

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue

Wiltshire College has helped its local fire and rescue service win national acclaim for a series of initiatives that are saving horses' and humans' lives and making it easier for employers to support part-time firefighters.

Readers of just about every national newspaper in the country – as well as millions of TV viewers – have heard about Tom Brolan, a Watch Manager with Wiltshire Fire & Rescue, who has revolutionised animal rescues by encouraging the service to acquire a life-sized model of a horse for his colleagues to practise on in safety.

He came up with the idea to improve rural rescue facilities during a Watch Manager Development Programme run by Wiltshire College's Employer Responsive Team that required him to complete a work-based assignment focussing on an area in which he felt improvements could be made.

"The dummy horse may look very strange, but we went to 50 animal rescues last year, mostly involving horses trapped in ditches," says Tom. "A horse's kick can be life-threatening, so it's important to know how to carry out rescues safely."

His initiative has already saved the life of a horse that fell into a ditch at Purton Stoke, as a message of thanks sent to the rescue service reveals.

"Without the new rescue equipment, the horse would be dead," it says. "It was a very tricky operation as the horse was exhausted and couldn't stand, even when upright. The new equipment meant she could be supported without stress on her legs, and everyone could stay far enough away to be safe and allow her time to recover."

Tom's project for the college led to the RSPCA contributing to the cost of the dummy horse as well as the purchase of other specialist equipment.

It's also brought him to the attention of the Chief Fire Officer who listens to the learners' presentations and decides whether they should be developed – a chance to put ideas to him that they may not always get.

"As a result of Tom's training and the project he did for it, we now have an animal rescue department," says Kathy Collis, Station Manager, Training and Development. "Before that, we adapted other equipment for the purpose, but this has helped us become even more professional at animal rescue."

"The Chief Fire Officer is very supportive of what Tom has done. It's really set an example. People are more motivated to take part in the programme now they realise they might have a chance to present to the Chief Fire Officer. Tom was nominated for the Institute of Leadership and Management's Learner of the Year award and has since become a Watch Manager working in the animal rescue department at our HQ in Potterne near Devizes."

His training was part of the service's aim to give all of its crew managers and watch managers externally-recognised management qualifications through bespoke training delivered by Wiltshire College.

"We used to send people to the Fire Service College and they were away from us and their families for weeks," recalls Kathy. "It is more cost-effective for us to use Wiltshire College to deliver the training in our own workplace and to our time schedules."

"The college are extremely accommodating and meet us at the beginning of every programme to review the previous course content in line with any changes the service needs as well as any alterations required by the awarding body. They support all the things we do. They are not obliged to attend our training days and award evenings, but they always come to our events whenever possible."

Kathy says the college training is also helping convince employers to let their staff become retained firefighters at the 18 stations crewed by people with other full-time jobs.

"We can now approach their employers to offer them the benefit of a management qualification for their employee if they release them to be a retained firefighter for us," says Kathy.



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