

## 2018 Family Events

**June 9-15**

***Outward Bound***

Appalachian Trail, Pennsylvania

**June 29-July 1**

***Hal Bruno Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters***

Johnsonburg, New Jersey

**August 2-4**

***Young Adults Retreat***

Warrenton, Virginia

**October 5-7**

***National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend***

Emmitsburg, Maryland

**December 7**

***Annual Tree Lighting***

Emmitsburg, Maryland

**December 7-9**

***Spouses Retreat***

Maryland

**February 2019**

***Parents and Siblings Retreat***

Location TBD



*We mustache you to join us for an upcoming event.*



**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Programs are a unique partnership effort of the PSOB Office, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), U.S. Department of Justice and local, state, and federal public safety agencies and national organizations, such as the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to provide death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the Programs.

**Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513**

## We want to hear from you...



Firefighters are often held up as heroes who bravely risk their lives to help save the lives and property of others. "Hero" can be a complicated word, though, especially when the death of your loved one is a very public event. We have heard a lot of different things about what that word means to surviving family members after a firefighter dies in the line of duty. If you would like to share your thoughts on the word "Hero" and what it means to you, please write!

To submit a piece for an upcoming issue, please send it by June 1 to:

[jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org) or

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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# The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 82 ~ MARCH/APRIL 2018

« *More is possible when friends unite.* »  
~ 2018 Wellness Conference attendees

## 2018 Fire Hero Family Wellness Conference

*Blue Ash, Ohio*

**T**he 2018 Wellness Conference was held April 8-10 in Blue Ash, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati. Families traveled from across the country to attend workshops, participate in projects, spend time connecting with one another, and explore the local area. Our group was diverse, with attendees ranging in age from twenty-somethings to eighty-somethings. They represented firefighters who died as early as the 1980s and as recently as 2016. We had amazing support from the Blue Ash Fire Department, who helped with airport transportation and provided a local presence and logistical support throughout the conference.

Many thanks are also due to our Ohio fire hero families, coordinated by Arlene Zang, who put together the welcome bags and other special touches for the conference. The staff of the Embassy Suites in Blue Ash went above and beyond to accommodate our group. You all did Ohio proud, and we are grateful!

But don't take our word for it. Let the people who were there tell you what they thought of the conference. We hope their words will help convince you to join us in 2019! Preliminary planning for the next one is already underway, and we will post updates as we finalize arrangements.

*continued on page 2*



Wellness Conference *continued from page 1***Comments from Attendees****Bonnie Hall***Wife of Sid Hall (2007-IN)*

A while ago I realized that my sons were grown and now I needed to pay attention to me. Through helpful encouragement I made the decision to attend the conference. This was a big step I

wasn't sure I could complete, but there I was at the Fire Hero Family Wellness Conference in Blue Ash, Ohio. What helped me the most was that I could take it step by step, even if I needed to take a step back to breathe and focus on what was right there in front of me. That may sound simple, but it certainly helps when things become unclear or there is uncertainty ahead. What I will remember is the supportive surroundings we had the whole time, along with the smiles, pats on the shoulder, and hugs I received. On a small card by my plate at the final dinner we all had together, this is what I took away, physically and within myself: "You Got This." For those who have never attended a Family Wellness Conference, you can do it. You will find what you need there and be ready for whatever you may face in the days afterwards.

**Myra Zeeks***Wife of Jimmie Zeeks (2009-IN)*

This was my very first conference, and I loved it! What a great way to recharge, relax, and come to terms with unresolved issues dealing with our loss. Laughter yoga was absolutely hysterical, and

the rock painting was a great way to express our feelings. The hotel was amazing. I love my fellow survivors so very much and enjoyed spending time with them as well. I'm already looking forward to next year!

Thank you NFFF and staff for a job very well done!

**Denise Franz King***Daughter of Gerald Franz (1986-ID)*

First, thank you to all who put the conference together. I wouldn't change a thing, as it was well balanced between types of learning, sharing, social, formal, and informal times. Offering yoga and a walk were much appreciated.

I was anxious when I arrived, but I was welcomed wholeheartedly. I wept quietly through most of the keynote address because Vicki Scalzitti understands and honors our loss. Nancy came over afterward and said, "It's OK to cry here; we understand."

Vickie Taylor talked about wellness plans and increments. One of the participants said about starting an exercise program, "Just do lunges between the couch and the bathroom if that is what you can do. There, you've started." It was a funny image, but a perfect example. For me, making a difference so others will not have to experience loss drives me. As an elected official in charge of a fire department, my goal is to make sure our firefighters have the training and equipment they need to keep themselves safe so they can save others. I feel I am making a difference. That's all most of us want.

Sometimes depression or sadness just sneaks up and covers me like a blanket, and I learned that so many other people who have experienced a LODD are in earlier stages of dealing with the pain. There are lots of specific ways I can shake it off with self-care, exercise, being with other people, looking for the good in each day. Being surrounded by others who understand is priceless. Instead of being covered by a blanket of sadness, being there is a bandage and a hug from people who care and understand like no one else. You owe it to yourself and your loved ones to go.

**Laura Cano***Wife of Richard Cano (2015-TX)*

This was my second wellness conference, and I really enjoyed everything about it. The morning exercises really help get me motivated in the morning. From this conference I have taken away meditation and yoga





techniques to go back and apply to my life and even incorporate in my classroom. The best session for me was sitting with other spouses and letting it all out and being completely real and open

about my feelings of grief and new life process. If you have never attended a conference and are not sure if you should attend or not, give it a shot. What do you have to lose by coming? Everything the conference offers is to better our lives. It is a learning journey now that the journey has been shifted by the loss of a loved one. Each time I attend a NFFF function, whether it be Memorial Weekend or Wellness Conference, I gain a new person into my life who was put there for a reason on my journey.

**Diane French**

*Mother of Michael “Frenchie” French (2007-SC)*



I’ll remember the relaxed feeling of not being judged, being with people who understand and care. I am always enlightened by Vicki’s class but gained insight from the others as well. The new thing I will

be trying at home is the rock painting. I found it to be fun, and it helped me keep focused on just the project at hand. Last, but not least, I will remember seeing and spending time with my friends.

**Robin Lewis**

*Wife of Tom Moore (1999-CA)*

I was hesitant about participating in the conference, simply because I wasn’t sure if there would be a place for me. Tom was honored in 2000, and so many years have passed, filled with changes. I didn’t know how I’d connect or fit in. Any doubts I had about whether the conference would be helpful were quickly erased as I began meeting new friends and again sharing parts of my story. Time does help heal and dull the sharp edges of grief, but being able to still share with others that truly understand is refreshing and, even at this point in my life, a tremendous blessing. There’s

an openness associated with being surrounded by fellow survivors—no worries about whether or not to bring up grief in a conversation, because we all know that it’s part of life. It really is amazing the depth our conversations can go to in such a short time, from complete stranger to close friend!

I was reminded of how important it is to take care of myself and really appreciated the information and techniques that Denny Doyle shared with our group on myofascial treatments. I’ve already ordered a book that she recommended for self-treatment and am awaiting its arrival!



It was evident that I needed the connections of others who have shared similar experiences. I may be further down the road than some, but that fact doesn’t negate the bond that we share because of what we’ve had to go through. There is such value in knowing I can help someone else by the sheer fact that I’ve traveled the road a little longer than they have, and they can see for themselves that life can still one day be full of joy and fulfillment.

**Carol Jones**

*Wife of Steven Louis Jones (2002-NM)*

Grief and the process of grieving has no finish line. It takes as much time as it takes you, and that’s okay. Grief is not a race where we can jump over the hurdles and be done. There will always be another hurdle, some days not so many but other days you can’t seem to get off the track.

I think adults need permission to put themselves first. As a young girl I watched the adults around me put the needs of others, often those less fortunate, above their own needs. I can’t tell you how many times I heard, “do unto others,” “How do you think that made Timmy feel?” or “Put yourself in their shoes.” As we grow up we take on the role of caretaker or provider; we become responsible for those around us. For better or worse, we are our brother’s keeper. Before we know it, and often without realizing it, we put ourselves last. We run in circles trying to make things better, easier, or smoother for everyone except us.

### Comments from Attendees *continued from page 3*

By attending this conference, you can finally take the time to put yourself first. The speakers, facilitators, the NFFF staff, and the other attendees advocate the need to be number one in your own life. After all, if we don't take care of ourselves, how can we be useful to others?



During the conference, you can reach out to others who have been where you are. I have been surprised so many times at these conferences when a group of us will be

talking and I find myself thinking something and the words actually come out of someone else's mouth! I always benefit from the experience of those around me, and I try to encourage and help someone else. Here you can be mad, sad, angry, or searching, and you are not alone. There is so much brainstorming, sharing, bonding, and support at the conference that I believe everyone leaves with a renewed spirit and a deeper appreciation for who they are and where they are going.

One of the most surprising things for me is that people I've seen and talked to for years have shared more with me this conference than any time before. Whether they were more confident and comfortable or whether they felt closer to me, I can't say, but I will never forget some of the things shared. I made it a point to sit with people I have seen but may not have had time to have a conversation with before. I made some stronger connections and some new friends.

This year the biggest impact for me was the myofascial stretching. Like most of us, I carry stress in my shoulders and neck. I have already found a therapist in my area and have an appointment for this week. I am hopeful that this will help delay the need for pain medications.

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#### **Annette Armstrong**

##### *Mother of Oscar Armstrong III (2003-OH)*

What I will remember most from this year's conference was our rock wall climbing outing. I believe that through play we experience less known aspects of ourselves and our playmates' personalities. Unfortunately, due to an injury

I was not able to climb. However, it was great to be an observer who laughed, feared, encouraged, and tried to coach as other brave hearts ventured or rung the bell.

What helped me most was the ongoing exchange of advice, thoughts, experiences, and feelings shared by first time and repeat conference participants. Such sharing is comforting and insightful. I especially, enjoyed both morning yoga classes. They provided long overdue "me time." Sparks to ignite the slower "keep it in shape message." A little push to be a quiet athlete. It put me in touch with fading memories of when I use to greet my day in a more calming way.

The keynote speaker was also great.

I want to add meditation to my relaxation options. However, after reading books and magazines about meditation and having good intent, I was unable to move forward into the silence. Some other things were off, my approach was too complicated.

I doubted "meditation for grief" would really help, but I signed up and wandered in. I'm glad I gave it a try. The presenter did not focus on grief. She provided interesting information regarding different types of meditation. In addition, clear, uncomplicated suggestions for engaging and eliminating self and environmental distractions. At home, I'm now making slow progress. The information she provided is helpful.



There are many reasons to attend and benefits from attending a wellness conference. I would encourage people to come share a concern or feeling with someone who may have a different way of listening. Relaxing, learning, understanding the components of wellness related or unrelated to grief is important, regardless of you place in your grieving experience. Left brain, right brain, it all needs to be massaged. Come offer some help and receive some help. If you didn't like last year's choices of conference workshops, be one of next year's workshop choices. Try a different NFFF conference, event, or activity, because needs and preferences change. Attend and participate, then judge for yourself.



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**Cathy DeFlumere***Wife of Albert "Foxy" DeFlumere (1996-NY)*

As a "seasoned" survivor I sometimes ask myself, why would a survivor whose loss occurred over twenty years ago come to a wellness conference? I should be "over it" my friends from home

might say, but as we all know you are never over it. The conference is a time where I learned how far I have come in my journey, but I do still have some obstacles. One needs to take care of themselves before one can take care of others. There are opportunities to learn from and help one another in everyone's challenges of grief. I am thankful for my survivor family. Come to the next conference and "recharge your batteries" with all who understand.

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**Sharon Purdy***Wife of Lee A. Purdy (2000-OH)*

I attended the 2018 Fire Hero Family Wellness Conference which was held in Ohio this year. It was such a treat to be able to have contact with those survivors I have come to know and love and to make friends with new survivors.

I appreciated the sessions. Those that focused on grief were well done and gentle on the soul. We are all in different stages of healing, and the sessions gave us a chance to share what was in our heart. I would love to see a session on what amazing progress we have each made in our journey. We know how to grieve the loss of our firefighter, but we all need an opportunity to celebrate their lives and our lives as we go forward.

The other sessions—yoga and laughter, that silly scavenger hunt, and other sessions—were just the right touch of gentleness, and yet laughter was the word of the day. I enjoyed the sessions I attended. It was a good balance.

One of the major things that made this such a successful conference was the time we had to just gather and be with our survivor friends. The hotel was a perfect layout to allow us to gather. The large lobby area had comfy chairs and lots of room to sit and visit. The large open area gave us a chance to be family once again. A room to gather is important, and I appreciated that large lobby. It made a difference.

A special thank you to the Blue Ash Fire Department for being there during the conference. What a gift to get to know this amazing team!! It's always a great pleasure to see the NFFF staff once again. Those hugs and smiling faces from each of you made the experience special. Thank you so much!!!

I would encourage you all to attend the next Wellness Conference or program for your age group. It is an amazing experience to be able to share time with others who know and understand and care. We are all family in our hearts.



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**Comments from Facilitators**

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**Vickie Taylor, LCSW (Virginia)***Behavioral Health Specialist,  
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation**Director of Prince William Public Safety Resilience Center*

I went home from the Wellness Conference with a renewed spirit, and for that I thank each and every one who was present. Such a powerful reminder that traveling the pathway of grief is about approaching one's new life with grounded hope, an approach that includes balancing the brutal reality of the loss with the commitment to forge a new path. Each survivor had a life path mapped out, and the unexpected tragic death of a beloved family member changed that path. It is an honor and a privilege to bear witness to the commitment to create a new life of purpose, growth and resilience.

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**Vicki Scalzitti (Illinois)***Coordinator, Good Mourning Program for Children, Teens &  
Families, Rainbow Hospice & Palliative Care**Author: The Road to Good Mourning**Co-author: 10 Steps for Parenting Your Grieving Children*

Being asked to be part of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Wellness Conference is a privilege and an honor. Being able to serve this survivor group is meaningful and rewarding, both professionally and personally. The participants that I have met through the years have been

*continued on page 6*

truly inspirational in their perseverance, strength, and compassion for each other. The presenters, staff, and organizers also hit the mark in providing this conference, creating a truly supportive and healing environment for new and long-term grievers.

What would be most surprising to those who haven't had the opportunity to attend a conference is the positivity and life-embracing spirit of the fire hero families. Almost all of them have expressed the hope that they have made their fallen hero proud, and I'm sure they have fulfilled that commitment with love and dignity. While acknowledging the depth of their own struggles and supporting others in that difficult experience, they continue to support those in the fire service, raise their families, share their hero and their experience with others, and work towards wholeness and peace. And they're smart and loving and fun! I would encourage anyone who is eligible to attend this conference to give it some very serious consideration. It could change a life.

I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of this conference. It's the way I have to honor and say thank you to the heroes and their families, although there is no sufficient way to thank them for their service and sacrifice.

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### Megan Murphy (Massachusetts)

*Founder of The Kindness Rocks Project*

*Published in 2017 Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Kind (of) America; Mind, Body, Green; Tut.com*

During our workshop, participants used kindness cards to create positive messages:

*"Create awareness through kindness"*

*"May Love Unite our world"*

*"Let compassion ignite change"*

*"Kindness can empower good"*

*"Compassion can connect our lovely world and empower respect"*

*"All shall believe in our dreams"*

*"Let kindness and compassion empower your heart"*

*"More is possible when friends unite"*

*"Together we make tomorrow special"*

*"Let's expect happiness"*

I would like to say how honored and humbled I am to be asked to share The Kindness Rocks Project with the families at the Wellness Conference. I believe that the sentence that was created with the kindness cards during our workshop summarizes the event: "More is possible when friends unite." How lovely it was to be witness to all of you supporting one another through laughter, tears, joy, pain and most importantly love and respect for one another. I hope that you will continue to ignite the kindness that resides within each of your hearts and share it with the world, because **one message at just the right moment can change someone's entire day, outlook, life.** I know that I will keep your kind messages with me always and carry them in my heart.

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### Judi Winall, M.Div., CIH, CLYT (Ohio)

*Certified laughter yoga teacher*

*Founder of The Center for Soul Empowerment*

I was impressed by those who participated in my Laughter Yoga workshop with how open and willing they were to play and laugh. Sometimes Laughter Yoga can be a stretch beyond one's "comfort zone" because we're learning how to laugh as an exercise, without the influence of jokes, comedy, or a sense of humor. Playing usually has specific and sometimes strict boundaries for us as adults because of cultural beliefs. Allowing oneself to laugh for no reason is a liberating process that brings tremendous health benefits to mind, body, emotion, and spirit. The participants were able to embrace a joyful playfulness with grace and ease. As the contagious laughter spread throughout the group, so did the willingness to play. Smiling and laughter are expressions we can choose anytime, anywhere, and while doing anything when we allow ourselves to do it as an exercise.

*Many thanks to our incredible, insightful, authentic, and fun facilitators!*



Denny Doyle



Megan Murphy



Vicki Scalzitti



Heather Stang



Carol Svensson



Vickie Taylor



Judi A. Winall

*The pieces that appear in The Journey may not be reprinted without written permission.*



## Fire Heroes Rock!

**S**omething new started during the 2018 Wellness Conference, and we invite you to join in! If you aren't familiar with The Kindness Rocks Project described above, please visit <https://www.thekindnessrocksproject.com> to learn more. From their website: "Our goal is simple, connect many, inspire many and create a kinder world! We are simply a grassroots kindness movement."

During the Wellness Conference, attendees created a new Facebook group called FireHeroesRock, where you can post

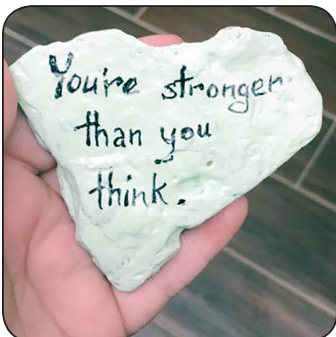
photos of the rocks you paint, hide, and find. Thanks to Lisa Hampton, wife of Daniel Hampton (2015-TX), who offered to serve as the administrator of the group. This group is by fire hero families, for fire hero families. It is open to all, so please pass the word on to friends, families, and fire departments who may want to participate! Help us spread a little kindness. Use #FireHeroesRock to find the group on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. You can also email [fireheroesrock@gmail.com](mailto:fireheroesrock@gmail.com) for more information.



## Mystery Solved!

*During the Wellness Conference, attendees were delighted to find that someone had hidden Kindness Rocks throughout the lobby of the hotel for them to find. The rocks were marked "Norwood Rocks," but no one knew who had placed them. Now we do!*

**I** had been thinking about painting rocks for the conference after I learned that Megan Murphy would be presenting in Blue Ash, and since I live nearby I couldn't wait! Originally my plan was to "rock" the event on Tuesday, but I decided to do it before Megan's presentation.



I'll admit, I was nervous about hiding the rocks, wondering how I would explain if someone from hotel security stopped me! I was glad, though, when Liza Aunkst made the first online comment about finding one. I'm thrilled that my little contribution added some fun to the comradery they were building. Kindness comes back and keeps spreading!



Bonnie Peter and her son, David, a Norwood (OH) firefighter