

## BE FIRE SAFE IN YOUR HOME



Roving Reporters Catherine, Kevin and Derrick from Downpatrick TILII interview the Downpatrick Fire and Rescue Service

TILII reporters were very excited to visit the NI Fire and Rescue Service in Downpatrick. They met Firefighters Peter, Ernie, Colin, and Gerry, who is the District Commander over five districts.

Roving Reporter Catherine asked the Firefighters what types of fire they attend. Peter told us that they attend cars on fire, houses on fire, grass fire, chemical spills, large animal rescues, and traffic collisions where they use special equipment to cut people out of their crushed cars.

Peter said that during the summer was often the busiest time because of grass/gorse fires but the winter can be busy with traffic collisions due to icy roads.



Peter put on the specialist clothing and with the help of the crew, Roving Reporter Derrick tried on the helmet, noting how heavy it was! It was fun but we also learned how important protective clothing is to allow the Firefighters to go into a burning building to save someone.



Gerry explained that the number of fires has reduced over the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland, and this is due to education that the fire and rescue service provide to help people understand how to prevent fires from happening. It is important for people to understand that house fires are often caused by cooking or electrical problems, and that it is important to remove plugs, and not leave electrical items on while you are not in the home.

Roving Reporter Derrick asked the Fire fighters about their favourite part of the job. Peter explained that he wants to help people so this is why he really loves his job. Colin's father was a fire fighter and this was the job he always wanted to do. He loves going into schools and educating children on how to be safe and to prevent fires from starting. Ernie also felt that teaching people to be safe and not to start fires was a really important part of his job. Gerry said the favourite part of his job is meeting people and working together with the Ambulance, the Police, the Council, and the Electricity and Water Boards on how we can reduce accidents and fires to save more lives. Gerry said it is important for everyone to be safe and that he was glad we had visited to learn about fire safety. He said we all should have smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in our homes and that we must test them regularly to make sure they are working. Also, we must always stay in the kitchen when we are cooking to make sure everything is okay. Removing plugs and electrical equipment is important to help prevent electrical fires. Gerry said "we will always educate everyone to prevent fires and accidents."

Roving Reporter Kevin asked what they did not like about being Fire fighters. Peter said it made him sad when he attends fires and people throw stones at them and petrol bombs. He said sometimes it prevents them from helping people, which is what they are there to do. Colin said he was sad when people lost their possessions, and Ernie said sometimes people even lose their homes. Gerry explained that at times, no matter how hard they try to save people, sometimes someone loses their life in a fire or they drown because they have gone into the water. He said no matter how long we do this job the loss of life is tragic and we have to work together to support each other at such a difficult time.

Roving Reporter Catherine asked how long it takes a Fire fighter to train. Ernie said it takes three years to become a Fire fighter, and you constantly have to train and learn new skills. Once you have completed three years you can specialise, for example you may want to learn to drive the fire engine. At the moment there are 18 Fire fighters in Downpatrick but soon another two will be starting, taking the number to 20. Downpatrick fire crew are retained Fire fighters so they have to live and work in Downpatrick. This means they can respond quickly to a pager system and attend a fire or incident.



Gerry explained how committed the Fire fighters are. They may have to drop everything at any time to attend a fire or rescue. Their families are really supportive, which is important because they often have to leave special family occasions to save peoples' lives. Gerry said he is proud of the professionalism and dedication of the crew.



We all learnt the importance of fire safety but we did have some fun too



**WE HOPE OUR STORY HELPED YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO BE SAFE AND TO MAKE SURE YOU CHECK YOUR SMOKE ALARMS AND REMOVE PLUGS. ASK THE STAFF TO HELP YOU IF YOU NEED SUPPORT TO DO THIS**