



More Than a School Visit: A Message for Representation and Inclusion

During the month of October, schools across the country participate in Fire Safety Week. Young students are eager to learn more about firefighters as community helpers and are interested in learning ways to stay safe. Fire departments often take this opportunity to visit local schools and demonstrate fire safety procedures, give tours of the fire engine and ambulance, and answer students' questions.

One student experienced a particularly impactful lesson when the local fire department visited her school. She turned to her teacher and said, "I didn't know girls could be firefighters!"

Her teacher was completely stunned by her comment. Before this moment, becoming a firefighter had never been an option in the student's mind simply because she had never seen anyone who looked like her.

The teacher realized that for most of her class, this was the first time they had ever seen a female firefighter in person. Pictures in books simply were not enough. What if even more years had gone by for the students without knowing they could become firefighters too?

This story illustrates the importance of representation. What may seem like a routine visit to a local school is in fact a chance to make a lasting impact on the next potential generation of firefighters. When people meet someone they can connect with, this invites an opportunity to say, "I can do this too."

Of course, representation does not strictly apply to gender. Representation is allowing people to see themselves belonging in that space. Representation lies deeper than the numbers and statistics that the term "diversity" typically connotes.

The next time you visit a local school or host a community outreach event, remember that you are an ambassador for representation and inclusion in ways you might not even realize.

You never know who might feel invited to join and become a volunteer because of you.