



# New Beginnings, New Approaches



Hello, friends. We hope that you were able to spend time doing things that bring you peace during the holidays.

We can all agree that 2020 was a year like none we have ever seen. The COVID pandemic brought collective loss and separation. Despite this additional challenge, we have worked to develop new approaches to help our community. Indeed, the ability to adapt to new circumstances is at the core of resilience and post-traumatic growth.

So while more than anything, we missed being with you in person—the inability to gather physically did not prevent us from creating ways to spend time with our Fire Hero Families.

**Here's to the New Beginnings, New Approaches, and Silver Linings of 2020!**

## Zoom: The Silver Lining

*"Y'all have done an outstanding job during this crazy year. The Zooms have been wonderful."*

One of our programming aspects that families say means the most is the opportunity to connect informally for friendship and conversation. We have offered workshops, video resources, and a few sessions that are purely social in nature—such as a virtual cookout for men, a holiday cookie exchange, and sessions where people can chat with others in their state or region.

Our families appreciate the opportunity to just “hang out” with one another—and Zoom makes that possible in a way that would not have been an option a decade ago.

*"I struggle daily and never know what kind of mood I will be in at the time of these events, but the variety is helpful."*

## NFFF Connect – The Power of Community – Online 24/7

Created during the global pandemic to continue to support and connect with Fire Hero Families, this online hub provides a “community” for families when they can't gather in person. Resources were created that included videos, workshops, news and toolkits focusing on self-care, wellness, and helping others during these unprecedented times. *Continuing in 2021.*

## Peer Support Groups – Weekly

On April 29, we hosted the first weekly virtual Peer Support Group meeting for family members of fallen firefighters. The 90-minute sessions enable Fire Hero Family members to meet informally with other families to share stories, struggles, and ideas. Participants say the group “has been a lifeline” that they “look forward to each week.” The group even opted to meet on Thanksgiving eve, since most were not traveling/gathering due to concerns about COVID. *Continuing in 2021.*

## Professionally Facilitated Support Groups – Weekly

On April 28, licensed psychologist Dr. Angela Moreland began hosting weekly support groups via Zoom, providing direct support to family members struggling with grief and the effects of the pandemic, social isolation, and parenting concerns. These support groups are especially helpful to those without a strong support system in place. *Continuing in 2021.*



## NFFF Comfort Zone Camp (ages 7 – 17) – June

This annual camp went all-virtual this year, offering a way to bring kids together while apart. As always, this year's CZC enabled children who are traveling the same path of grief to engage with others who understand. Campers received a “Camp

in a Box” with t-shirts, water bottle, pins, name badge, and supplies for camp projects! The June event included “Healing Circles” and activities such as crafts, a virtual bonfire and a closing Memorial Service. Parents noted that camp helped their children feel connected to others who have experienced loss—and provided additional strategies and tools to help kids express feelings and process grief and emotions. *Continuing in 2021.*

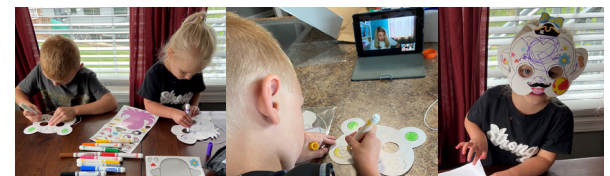
*"This was great because my son doesn't do well meeting new kids/people face to face. This helped ease his anxiety and not having to be somewhere that I'm not."*



## Camp HAL (ages 4-6) – August

With more campers than ever before, Camp HAL was filled with activities. Stories, stickers, masks, and bubble wands served as channels for sharing feelings about grief and loss. This virtual camp for the younger children (and their parents) combined grief components with creative activities for families to do together via Camp HAL-In-a-Box. Parent-only sessions focused on how to deal with their own grief in a constructive way while offering resources to help children at different developmental levels. Three virtual Camp HAL sessions are planned for 2021. It's a perfect way to serve children and parents who aren't able to travel or who feel more comfortable meeting virtually before attending the in-person camp. *Continuing in 2021.*

*"Thank you all NFFF for being so caring at the hardest time in our lives. My kids are very much enjoying their boxes!!"*



When we shifted to online programming, we were busy “virtually” all year long! We are here for you and look forward to our gatherings in the new year.

### Memorial Weekend – October

Due to the pandemic, families were not able to gather at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in October. But while we were disappointed to postpone the 2020 Memorial Weekend events, the nation’s fallen firefighters were not—nor will ever be—forgotten. On October 4, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation broadcasted *America’s Tribute to Fallen Firefighters* to honor the lives of 103 firefighters who died in the line of duty.

### Grit, Grace, and Growth: For Widowed People – November

This monthly workshop series began in November and continues through February 2021, and is specifically for people who have been widowed. The group meets monthly and utilizes interactive journals and short videos on topics related to widowhood. Workshops include time for discussion and interaction to share experiences, ideas, concerns, and hope. When participants were asked what they hope to get out of this experience, a resounding reply was “*coping skills for day-to-day life.*” *Continuing in 2021.*

### State Connections – November

Starting in fall of 2020, this new activity connected Fire Hero Families within each state/region. The monthly virtual meeting fosters conversation between families to help build local connections, share information, and find support closer to home. Future meetups will provide a great opportunity to meet other Fire Hero Families in your area and share information about fire hero family events. *Continuing in 2021.*

### Men Forging Ahead – November

Established in November, this virtual support group is “for men only!” Open to husbands, male life partners, fathers, brothers, and adult sons whose firefighter has been honored (or approved to be) at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. The gatherings foster camaraderie between men in the Fire Hero Family community, who often feel pressure to “be strong” for others or process feelings alone. Sessions offer the opportunity to connect with others who have experienced a similar loss, discuss shared experiences, and support one another. *Continuing in 2021.*

### Holiday Support Groups – November and December

Family members joined us for extra support during the two virtual Holiday Support Groups. The winter holiday season can be especially difficult—particularly in 2020. With memories of past celebrations, pressure to be festive (or pretend to be), and reminders that someone you love is missing, many grieving families dread this time of year. After attending the Holiday Support Groups, 80% said they were able to identify action steps to help navigate them through the holidays. In these sessions, there was no pressure to act merry or bright. Attendees shared ideas, experiences, and strategies for the holiday season. One take-away about the sessions: “*Be happy and grateful for the people around me.*”

### Virtual Holiday Tree Lighting – December

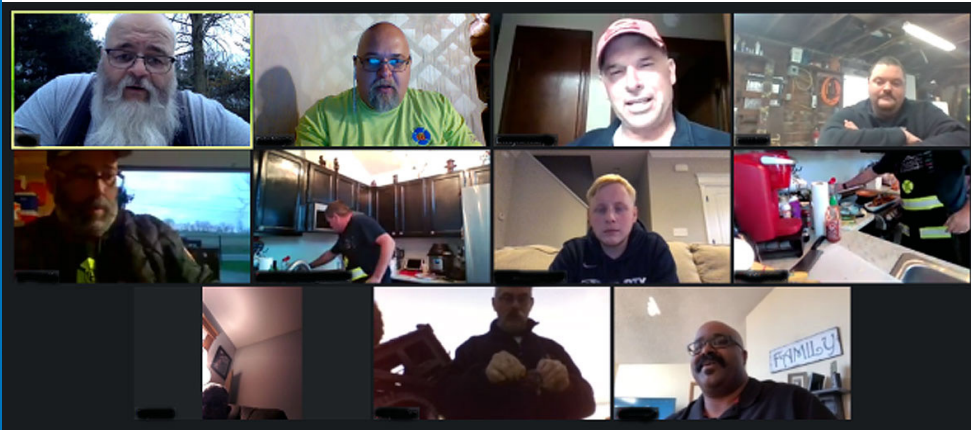
Unlike in previous years, we were together apart! A [pre-recorded video](#) with memories shared by families, music from past live Fire Hero Family Tree Lightings, and featuring several families for the countdown was aired on December 4. Memorial Chapel trees were adorned with ornaments from families and departments from across the nation. Honor Guards placed a wreath at the Memorial in remembrance of the fallen: shall they always be remembered.



### Holiday Cookie Exchange – December

We met our goal with the inaugural Holiday Cookie Exchange! 100% of the attendees agreed that the Cookie Exchange helped to lift their holiday spirits! Hosted by staff members on Zoom, family members traded family recipes and shared stories of their firefighters’ favorite cookies. It was

uplifting for us as well, to know how many of you take cookies to firehouses—and to know you felt more connected to the NFFF Community.



PO Drawer 498  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

301-447-1365  
[www.firehero.org](http://www.firehero.org)

### Join us on Social Media!

Facebook group (for Fire Hero Families): <http://www.facebook.com/groups/NFFFFireHeroFamilyPrograms>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/FireHeroFamily>

Instagram (for Fire Hero Family youth/young adult children): <http://www.instagram.com/fireherokids>