



Sandra Onn

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I'm a Station Officer in the Tasmania Fire Service. I have been in my current role for approximately eight weeks. My current job in the Building Safety Unit involves working with people from all different sectors of the community – organisations, schools, accommodation providers – making sure that their fire protection systems are adequate and operating in accordance with legislation.

As Tasmania's first female station officer, I am proud of my achievements. I first joined the Fire Service in 2005, through our communications area. I worked as a dispatcher in FireComm for nearly four years, and then became a firefighter in 2009. It's a really long process to go from being a trainee firefighter to where I am now, and everyone goes through the same process, regardless of gender.

It took me a while to get in to the Fire Service. The process is quite stringent. You do need to be physically fit and strong. We go into high stress situations – confined spaces, hot and dangerous environments. You have to be physically and mentally able cope with that. It's hard work, and I put a lot of pressure on myself to do the job to the best of my ability.

Women are really underrepresented in the Fire Service. I think many women just don't recognise that this is a career option for them. If they've got an inkling to work in emergency services, many women go to police or ambulance. They don't think that the Fire Service is something they can do. But they can. I and all the other women in the service are proof that you can do it. You may not get in on the first go, but it's about building your ability and not giving up.

I do think it's important that we reflect the community we are serving – whether we're talking gender, religion, race etc – because having diversity brings different perspectives. It brings a different dimension to how we do the job, how we relate to the community. The people we serve are not necessarily going to remember the equipment that we used, or how we did the job. They are going to remember how we made them feel.

I want women to know that working for the Fire Service is a great career. If you want to be hands-on in the community, there is nothing better. When we go to a job or an emergency, we're there to make it better, and we don't leave until we do. That's fantastic.