Putting out fires is just part of the day's work for these teens.

Rescue Rangers

Teen volunteers fight fires and perform daring rescues in Alaska.

By Sarah Rehman

They can rescue babies from burning buildings, rappel from water towers in emergency situations, and perform daring ice rescues. No, these aren't the latest comic-book superheroes—although some people like to think of them that way. These are the Dragon Slayers—a teenage emergency squad in Aniak, Alaska.

Wanted: Brave Teens!

Why would a group of teens perform such rescues? The answer has a lot to do with the area where they live.

Aniak is a small village in the Arctic. It's located 150 miles from the nearest city. So, when a disaster happens, it can take a very long time for rescue crews to arrive. And in an emergency situation, when time is critical, that's too long.

Pete Brown, a former US Army medic, realized that firsthand, when his son, Jeremiah, was hit by a four-wheeler in 1993. It took hours for help to arrive. Fortunately, Jeremiah survived and recovered, but the experience changed Brown's life. He realized that Aniak needed a reliable rescue squad. The only problem was that many people had full-time jobs and couldn't volunteer to help during the day. That's when he came up with the idea for a rescue team of teens.

The teens would attend school during the day. But if an emergency occurred, they would leave to help. The teens would then make up their schoolwork later.

Tough Training

So what exactly does it take to be a Dragon Slayer? Teens must maintain passing grades in school to stay on the team. They must also train hard. They take emergency training courses, which include first aid and CPR. They also practice difficult drills, like performing a rescue while blindfolded.

Dragon Slayers train to rescue people in car wrecks.

Rescue Efforts

Their hard work and training is worth the effort. In the past 20 years, the Dragon Slayers have performed many different rescues, such as resuscitating heart-attack victims, rescuing injured snowmobilers, and even delivering babies!

The program isn't just rewarding to the victims, but to the teens who participate as well. The rescue work gives them discipline and keeps them focused. Many Dragon Slayers have gone on to graduate high school and pursue higher education. Some have become certified

EMTs, firefighters, nurses, paramedics, rescue divers, and physician assistants.

"Being a Dragon Slayer was an incredibly rewarding experience," says former member Mariah Brown, who became a Navy rescue swimmer. "Helping people made me feel good about myself and gave me confidence to succeed at anything."

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