

SALUTE TO
Unsung
Heroes



Volunteer Firefighters

These public servants are usually first to respond to emergencies

There are tens of thousands of fire departments across America, according to the U.S. Fire Administration — and the vast majority are staffed by volunteers.

These department's first job, of course, is extinguishing fires. Most people know they also help with rescue operations, sponsor general fire safety programs and monitor fire risk in order to establish burn bans. But there's more to this critical role, according to the U.S. Corporation for National and Community Services.

WHAT THEY DO

Beyond fire fighting, mitigation and rescue, they also deal with hazardous material response and removal. Other emergency management functions include providing general medical services until other help arrives, arson investigations, youth and senior awareness programs, and fire-code enforcement.

HOW TO HELP

Citizens can play a direct role in supporting firefighters that goes beyond practicing fire safety and discussing it with friends and family. Most fire departments rely on slim municipal budgets, so grants and donations are critical to their operation. When funding



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is low, departments will often scrimp on supplies or training resources. They may even have to lay off personnel. Consider holding a fundraiser for your local fire house, with donations directed at supporting their vital role.

Visit to talk to first responders about what's needed most. That will help you set goals, while also giving your cam-

paign something specific to focus on when promoting on social media or with local media outlets. Your event might center on a community cookout, or a silent raffle. Some communities host charity bingos or craft sales. Whatever you choose, be sure to invite firemen from the local precinct to your event. They'll put a human face on

these pressing needs, and the people who depend on them will have a chance to express their gratitude.

BECOMING A VOLUNTEER

Fire departments can always use an extra helping hand or two when emergencies arise, especially in less-populated rural areas.

Check with your local department to find out more. Most will have some basic requirements for any volunteer, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That usually includes EMT certification, more than 100 hours of related training and a high-school diploma. Other individual departments may have other requirements.

Food Bank Operators

Hunger can be one of the biggest issues facing the poor

Some 40 million Americans are malnourished at any given time according to Feeding America, and food banks are here to help.

They're found in facilities both large and small, depending on the size of the community. But all of them rely on the critical role of workers and volunteers to keep feeding those in need. Here's more on how these food banks operate, what you can do to show your appreciation, and how to sustain their important work.

HOW IT WORKS

Rural areas may be home to simple one-house facilities, while larger metropolitan cities boast huge warehouse-size operations. In both cases, however, the operation works in concert with grocers, farmers and other food service groups to collect and distribute goods to the poor. Without a crew of compassionate helpers, the whole process would grind to a tragic halt.

Donations and overstocked items make up the bulk of the stocks, sometimes along with foods nearing their expiration date. Cash donations are also used to buy at discount rates, in particular at larger operations. Food banks typically run pantries for carry-out items, while soup kitchens are manned with workers who



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provide hot meals and maintain the kitchen, eating and clean-up areas. Local food banks may also partner with faith-based organizations or national and municipal outlets to get food to the hungry.

HOW TO HELP

Huge organizations like Feeding America funnel a

broad range donations into a network of food banks, but most of these local efforts rely on help from ordinary citizens like you. Visit a nearby facility to find out more about specific needs. You may find that they are running low on items that you can donate. If the need is great enough, you could also help raise needed

funds to provide a larger donation.

In the meantime, seek out grocery stores that are helping to address hunger, either through giving barrels where canned goods and other non-perishables can be donated or through direct donations added on to customer bills. There are usually

a few things in anyone's pantry that can be donated. Just make sure the expiration date hasn't passed. In some cases, however, the biggest needs are simply more people to become food bank operators. Simply giving of your time and effort might make a bigger impact than anything else.

Hospice Care Workers

They provide compassionate specialized care at deeply emotional moment

Qualified, experienced and caring professionals make all the difference when a loved one is facing excruciating pain and end-of-life decisions.

Hospice workers, whether licensed medical providers or committed volunteers, are there to listen to concerns, answer questions, monitor prescription and pain medication, and foster as positive an experience as they can. Learn more about their critical role.

DEFINING HOSPICE CARE

Hospice care is dedicated to maintaining quality of life for those whose disease, illness or general condition is unlikely to improve, according to the Hospice Foundation of America. Care plans are individually customized to address the pain associated with these terminal issues — and that includes physical, spiritual and emotional pain. Hospice care became more formally organized in the 1970s, and was initially most commonly associated with cancer patients. But more than half of those in hospice care today are dealing with other health issues, including memory loss, and late-stage lung and heart problems.

MILLIONS IN NEED

Caring for those in hospice



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is about more than addressing medical issues. Patients are also in particular need of companionship from those who are good listeners. That's where volunteers can make a huge impact, while also raising program awareness outside of the care facility. With more than 1 million patients and family members involved with hospice care, the need

for community involvement has never been greater.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization lists a number of critical needs for these facilities, while also alerting new volunteers about what to expect. Many work in the patient lobby, relaying needs from those in hospice

and their family to staff members. You may also simply be asked to serve as a listener, in particular for those who don't get many outside visitors. In some cases, workers may take patients on short trips outside the facility.

Most programs offer advance training on things like care-unit philosophy, and grief counseling and loss.

You'll have to learn how to help while creating healthy boundaries. The most important qualities to have, however, are empathy and kindness. If you think you'd like to become one of these critically needed workers, contact the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization hotline at 800-658-8898 to find out more about programs near you.

Teachers

The best instructors create encouraging environments that help your child shine

Their job description isn't limited to things found in books, as teachers provide support, comfort and a life lesson or two in addition to the expected grammar and math equations. They may also be spending lots of their own money to help children through the process.

Too often, however, their very important role in lifting kids to their full potential is overlooked in communities.

BEYOND ANY BOOK

Teacher pay is usually such that no one enters the profession looking to strike it rich. Quite the contrary, in fact. Teachers are typically driven more by a hope and desire to foster a happier, healthier and more successful future for the next generations of our youth. There are curriculum requirements, of course, and kids are still expected to emerge with a comprehensive knowledge of reading, math and science. But perhaps more than ever, teachers now serve as mentors and leadership figures to children emerging from divorce, poverty or other societal ills.

AFTER CLASS IS OVER

Teachers help put into practice early parental lessons about sharing, then assist in guiding students through more



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complex concepts like personal responsibility and developing coping skills when conflicts arise. In most cases, these lessons are carried with youngsters long past graduation. By then, the average teacher will have spent many, many hours engaged with the students' work, often long after class is over. This includes tra-

ditional tasks like grading tests and critiquing assignments, but also outreach efforts including tutoring sessions, online learning and parental meetings that may take place once the kids have returned to their respective buses.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Parents and involved com-

munity members can lend a huge helping hand to local teachers. It all starts with promoting the value of respect for this leadership role, through everything from leading class to making homework assignments. Teachers also end up making a lot of out-of-pocket purchases in order to fashion les-

son plans that are more interactive and meaningful amid budget gaps in the classroom. In some cases, teachers even provide their poorest students with basic school supplies, all to ensure their participation. Consider establishing a fundraising project with other parents on your favorite teacher's behalf.

Child Welfare Workers

These social workers' role in protecting our children often goes unnoticed

Dedicated professionals across the country help lift kids from terrible circumstances into loving new homes — and they do so in frankly overwhelming conditions: Some half a million kids are in foster care at any one point in time, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources.

WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT

As the number of children who die annually because of abuse and neglect reaches the thousands, social workers specializing in their welfare have become essential. Advocacy on behalf of the neglected and the poor is a critical factor in lowering that horrifying number. The stated goal of a child welfare worker isn't to break up families, since that's ideally the environment where kids will flourish the most. Still, in some cases, intervention is nevertheless required and these unsung heroes have to make the hard but necessary choices that will keep children safe. When everything falls into place, foster kids are granted the second chance they deserve — and caring and committed social workers are among those to thank.

FACING CHALLENGES

This isn't easy work. Child



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welfare professionals come face to face every day with traumatized children who've suffered awful mistreatment or have been the victims of poverty. As a result, social workers are commonly diagnosed with two specific forms of depression, including post-traumatic stress disorder and so-called compassion fatigue — or sec-

ondary traumatic stress. These unsung heroes also have to confront the fact that children will initially suffer stress all over again when they're placed in new living environments. Then there are those unfortunate instances when these moves simply don't work out, no matter how well intentioned they were.

DIFFERENCE MAKERS

The job's meaning is underscored when children facing hostile situations or lack of basic necessities get a brand-new start. Child welfare workers also typically get to know these kids on a deeper personal level through the process. Those conversations help

guide the path forward, while allowing these professionals a front-row view as children develop impressive new strengths on their way to personal successes as a survivor. Any risk to a social worker's own mental health is worth it when a youngster begins to flourish after departing difficult circumstances.

Emergency Medical Technicians

These well-trained pros play a key role when things turn for the worse

The hours are long, and the duties are stressful — but critical events would have far worse outcomes without the steady professionalism of EMTs.

WHAT THEY DO

EMTs are usually the second responders on the scene of an accident, industrial mishap or other emergency, following local fire fighters. Their role is to make quick medical assessments, conduct initial treatment options, then communicate information back to hospital staff as they prepare for the patient's arrival. They must be experts in diagnosing injuries and possible complications, while speaking in a concise and clear manner. Their initial on-site treatment can sometimes mean the difference between life and death, depending on the severity of injury.

NEEDED SKILL SET

Once patients have been stabilized, EMTs also oversee their safe transport whether the injuries are routine, non-emergency issues or a potentially life-threatening emergency. With so much to know and so much at stake, EMTs must undergo extensive testing and vigorous training in order to get certified. That includes passing practical and



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written examinations from the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, and then earning a national registration.

States often have additional approved training programs, and there is usually a separate exam for paramedics certification. A criminal background check is also routinely performed. The National Registry lists the most commonly

needed critical skills as patient trauma and medical assessment, management of cardiac and related events, and administering oxygen.

NEVER AN AVERAGE DAY

Beyond their work in the field, emergency medical technicians must also keep accurate records explaining the incident and any medical aid that was provided. These

records are critical both for immediate medical purposes, and in case there are legal implications down the road. The length of their shifts varies based on specific departments, with a reported range between eight hours and two days. Those on longer shifts are given an opportunity to take naps, though they can be awakened at any time when an incident is reported.

A GROWING CAREER FIELD

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a seven percent growth in this field through 2031, with some 20,000 openings for EMTs and paramedics per year. Median income for EMTs in 2021 was \$35,470, according to the bureau, while paramedics made an average annual wage of \$46,770.

School Bus Drivers

Busy parents often take this critical daily figure for granted

Delivering kids to school and then returning them home on a strict regular schedule remains one of the daily miracles of childhood. Yet the person behind the wheel is typically overlooked.

MANY CHALLENGES

Driving can be difficult enough without dozens of screaming kids sitting in the back of the vehicle. Then there is the increased sense of responsibility associated with transporting another family's children. Other variables over the course of any given day include distracted or rule-breaking drivers and inclement weather. Drivers are also responsible for general checks of the bus, including tires, lights and brakes. They must keep careful record of miles driven and fuel usage, too. That's all after securing a CDL certification, which itself is no easy task.

HOW TO HELP

Parents can address at least one of the issues facing these unsung heroes: School bus etiquette. Children should be taught the importance of following the rules and respecting the driver. The National Safety Council stresses that riding the bus is actually safer than arriving at school by passenger vehicle. Nevertheless, there are key



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elements of good bus-riding behavior that make it even safer, like remaining seated and wearing safety belts, if available. Remember that loud noises can be distracting to the bus driver, increasing the possibility of an accident. Keep arms and heads inside the windows at all time.

Oncoming drivers should

be aware that buses make frequent stops. Look out for entering and exiting students. Cars usually must obey when the stop arm is extended, depending on roadway configurations. Travel can resume as normal once the driver turns off the red lights and the stop arm isn't visible anymore.

DRIVER SHORTAGES

Dealing with issues ranging from unruly children and a compressed schedule to pay issues and a general lack of recognition has inevitably led to a nationwide shortage of drivers. Students are now arriving late more often, according to Education Week, and grades are being directly

impacted. In some cases, routes have been combined – meaning kids are also getting home hours later. In other cases, districts have been forced to return to remote learning. These downstream impacts only serve to underline how important school bus drivers are to the entire educational process.