



## **Mike Thomas, Chair & Trustee.**

I have been in public service since leaving school at 15. I spent two years as a police cadet followed by two as a constable in London before leaving to join the fire service in 1973. I still remember my time as a constable and I learnt a lot about myself and the need to adopt a caring and responsive approach especially to those less fortunate than myself. I worked with older disabled people, many of whom relied totally on volunteers for every activity in their lives and also worked at a home for disadvantaged young people. I also served at Pizalozzi Children's Village on the edge of Lake Geneva, as a volunteer and, as a result of the enthusiasm and understanding that I could make a difference I joined and worked for the International Voluntary Service (IVS).

I spent 22 years in London learning my trade as a firefighter and officer protecting communities and thoroughly enjoying serving the public. The last fire engine I rode was at Tottenham in 1989 after which I was promoted and took a role in senior command positions. I finally left London in 1995 for pastures new in Devon as a Senior Divisional Officer. It was here that I first learnt about the connection that we can make to communities abroad and I was involved in projects that delivered ex Devon Fire appliances and equipment to Albania. After three years here I left to join Lincolnshire as Assistant Chief Fire Officer and subsequently Deputy and now Chief Fire Officer.

It was in Lincolnshire in 1999 where I was approached by many members of Operation Florian to see if I would take on a role as Chair of the Central Region of the Charity. I was pleased to be invited and soon became involved in the fundraising and other activities including missions abroad into Croatia, Bosnia and Paraguay and more recently Montenegro and Kosovo.

It became clear to me that there were many enthusiastic people in the Charity all busy beavering away and really making a difference to the many communities ravaged by war. I was pleased to be part of the valuable ethos and admired the work of the founders. I took it upon myself to try to help support the Charity at a more strategic level and have been a driver behind modernising the Charity and providing a valuable framework that allows the members to flourish and contribute whilst the Charity meets its duties and responsibilities and is an effective organisation. We have seen some real changes to the back office in recent years and I'm sure the members themselves appreciate the value of that support.

I remain fully committed to the Charity, I believe it has many excellent people and I'm very pleased to be able to help in my own small way to provide a sound platform for the future development of the Charity.