

Volunteer Spotlight

Trent Fearnley

PGDip FireE Dip Fire and Rescue GFireE



THE INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS
FOUNDED 1918 • INCORPORATED 1924



Tell us about yourself.

I am the National Adviser for Fire Risk Management for Fire Emergency New Zealand. I've been in the emergency services for 23 years and I went back to university after 12 years to learn fire engineering.

When did you first learn about the IFE?

I had a car accident in 1997, and in 1998 I was on light duties for the fire service as I'd broken my leg. I decided that instead of doing the light duties I'd do something that could benefit my career. So, I went into what we called in those days 'Fire Safety' which is now called Fire Risk Management. My senior station officer was a Member grade of the IFE, and he said if I wanted to do anything with fire safety then I had to do the IFE exams. He basically challenged me to do the exams, he pulled out a load of his old exam papers and that's how I got started.

How did you get involved with IFE volunteering?

When I came back to New Zealand after working in Dubai for a couple of years I went to Gisborne Station as a station officer. I went back to my operational role rather than my technical role, but I still wanted to keep up my technical expertise and keep myself at the forefront of fire engineering, so I thought it'd get involved with the IFE. I put my name up for election for the branch council and that's where my volunteering started. I was elected to the New Zealand Branch Council in 2011.

What is your favourite part of being an IFE volunteer?

The companionship. We say in the fire service that the fire service is your second family. The IFE is like my third family now. You get to meet people from all different walks of life. You get to broaden your horizons and to make lifelong friends. To me, that's the benefit and that's what I really enjoy about the IFE and being a volunteer.

What are your highlights of volunteering?

Being elected as President of the New Zealand Branch was one of the biggest highlights. I was quite early on in the branch council to be elected as president, so it was quite an honour.

Has volunteering benefitted your career?

Part of my job is about stakeholder engagement, and having that external profile that the IFE has afforded me has meant that I am now entrenched in other organisations like the Fire Protection Association New Zealand and educational institutions. I wanted to get to the national adviser position, and most of what was required in that role I was already doing for the IFE. When I went for my interview, I quoted what I was doing for the IFE and how we set up the process within our branch and that was exactly what they wanted for the new role. So, it has really helped my career. Had I not been in my IFE role I probably wouldn't have got the job that I'm in now!

Would you recommend volunteering with the IFE to others?

Yes I would, and I've sat down with a lot of members in New Zealand and I've said what you put into it is what you get out of it. You've got to put yourself out there and you'll get a lot more back. If you see it that way, rather than just a take, take, take, you'll reap the rewards.

June 2020