



PROMISING PRACTICES FOR Increasing Diversity Among First Responders

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SITE PROFILE
Camp Fully Involved

PREPARED BY



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Site Visit Findings

First responder fields serve a crucial role in the safety and well-being of communities around the country. Public citizens and officials have placed a renewed focus on improving both the representativeness of first responders in relation to the populations they serve, and the agencies' relations with their local communities. The assumption underlying this focus is that a more representative first responder workforce will lead to better community relations and fairer treatment of the public served. *Promising Practices for Increasing Diversity Among First Responders*, conducted by Coffey Consulting, LLC on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor Chief Evaluation Office in 2016, was an exploratory study that involved five in-depth site visits and a literature review to identify promising practices that first responder agencies and organizations can leverage to increase the diversity of their workforces.

The following site profile is one of five available for the first responder departments and training providers that were selected for this study, based on both the extent to which their first responder workforce is representative of the local population, and their use of practices that align with the human resources literature as being effective for developing a diverse workforce:

- Atlanta Police Department (APD)
- BAY EMT, Oakland, CA
- **Camp Fully Involved (CFI), Concord, NH**
- Dallas Police Department (DPD)

- San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD)

The full study (available at <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/CompletedStudies.htm>) details a number of common practices along the employment pipeline, from outreach and recruitment to the retention and advancement among those hired. In addition to promising practices, a number of challenges were identified to further diversifying first responders, including a negative public image of first responders in the community, low pay, and restrictive selection and hiring processes.

Camp Fully Involved

Background and Unique Practices

Camp Fully Involved (CFI) was selected as a study site based on its unique practices to increasing diversity in the firefighting field, with a particular focus on women. The study team interviewed the CFI director, two representatives from partnering organizations, four lead instructors (three of which were also founding members), an adjunct instructor who is also a former cadet, and four alumnae. Members of the study team conducted the site visit in May, 2016.

CFI is a hands-on, week-long residential camp located in Concord, New Hampshire, for girls age 14 (and having completed 8th grade) to 20 who are interested in fire science. The camp's mission is to “to provide young women a safe, dynamic, interactive and physically challenging environment to gain strength and knowledge while building confidence and leadership skills.” (CFI, n.d-b.). CFI has been hosted by the New Hampshire State Fire Academy since opening in July 2007. The Academy donates the use of its state-of-the-art facility, including its dorms and some equipment, to CFI.

While the percentage of female firefighters has slowly increased over the past three decades, women comprise only 3 percent of career firefighters nationally (National Fire Protection Association, n.d.) and only 1 percent of firefighters in New Hampshire (Dinan, 2015). Founding director Jess Wyman, prompted by her own experience as a firefighter—currently serving as the first female Lieutenant at Nashua, NH Fire Rescue—and with encouragement from staff at a similar program in Oklahoma, created CFI to respond to the need for a more diverse fire service workforce.

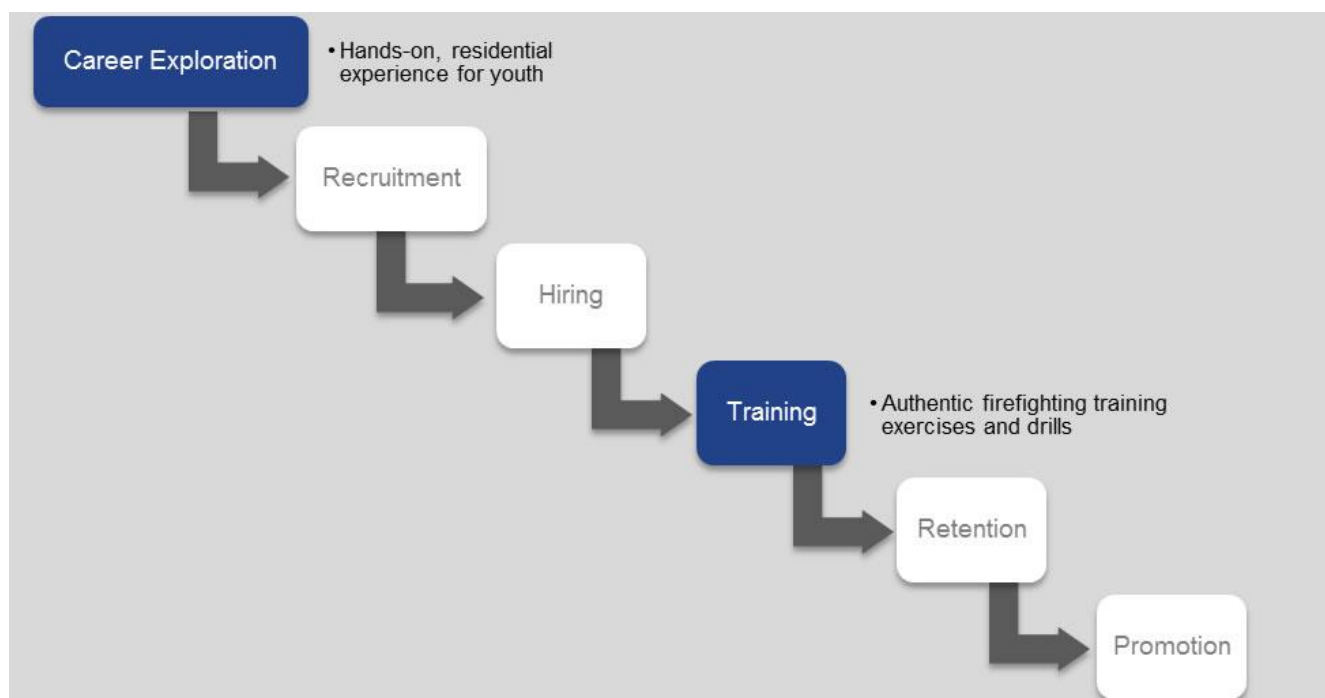
Unlike other youth firefighter camps, CFI is unique for several reasons: the cadets, or participants, are all female; it is residential; the staff include both female and male firefighters; and cadets are exposed to authentic firefighter training exercises and drills, such as extinguishing a car fire, rappelling down a four-story burn building, and—CFI's capstone activity—putting out a building fire. As one of the founding members of CFI remarked about the all-girl design of the camp, “I think not having the boys here; [the cadets'] guard goes down and they can be who they want to be.”

Although CFI is focused on helping girls learn about and experience the firefighting profession, applicants are not required to be committed to a fire science career; the hope is that cadets “will gain a confidence and inner strength that come through accomplishment and success, and those qualities will stay with them no matter what career paths they should choose” (National Fire Protection Association, n.d.). According to Wyman, “We have a lot [of cadets] who are already interested in fire services, but for ones who don't have connections to fire service, we really want to open doors.” And, as echoed by an instructor, “We've had some girls come in thinking they'll be firefighters, and then they say ‘not for me,’ but they still come out with skills that are valuable.”

While CFI has not conducted formal outcomes assessments, it has collected informal self-reported data on the post-camp activities of alumnae. Data provided by CFI show that, as of the 2015 summer session, 57 percent of cadets (or, 97 cadets) either continued in fire science, joined a fire exploring program,¹ or attended college for a fire-based degree program. Of these cadets, 23 percent (or, 22 cadets) were hired as volunteers, paid on-call, or full-time career firefighters.

Figure 1 displays where promising practices identified at CFI fall along the employment pipeline.

Figure 1. Overview of Diversity Efforts Along Key Points in the Employment Pipeline at CFI



Leadership

Lieutenant Wyman created the camp based on her experiences as a woman firefighter seeking greater representation in the field. Wyman, the director, and core instructional staff volunteer their time to work for the camp while it is in session and throughout the year to review and refine the curriculum, obtain and maintain equipment, and plan for the next summer camp.

¹ Exploring includes all active explorers/junior firefighting programs and those cadets who are currently pursuing a fire-service, EMS, or military college path.

CFI Highlight

The four CFI alumnae spoke of going through a personal transformation during the week at camp. Their experience at CFI helped them build a professional network through the connections they made with their fellow cadets and camp instructors as they worked towards their goals to become fire service professionals.

When asked what stood out to her most about the camp, one alumna spoke of how hearing about the instructors' personal experiences with being from an underrepresented group in the field helped her to feel supported. She reflected, "Camp really helped get that mentality of 'you're a girl, you can't do this' out of our heads."

The alumnae interviewed said the instructors cultivated a supportive climate and the cadets rallied around each other, helping each other to complete each of the activities and cheering each other on. Another alumna, who is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in fire science, said of the camp: "It was the pushing you to be good, if you were doing something wrong, they'd show you a new technique."

Another alumna, who is working towards becoming a fire investigator, credited the relationships and training she received at the camp for her decision to pursue fire science. Alumna described how the hard work they put into the camp and skills they learned also helped increase their confidence in their abilities to be successful firefighters.