



Last week we heard how Charlotte came to be involved with Fife Gingerbread, and what it was that led her to start volunteering with them. You can read about that here ([INSERT LINK TO PREVIOUS PART](#)).

Q. You recently won an award at our annual Ceremony, how did you feel to be named Young Volunteer of the Year?

I was speechless, I didn't even think I'd be nominated. I always say that I don't feel like I've done anything special or deserve recognition above anyone else – it's just my nature to want to help people. However, fortunately for me Fife Gingerbread thought I was deserving. I felt quite bad on the night actually because there was a really young boy nominated who had done lots of litter picking with his dad around the community, I thought he should have won!

Q. Don't feel bad, you were rightly named the winner and I'm sure that young chap will receive many more nominations in future! You've been selected as the First Minister's first mentee, did you know you had been put forward?

You're not nominated for it, it's something you've to apply for. I think the only criteria was that you've to be an 'inspirational person' so it was Sandie that told me about the opportunity and encouraged me to apply. I remember thinking 'this is a bit crazy, it's the First Minister and I'm just Charlotte from Buckhaven!' I remember filling in half of the application and leaving the other half as I really didn't think I'd be considered for it. I left the last question until the day before it was to be submitted as I just thought to myself that there was no chance I'd win so I almost left it completely. Sandie gave me lots of encouragement and that helped me to believe that I might actually have a chance.

After doing a short video as part of my application I was told I had got through to the next part of the process.

Q. What was the procedure?

It was a staged process, so I got asked to go for an interview which I attended and I surprisingly wasn't actually nervous about. I felt that had gone really well. At that point, they told me it would be two or three weeks before I heard anything. They contacted me the next day to tell me that the First Minister wanted to meet me along with two others. I later found out that there had been 8 interviews and I was selected as one of the final four.

I had assumed that there would be four people meeting the First Minister, but she told me when I met her 'I hope you're not too nervous because it's just between you and one other person' so they had eliminated two other people before I had even got there. We had a great interview and I even embarrassed Sandie by asking the First Minister to speak to her! Sandie wasn't expecting that at all, but I wanted her to be recognised too.

Again, they told me they'd contact the successful candidate in the next couple of weeks. The next day my phone had been off all day (I'm really bad for charging my phone!). When I eventually switched it on, I had lots of missed calls and voice messages and I wondered what was going on. I called June at Young Scot back (Young Scot manage the mentoring scheme on behalf of the FM). She said "I've got two things to tell you: Firstly, buy a new phone charger, and secondly the First Minister has picked you to be her first mentee.

Q. How did you feel the moment when you heard you'd won?

I couldn't believe it. June must have repeated it about 5 times. I never ever thought that little me from Buckhaven could achieve this. It didn't really sink in to be honest. I was told not to tell anyone and that was really tough.

Q. And how do you feel now?

Still to this day, it hasn't sunk in yet! I realise how great an opportunity this is, and I'm the only person in Scotland that has been given this so it really means something. It's great to know that my kids are going to see me doing something useful and something they can be proud of. My sister too, she's been through a lot and this hopefully shows her that even if bad things happen, you can still go far in life. I feel like I'm doing this for them.

Q. Now that people know, do you have everyone asking you for your story?

Yes but I don't mind at all, the longer I've had to process it, the more I understand how I was feeling at certain points. I have had people recognise me though and that's a bit strange! I do get people asking me to pass on their own political thoughts/views to the First Minister, but that's not what my role is for. That part has possibly been the most challenging but I'm learning to deal with it.

Q. Your volunteering has had great outcomes for you and we think that lots of people could benefit from volunteering, even if not everyone will be able to get the awards that you have! What is the best thing that you got from volunteering that other people will get too?

The best thing is helping people, which gives me a great sense of satisfaction. When you volunteer you become part of a community. It's like I've got another family. It's a great way to build your own social networks too.

It's quite amazing to think that I've made a difference in someone else's life, someone who I probably would never have known if it wasn't for volunteering.

Q. What would you say to someone that was unsure about volunteering?

Talk to someone that already volunteers, or talk to an organisation that you know can help you volunteer. I always thought you don't get anything out of volunteering, it's just about giving. I definitely never knew you could win awards! It might seem like a lot of work, but it does benefit you in the long run. You get so much out of it. It kind of hit me out of nowhere one day when I was thinking about how much I've done.

Q. What are your plans for the future?

I have no concrete plans, I'm genuinely taking each day as it comes. I like to just 'go with the flow'. After the Mentoring scheme finishes, I probably will start to look for work. I've recently completed a Professional Development Award in Youth Work, which is equivalent to a Higher, something I'm really proud of and wasn't able to complete at school due to personal circumstances. Volunteering has given me so much. I'm due to appear on 'The One Show' and I've recently written an article of 'Elle' magazine so these are things I couldn't possibly have planned for!



Pictured above is Sandie Kennedy (Volunteer Co-ordinator, Fife Gingerbread), Charlotte Liddell and Stephen Adamson (FVA)