

## PSOEA: Education Benefits for Survivors Eligible for PSOB

The Public Safety Officers' Benefits program provides support for higher education to eligible spouses and children of public safety officers who died in the line of duty or were catastrophically disabled in the line of duty.

The PSOEA Program recognizes that the benefits available to families through the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program, administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, are often consumed by basic needs and are not sufficient to support the costs of higher education. For many families, however, access to higher education is instrumental in their ability to move forward in the aftermath of a line-of-duty tragedy.

PSOB Education Benefits (PSOEA) are available to public safety officers' spouses and children for 45 months of full-time education or training or for a proportional period of time for a part-time program. The first step in filing for

PSOEA benefits is the submission and approval of an initial prescreen application, which confirms program eligibility. After the prescreen application is approved, an initial payment application is submitted, along with additional documents and information.

For more information about the PSOEA Program, eligibility, and the documents required to submit a PSOEA claim, please visit [www.psob.gov](http://www.psob.gov) or call the toll-free line at 888-744-6513.



**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
U.S. Department of Justice

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...



Submissions for *The Journey* are always welcome from members of the Fire Hero Family community. We would love to hear from you about your firefighter, your experience of loss and grief, and ideas and perspectives you can offer to

those who need some hope and encouragement. We offer a writing prompt in each issue, because we know that sometimes it's easier to have a specific topic to get started. If you want to write on a different topic or to suggest a topic for a future issue, please let us know!

What does it mean to be a parent with no surviving children, a child with no surviving parents, or a brother or sister with no surviving siblings? We would like to hear

from members of the Fire Hero Family community who can speak to those specific losses and offer some hope and understanding to others who are struggling. What helps you as you navigate life without your loved one(s) who died? How do you honor those relationships, hold space for your memories, and stay connected with others?

To submit a piece on this or another topic for an upcoming issue, please send it by March 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

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*The only thing that is constant is change.*

~ Heraclitus

*Every moment is a fresh beginning.*

~ T.S. Eliot

**T**he start of a new year has different significance for each person. For some, it feels like a blank slate and a time of renewal, clearing out the old in order to welcome the new. But loss colors everything, and the new year may feel different to you now. It may be difficult to think about starting a new year without them. Or maybe the new year is how you count the years of your loss—this begins the fifth year without...

However you are feeling as you start 2020, the one thing you can count on is that life will be different by the year's end. You will be different, changed by the experiences you have in these 366 days. (It's a Leap Year!) There will undoubtedly be losses and gains, moments of levity and moments of darkness, times of connection and times where loneliness creeps in. There are many things we don't control, things we cannot know. Sometimes that can feel overwhelming, especially when you've already been through big things beyond your control.

Please don't despair! We know for certain that connecting with other people is one of the best ways we have to fight loneliness and stay hopeful. Having others in your corner makes a difference. It doesn't take away the pain of loss, but it can bring much-needed perspective, understanding, encouragement, exchange of ideas, and new memories. Together, we can survive what seems un-survivable.

Whether your loss is recent or many years ago, if you are feeling alone, please reach out and let us know so we can help you find support. Maybe you want to talk or email with one other person who has been through something similar. We can help you find counseling and support resources in your local community. Or maybe you will consider attending one of our upcoming 2020 Family Events. Make that first step by calling the NFFF at (301) 447-1365 and asking to speak with a member of the Fire Hero Family Programs staff.

## 2020 Family Programs

**T**hese events are open to family members of firefighters honored at the National Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland, as specified below. We hope to see you in 2020!

**Dates:** March 19–22, 2020  
**Event:** Spouses and Life Partners Retreat  
**Location:** San Antonio, Texas  
**Audience:** spouses/life partners of honored firefighters

**Registration for this event is full!**

This retreat will focus on the experience of losing a spouse or life partner. This special weekend will help you assess your current state of mind and teach you new ways of calming and grounding yourself when you feel distressed. These are skills you can also apply when parenting, supporting friends and family, and reaching out to others.



*continued on page 1*

I am so thankful that this type of retreat was available to me. Making connections with other spouses was so incredibly meaningful to me, and hearing their experiences put my own into perspective. Having women who have suffered this type of loss leading us through this type of self-assessment and introspection makes the hard work seem worthwhile.

~ Jeannie De Meyere, fiancée of Jason Adams (2016-AR)



**Dates:** May 17, 2020  
**Event:** Peer Support Network Meeting  
**Location:** Branson, Missouri  
**Audience:** family members who have already taken the NFFF 1-day Peer Support Training

If you have previously completed our 1-day Peer Support Training to do outreach to other family members, this 1-day meeting is for you. It will be a bit of a refresher, a time to discuss some upcoming changes in the program, and an opportunity for you to provide feedback, ask questions, and exchange ideas with other members of the Network. This meeting will be held on the arrival day for the 2020 Wellness Conference; we hope you will stay for that event, too!

*The primary thing that I believe the Peer Support Training Program teaches you is how to be a good listener. It's not about us. It's about that new family or the person who is having a challenge. And we sit, listen, let them tell their story. Many times, that is all they want. Your credentials have already been established because they know you've been through it, but we don't know exactly what they're going through. We listen. We don't judge. We don't try to come in and solve a problem, because in our society that's what you do; you're problem solvers. This is not a problem to be solved. Let them know you are listening.*

~ Dennis Neville, father of Brian Neville (2008-MD)



**Dates:** May 17–20, 2020  
**Event:** Wellness Conference  
**Location:** Branson, Missouri  
**Audience:** spouses, life partners, parents, adult siblings, adult children

When a firefighter dies in the line of duty, life changes forever for the surviving family members. For families of firefighters who have been honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial, there is a place to go each year to find support and comfort, make new friends, and create new memories. Workshops focus on grief and loss, mental and physical health and fitness, practical life skills, and creative outlets.

*Thank you for bringing joy into my life the past few days at the NFFF Wellness Conference. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet "family" who also have similar journeys, experiences, and trials. My expectations for the conference went far beyond what I would ever hope to wish for. I met a wonderful group of individuals who immediately accepted me without reservation.*

*The Wellness Conference was truly spectacular from beginning to end, and I am honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to be a part of it. Thank you for giving of your time, your talents, and your resources to ensure that our lives could be impacted for the better. I was moved and inspired by the speakers, instructors, content, and community.*

~ attendees of the 2019 Wellness Conference in Portland, Maine

**Dates:** June 26–28, 2020  
**Event:** Hal Bruno Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters  
**Location:** Colorado Springs, Colorado  
**Audience:** children, stepchildren, siblings ages 4-17 (18 if still in high school or just graduated)

Bereavement camp programs include use of age-based support groups led by licensed therapists and play-based



therapy for the younger campers. Campers participate in traditional camp activities such as arts and crafts, games, and campfires.

*Last night my teenage son came home from skating with his friends*

*and asked to come talk to me about his night. He said to me, "The camp taught me to be more open and share. They said it would help me feel better, and it has. I'm able to focus on the football field instead of thinking about other things." He also said he likes that he can talk to me more, since camp. I've learned to open my door and ears to him and create time for him since the youngest two kids require most of my attention. This was our first year at camp. I truly learned from the experience and can't express enough how happy I am that my son gained from it as well.*

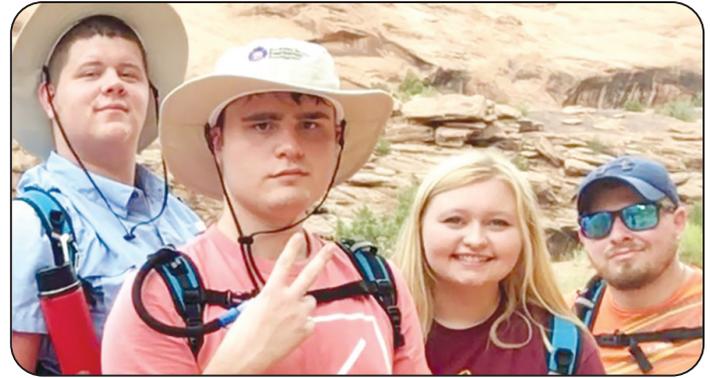
~ Rachel Matthews, wife of Lawrence Matthews (2017-IL)

**NEW EVENT!**



**Dates:** July 12–15, 2020  
**Event:** Men's Retreat  
**Location:** Estes Park, Colorado  
**Audience:** male spouses and life partners, fathers, adult brothers, adult sons and stepsons

Grieving men have unique needs. Men often feel pressured to suppress emotions, to "be strong" for others, or process their feelings alone. Many men process their loss through action more than in words. This retreat will provide a place for men to share and process grief with others who understand. We hope you will join us in beautiful Estes Park!



**Dates:** August 2–5, 2020  
**Event:** Young Adults Retreat  
**Location:** Estes Park, Colorado  
**Audience:** children, stepchildren, and spouses ages 18-25 (must be post-high school)

The transition from childhood to adulthood is challenging on its own. Leaving home, going to college, entering the workforce, or getting married can carry additional complexities when accompanied by grief and loss. The Young Adults Retreat provides a safe place where young adults can connect with peers and find support with those who truly understand. This event will combine challenging outdoor experiences with facilitated conversations about loss, resilience, health, and connection.

*The NFFF welcomed 24 young adults to a retreat in the high desert of Moab, Utah. Among the group, there was an eagerness to reconnect with friends, anxiousness about not knowing anyone, excitement for the week to come, and a universal acknowledgement that everyone standing in the circle was bonded by the loss of a firefighter parent or sibling... This may be the only place in the world where a group of young adults who just met can dive into some of the hardest stories to tell and be received with compassion and understanding.*

~ Misty Varnell, daughter of James R. Varnell (2016-NC)

**Dates:** October 2–4, 2020  
**Event:** 2020 Memorial Weekend  
**Location:** Emmitsburg, Maryland  
**Audience:** surviving family members, friends, and members of the fire service

The National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend honors the service and sacrifice of firefighters who died in the line of duty and features special programs for surviving families and firefighter coworkers, along with public ceremonies. New families have the opportunity to meet returning



families from across the country, share experiences, and make lasting friendships, which are often an important source of support going forward.

*The last time we were able to attend the NFFF Memorial Weekend, I had a friend ask, "Why do you do that? Does it help you in some way? Doesn't it just make you sad all over again?" It does help. Not only is attending firefighter memorials important to me in honoring Jared, but they are the best measuring sticks in gauging my progress. Measuring sticks I need when I can't feel the progress in my heart. Measuring sticks when others tell me I should be over my loss. Measuring sticks that encourage me along the path of my grief journey.*

~ Marlene Moore, mother of Jared Moore (2004-KS)



**Dates:** December 2-5, 2020  
**Event:** Winter Family Retreat  
**Location:** Fairfield, Pennsylvania  
**Audience:** surviving family members of firefighters honored at the National Memorial

Open to all ages and family members, this event will focus on service, giving back to others at the holidays, self-care, reflection, and fellowship. Attendees will help decorate the Memorial site and the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Chapel for the annual Tree Lighting and will attend the service.

*Even though it has been 18 years since I lost my dad, the holidays are very difficult for me. This year for some reason I was struggling; however, after arriving at the retreat and renewing old friendships and meeting many more wonderful people I felt a calmness come over me. I had never had the opportunity to attend the tree lighting before this year. It was absolutely beautiful and I am already looking forward to future trips/functions with the foundation.*

~ Trish Dickerson, daughter of Louis Rickards (2002-DE)



**Date:** December 4, 2020  
**Event:** Holiday Tree Lighting  
**Location:** Emmitsburg, Maryland  
**Audience:** surviving family members, friends, and members of the fire service

Each year the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation decorates holiday trees in memory of all fallen firefighters. These beautiful trees are on display in the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Chapel, featuring ornaments from the families and departments of America's Fire Heroes from around the country.

### Educational Assistance Available for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

#### National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Sarbanes Scholarship Program

Spouses, life partners, children, and stepchildren of firefighters honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial are eligible to apply for the NFFF Sarbanes Scholarship Program and our partner programs. The NFFF Sarbanes Scholarships are awarded for undergraduate and graduate studies, vocational-technical training, and certification and job training programs. They may be used for study at in-state or out-of-state public and private schools.

The NFFF has made several changes to our scholarship programs in response to feedback received from key program donors. These changes are designed to place the



NFFF in a strong position when we re-apply annually to our donors for scholarship funding, as well as to encourage current and future donors to provide additional support to the NFFF scholarship programs. Due to the implementation of these changes, the 2020-2021 scholarship application will open on Wednesday, January 29, 2020. Future year application periods will resume with a January 1 opening.

A letter further explaining these changes will be sent out electronically to eligible scholarship applicants and will be made available on the NFFF's website when the application period opens. The most significant changes to the programs are:

- **New Application Deadline**—The application deadline for the NFFF scholarship programs has been changed from April 1 to March 1.
- **New Selection Criteria**—Scholarship awards under the Sarbanes Scholarship Program will no longer be made at the same level to all qualified applicants regardless of financial need or academic performance. Awards will now be made based upon a composite score that considers each applicant's financial need and academic performance, with an emphasis on financial need. This same scoring system will be used to make awards under the Alan Patrick Sondej Fund as well as a new scholarship program. Awards made by our partners under their existing partnership programs have not changed.
- **New Scholarship Program**—In addition to the current Sarbanes and Alan Patrick Sondej Memorial Scholarship Fund, Motorola Solutions Foundation has agreed to fund an Enhanced Scholarship Initiative that is designed to provide for larger, and in certain cases, full scholarships on an academic year-by-academic year basis. In order to be eligible for an award under this program, the applicant must be pursuing a major in a STEM subject or Public Safety field. Awards under this program are made annually and will be based upon an assessment of financial need and academic performance using a scoring system.
- **New Application Process**—Beginning in 2020, the NFFF scholarship application process will be electronic. As part of the process, the form asks each applicant to upload their FAFSA form. Applicants who choose to not upload their FAFSA form are still eligible for a scholarship award, but the amount of their award will be influenced due

to their composite score not including any credit for financial need. At the close of business on January 29, applicants can access the online application at <https://nff-foundation.smapply.io/>.

If you have questions or concerns regarding the changes to our scholarship programs, please contact Eric Nagle at [enagle@firehero.org](mailto:enagle@firehero.org). We encourage you to apply and look forward to working with you to make the 2020-2021 scholarship application and academic year a success.



### **Columbia Southern University (CSU) Scholarship**

Columbia Southern University (CSU) is proud to honor those who have served their communities. CSU will grant one scholarship to the spouse or partner of a firefighter who has been honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. This scholarship will cover up to 60 hours toward one online degree program with Columbia Southern University and will be applied directly to the recipient's tuition for up to three years or until the completion of the selected online degree program, whichever comes first.

#### **Eligibility**

- Widow, life partner, or dependent of a firefighter honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial
- High school transcript or equivalent (GED)
- Available to begin coursework within 90 days of the date of the award.
- Capable of maintaining a 2.0 undergraduate GPA or 3.0 graduate GPA.
- Remain in good standing with CSU throughout a degree program.
- Maintain continuous enrollment in a degree program.

#### **Application**

The application period is May 1–October 2, 2020, and the recipient will be announced in December 2020. For more information, e-mail [scholarships@columbiasouthern.edu](mailto:scholarships@columbiasouthern.edu) or call (800) 355-4977.