hard to fulfill her dream of becoming a firefighter. Joolz was happy to share her personal story with WFS newsletter readers and social media followers by taking part in a Q&A and helping promote a WFS positive action programme aimed at future firefighters which she attended. She was nominated for Youth Champion of the Year in 2021 at the Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards and in January this year, Joolz Achieved an overall Merit in Level 3 year 1 Uniformed Protective Services.

Speaking on the notification of the award, Joolz shared: *"I feel truly honoured to have won this award, it means so much as last year was a privilege just to be a nominee. For me my chosen career path is to be a firefighter and I hope by sharing my experiences on my social media I have inspired more young girls to choose a career in the fire service. There are only 8% of women in the fire service and this needs to change."*

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service said: *"We have seen Joolz grow in confidence and increase her skillset during her journey from a young Fire Cadet to a Fire Service volunteer. Joolz is always eager to participate and help others in all tasks. We all would like to congratulate her in obtaining this award."*

Young Person Role Model sponsor, UK Fire Training, Managing Director, Jon Hughes, commented: *"Joolz's courage and determination to never give up is exactly the kind of attitude you want to see from a role model. In life you are never sure what is going to be thrown your way but Joolz ability to brush off, dust down and keep going is a testament to why she WILL ultimately succeed. Joolz's use of social media to advise and inspire others as well as to share her own journey is inspiring and shows exactly*

why she is a worthy winner. UK Fire Training are proud to sponsor this award."

Joint winner of the **'Young Person Role Model Award'** is **Shreya Sayal** from **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**. Shreya was described as a young person acting with "maturity and professionalism" and someone who challenged all stereotypes of what it means to be a Firefighter. Regularly demonstrating that girls from ethnic minority backgrounds can be firefighters, Shreya has also excelled and taken on additional levels of responsibility. Shreya was voted in by her peers to be a representative of her unit on DFRS Youth Council in order to be the voice of cadets within the organisation as a whole. She was then voted in as the very first Chair by the other Youth Council Members. Shreya now Chairs these meetings, taking a proactive approach and helping influence change for cadets and young people across the Service. An example of this being the introduction of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Shreya has also represented DFRS at a recent National Fire Chiefs Council's Children and Young People Fire Cadets development day being one of only two cadets to be invited.

Speaking on the notification of the award, Shreya said: *"I am delighted to have been named as Young Person Role Model 2023 by Women in the Fire Service UK.* I *was initially surprised to be nominated by my manager at Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service and I never thought I would win. Now I have won, I will continue to act in a manner which will hopefully motivate and inspire future young people. I am proud to be considered as a role model to others."*

Gavin Tomlinson, Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive at Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service said: *"This is a huge achievement for Shreya and on behalf of everyone at Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service, I would like to congratulate her on winning this award. All the young people who join the Service through our Cadet Scheme learn about our core values and ethics as part of the program and those who sit on the Youth Council are also given the opportunity to create their own code of ethics so they can be held to a higher standard than the rest. In challenging actions that went against these values and ethics, Shreya demonstrated outstanding commitment to not only the Service, but the community, and her peers as well. I have no doubt she will continue to achieve great things both personally and as a positive role model in her community as well."*

UK Fire Training, the Young Person Role Model category sponsor, commented: "*Shreya epitomises exactly the values of this award. An ultimate role model, not only for all fire service cadets to look up to but for all young girls especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds who want to become firefighters. Shreya should be immensely proud of this award and for what she has achieved so far in her blossoming career, it is evident that she is highly regarded and respected by her peers, and I am sure she will have a successful career within the fire service."*

Runner-up of the **'Young Person Role Model Award'** is **Eloise Gadsby** from **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**. Eloise is a young person who demonstrates the strength and value of women within the sector. She was described as "positive" and someone who "always volunteers for events and the chance to represent DFRS". Eloise, aged 16, has been a member of the Fire Cadet program at Ilkeston for almost two years and is a member of the Youth Council. She has attained a rarely awarded RYA 'Watch Leader' award during a recent sailing experience during a DFRS Youth Week. She has also taken on a leadership role within her cadets taking learning from the Youth Council back to her unit and contributing to the direction of the Cadet scheme. She has been recognised with a Chief's commendation for her actions in a road traffic collision (RTC) as well as being only the second person ever to receive an National Fire Chiefs Council 'Chair's Award'. Eloise is keen to transition into full-time employment as a Firefighter within Derbyshire.

Speaking on the notification of the award, Eloise said: *"I'm honoured and grateful for this award, and thankful for this opportunity."*

Gavin Tomlinson, Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive at Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service said: *"I am extremely pleased to hear that Eloise has been named runner-up of the Young Person Role Model Award. Eloise's commitment and dedication to DFRS is remarkable. Whilst outside of the cadet environment, she was faced with an RTC which she dealt with in a professional manner. She remained calm and diligent in the face of adversity, representing the true values and ethics of DFRS.*"

Jon Hughes, Managing Director of UK Fire Training, Young Person Role Model category sponsor, commented: *"Despite being only 16 Eloise has already shown that she has the ability to act calmly and diligently and put her skills to the test in a real life situation. Her actions along with her active and impressive attitude in her approach to taking a leading role within the Cadets is why Eloise is an excellent role model for all Cadets."*

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Full list of award nominees and more information about winners and runners-up: https://wfs.org.uk/2023/04/12/wfs-award-winners-2023-announced/

Women in the Fire Service UK is a volunteer-led, not-for-profit organisation which exists to advance equality, addressing gender imbalance in the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). Women are vastly underrepresented in firefighting. Government figures (2022) show just 8.2 percent of firefighters in England are women.

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