

I never really planned to be a lifeboat volunteer when I came to live in Northsea. I'd been working in London as a website designer, but although that was interesting, I didn't like city life. **I'd been really keen on boats as a teenager, and I thought if I went to live by the sea, I might be able to pursue that interest a bit more in my free time.** Then I found that the Lifeboat Institution was looking for volunteers, so I decided to apply. **Q11**

The Lifeboat Institution building here in Northsea's hard to miss; it's one of the largest in the country. It was built 15 years ago with funds provided by a generous member of the public, **who'd lived here all her life.** As the Lifeboat Institution is a charity that relies on that kind of donation, rather than funding provided by the government, that kind of help is much needed. **Q12**

When I applied, I had to have a health assessment. The doctors were particularly interested in my vision. I used to be short-sighted, so I'd had to wear glasses, but I'd had laser eye surgery two years earlier so that was OK. They gave me tests for **colour blindness and they thought I might have a problem there,** but it turned out I was OK. **Q13**

When the coastguard gets an alert, all the volunteers are contacted and rush to the lifeboat station. Our target's to get there in five minutes, then **we try to get the boat off the dock and out to sea in another six to eight minutes.** Our team's proud that we usually achieve that – the average time across the country's eight and a half minutes. **Q14**

As well as steering the lifeboat, as a 'helmsman', I have the ultimate responsibility for the lifeboat. I have to check that the equipment we use is in working order – we have special life jackets that can support up four people in the water. **And it's ultimately my decision whether it's safe to launch the boat.** But it's very rare not to launch, even in the worst weather. **Q15**

As well as going out on the lifeboat, my work involves other things too. A lot of people underestimate how windy conditions can change at sea, so I **speak to youth groups and sailing clubs in the area** about the sorts of problems that sailors and swimmers can have if the weather suddenly gets bad. We also have a lot of volunteers who organise activities to raise money for us, and we couldn't manage without them. **Q16**

The training we get is a continuous process, focusing on technical competence and safe handling techniques, and it's given me the confidence to deal with extreme situations with total calm. **We had to do a fire and sea survival test first,** and that's a big help with the casualty care activities we do. We've done a lot on how to deal with ropes and tie knots – that's an essential skill. After a year, I did a one-week residential course, led by specialists. **There's a wave-tank where we could experience an overturned lifeboat scenario – so we could get experience at what to do if the boat turned over in a storm at night, for example.** **Q17/18**

Since I started, I've had to deal with a range of emergency situations.

But the work's hugely motivating. It's not just about saving lives – I've learned a lot about the technology involved. My background in IT's been useful here, and I can use my expertise to help other volunteers. **They're a great group – we're like a family really**, which helps when you're dragging yourself out of bed on a cold stormy night. But actually, **it's the colder months that can be the most rewarding time**. That's when the incidents tend to be more serious, and you realise that you can make a huge difference to the outcome. **Q19/20**

So if any of you listeners are interested...