

## **Volunteers:**

### **The Core of the American Red Cross Response, Preparedness**

Autumn Thompson

American Red Cross volunteer

American Red Cross (ARC) volunteers and donors fulfill our mission of preventing and alleviating suffering from emergency situations and inspire those around the country and world to take part in giving back.

ARC administers several different programs within the emergency preparedness arena and prioritizes education. Whether helping families consider the functional needs during an evacuation, such as pet care, or training communities in CPR and first aid, ARC educates communities to be prepared and unafraid in the event of a disaster.

Volunteers are critical in assisting with disaster preparedness efforts. Ninety percent of the ARC's work is completed by roughly 300,000 U.S. volunteers who respond to more than 64,000 incidents annually.

“The mission of our organization is to help people in their time of need through leveraging our volunteer resources,” said ARC Delmarva Chapter Executive Director Theresa Young. “We are truly a volunteer lead organization, as our volunteers provide such valuable perspectives on how to best break through to communities in need.”

## **Who DAT?**

Red Cross Disaster Action Teams (DAT) are teams of volunteers that respond to an emergency call within two hours. Emergency calls will come in from community partners, such as local fire departments, and occasionally from individual community members.

DAT crews are ARC's public face in the community and make a difference to survivors of various emergencies during their most critical times. These crews may include volunteers who focus on mental health and trauma awareness, provide immediate basic assistance, and identify safe housing environments for displaced community members.

Some volunteers are trained mental health nurses and counselors who use their licenses and skills to help with the immediate effects of trauma caused by emergencies like house fires or a mass shooting. These volunteers visit shelters and canvas communities following major disasters to determine how survivors are coping, and they provide crisis-based mental health intervention if necessary. If a survivor needs long-term services, ARC nurses can often provide referrals to community resources.

## **Recruitment**

When recruiting disaster preparedness volunteers, effective listening skills, sympathy and empathy, and determination are desired qualities. Volunteers must be dedicated to helping others

in their time of need. They must be able to look at the whole scene, assess the immediate situation, and determine how to best help a person in that moment.

“Having the ability to listen and think critically helps Red Cross volunteers be able to provide much needed compassion that lets survivors know that we are here to help them get back on the road to recovery,” Young explained.

## Training

A general monthly time commitment is required for most volunteers. The level of training and opportunities to progress in skillsets are plentiful and fully up to the volunteer. ARC volunteer trainings are uniform and specific to the type of work they wish to assist in and to their age range. For example, a volunteer with an early childhood education background may be trained in the Pillowcase or PEDRO Projects, which are elementary emergency preparedness programs that urge children to make household emergency kits and have preparedness conversations with their families. Younger volunteers may want to become blood ambassadors at blood drives, or take lifeguarding or babysitter certification courses.

The ARC teaches volunteers how to provide life-saving aid by only providing chest compressions; and basic first aid for cuts, burns, and head, neck, and other traumatic injuries. Volunteers also learn how to effectively manage dynamic personalities and emotions during an emergency.

ARC is always in need of volunteers. To learn how to become an ARC volunteer, visit: <https://rdcrss.org/2Rgm6xq> or e-mail: [gcrvolunteerservices@redcross.org](mailto:gcrvolunteerservices@redcross.org). To review the wide array of ARC trainings, visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

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