



Celebrating the Stories of FDNY Women



Chimamanda Ngozie Adchie, the Nigerian novelist, says “the consequence of a single story is that it robs people of dignity.” She says that a single story emphasizes our differences rather than our similarities.

When I meet with people throughout the Department to explain my role as Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, my job is not only to tell my story but to learn about the journeys of everyone possible, which are all part of the rich tapestry that we all share as One FDNY.

It is our differences, the magic of our unique expressions, that help contribute to our success. My door is open to hear the stories of everyone: why they came here, what they have contributed, how they have grown, how they want to continue to be part of FDNY’s success.

There is not a single story that I refuse to hear because I am committed to telling the full story, the story that is 152 years of many different perspectives.

Our story is not only about emergency medical services but also about fire prevention, not only about firehouses but also about the communities that surround them, not only about marine rescue but also about fire marshals, not only about uniforms but also about civilians, not only about disputes but also about harmony, not only about discord but also about empowerment, not only about men but also about women.

It is through the lens of this sacred light that we celebrate all women, but our celebration never ends. Women’s History Month helps commence an appreciation of women, but it is merely a catalyst to engage, inspire and uplift women of all backgrounds, gifts, talents, and expressions.

Our light of support, strength and solidarity will manifest in gatherings, networks and opportunities to sing our praises, ignite our ideas and share our stories.

FDNY’s Quality of Work Life committee realizes that recognizing the light within someone else makes our own lights shine

brighter and thus awards FDNY women whose lights shine the brightest at the end of every March. This year’s ceremony participants include: FDNY High School student Jada Martin and awardees Deputy Chief Grace Cacciola, EMT Tracey Calhoun, EMT Yanina Dresskaya, Anecia Foreman, Carline Germain, Captain Kathleen Knuth, EMT Gloria Leonard, Lt. Tracy Lewis, Firefighter Jackie-Michelle Martinez, and Silvia Morris.

Our lights are merely reflections of the Department’s strong character, bold courage and solid commitment. Each award recipient is an opportunity for FDNY to reflect a new aspect of the amazing stories that shape and form its tradition of bravery, honor and courage. There is no greater legacy for future generations than to pass on the eternal light that will keep shining, strengthening and empowering everyone.

Deputy Commissioner Cecilia B. Loving
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer



FDNY's Women Leadership Discuss Building Positive Relationships

In commemoration of Women's History Month, the Fire Commissioner's Office convened a panel of women to discuss career advancement. The panel, moderated by Fire Commissioner Liaison Amanda Schmidt, featured many of the female leadership in the Department, including Deputy Commissioner of Legal Affairs Terryl Brown, Deputy Commissioner of Government Affairs and Special Programs Laura Kavanagh, Assistant Commissioner of Management Analysis and Planning Kat Thomson, Assistant Commissioner of Youth Workforce and Pipeline Programs Michele Maglione, Assistant Commissioner of Recruitment and Retention Nafeesah Noonan, Assistant

Commissioner of Human Resources Donay Queenan, and Chief Medical Officer of Health Services Dr. Kerry Kelly.

The panelists shared their varied professional backgrounds, discussed their experiences working in a male-dominated workplace, explained how they navigated returning to work after having children, and provided advice on achieving work-life balance. Benefits of mentoring were addressed, as well as the importance of finding allies, obtaining trustworthy career advice, and building positive relationships with colleagues. The conversation also focused on the need for women to be confident in their skills and abilities and to reject the idea that they

cannot manage a family as well as advance their careers. The panelists encouraged women to seek opportunities beyond their comfort zones and not to live in a realm of speculation or doubt but to fully engage the opportunities around them.



Nneka Martin enjoys comments made by Kavanagh, Maglione, Kelly, and Queenan.

Diversity and Inclusion Spotlight:

Valerie Loubriel Shines as Disability Rights Coordinator

If you have never requested a reasonable accommodation, you may be unaware of Valerie Loubriel's dedication and commitment as FDNY's Disability Rights Coordinator. Her passion for helping others is underscored by her experience: 14 years as a Captain with the Army Reserves Judge Advocate General Corps, over 25 years practicing employment law with the City of New York and four years at FDNY. "A reasonable accommodation is an assistance or change to the work environment that enables a member to perform his/her job despite having a disability or medical condition," Valerie explains. "The law requires the Department to provide reasonable accommodations unless doing so would impose an undue hardship."



She enjoys facilitating what the law calls the "interactive process," which is essentially providing a cooperative dialogue so that members of the Department can request accommodations for their needs. This confidential interactive process provides accommodations for a number of requests, including but not limited to, modified duty for individuals with disabilities, adjusted work schedules for individuals post-childbirth, and a private place and break times to express breast milk. Religious accommodations include taking leave for religious obser-

vances, wearing religious head gear, or praying in the workplace. Support is also provided for domestic violence or sex offense victims.

Ishakia Andrews, Assistant Disability Rights Coordinator, not only considers herself "fortunate to work under Valerie's leadership but also blessed to sup-

port women and men who give their lives unconditionally." Another member of the Disability Rights team, EMS Lieutenant Mark Taylor, who has 18 years of service with FDNY, is grateful to provide the added perspective of a uniformed member of the Department who has "walked in many of the shoes" of those who seek accommodations.

Valerie stresses that it is "the member's responsibility to notify the Department that an accommodation is needed." Once the request is made, responding to it is a "collaborative effort" between the member and the Department to determine how best to respond to their personal needs, as well as the Department's operational needs. She and her team work diligently to make sure that the accommodation is effective. "The accommodation may not be exactly what is requested," the Disability Rights Coordinator says, "but as long as it addresses fully the member's needs, I consider it successful."

UPCOMING EVENTS

MENTOR-MENTEE DRIVE: *March 30, 2017.* Professional development, leadership and networking will be enhanced through one-on-one mentoring. Sign up to be a Mentor or Mentee by emailing your name, title, unit, mentor or mentee preference, and mentoring experience, if relevant, to Diversity.Inclusion@fdny.nyc.gov.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH EVENT: *April 1, 2017.* Women Firefighters in different stages of the job will present to discuss their careers and what inspired them to join the FDNY. Location: FDNY Fire Academy, Randall's Island. Time: 9am-4pm.

ONE-ON-ONE CDIO MEETINGS: *Beginning April 3, 2017.* These are ongoing meetings that any member of the Department can schedule by emailing their name, title, rank, question, comment or issue to Diversity.Inclusion@fdny.nyc.gov. Informal meet and greets are encouraged.

ARE YOU BRAVE ENOUGH 5K RACE: *April 8, 2017.* The United Women Firefighters and the Vulcan Society are throwing an obstacle race and festival. The Festival will feature learn CPR, fire safety, free obstacle course and games for kids and lots of giveaways. Location: St. Mary's Park on 450 St. Anne's Avenue. Time: 9am- 5pm. For more information: www.united-womenfirefighters.org/are-you-brave-enough.

AFFINITY LAUNCH EVENT: *April 27, 2017.* We will launch AFFINITY, a new civilian open forum to facilitate positive professional collaboration and foster an inclusive workplace.

WOMEN'S EXPO: *May 18, 2017.* The Expo will be a full-day celebration event with guest speakers to inspire women within FDNY as well as other NYC agencies. In anticipation, a storytelling platform will be launched to document the unique and compelling stories of women. participate by telling your own story or that of a woman who positively affected your life, please contact Diversity.Inclusion@fdny.nyc.gov.

SPEED MENTORING: *August 17, 2017.* Practice your quick introductions for a structured, fast-paced and fun way to collaborate, connect and communicate with colleagues.

CROSS-CULTURAL CONNECT: *September 27, 2017.* Broaden your knowledge and understanding of cultures by sharing stories, customs and contacts for a unique mentoring event.

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EMT Yadira Arroyo

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Submissions? Feedback? Email us at

Diversity.Inclusion@fdny.nyc.gov