

# Today, I made a **DIFFERENCE!**

*A coloring book about local government —  
your community of cities, towns, and counties!*



# About ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government management worldwide through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics. Through expansive partnerships with local governments, federal agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic funders, the organization gathers information on topics such as sustainability, health care, aging communities, economic development, cybersecurity, and performance measurement and management data on a variety of local government services—all of which support related training, education, and technical assistance.

ICMA provides support, publications, data and information, peer and results-oriented assistance, and training and professional development to more than 12,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world.

[icma.org](http://icma.org)

To order print copies of this book, please visit [icma.org/makeadifference](http://icma.org/makeadifference).

For more information about this resource or ICMA's career initiatives, K-12, and civics education programs, visit [icma.org/careers](http://icma.org/careers) or [icma.org/civicsed](http://icma.org/civicsed). You can also email [careers@icma.org](mailto:careers@icma.org).

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# Introduction

**Today...I made a difference!** The inspiration for this coloring book are the millions of men and women who work each day to make our communities great places to live, work, and play. The thousands of city, town, and county staff that work to improve our infrastructure (streets, bridges, and light rail), our safety (police, fire, and medical professionals), our health (clean water, public and mental health, and waste and recycling pickup), recreation (parks, pools, and libraries), our volunteers, our elected officials (council members, mayors, and commissioners), and the professionals that manage the budget and administration.

Another goal of this coloring book is to raise awareness of the public spirit that inspires your neighbors to work for the betterment of the community. Our national government gets a lot of attention every day, but the level of government that impacts you most, and every day, is your local government.

Local government employees work hard each and every day to make a difference – for you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc A. Ott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marc" being the most prominent.

Marc A. Ott  
Executive Director, ICMA

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Today, I helped keep you safe.

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**F**irefighters are ready day and night to help keep you safe. They will risk their lives to save you if you are ever in a fire. Do you know any other people who help keep you safe?



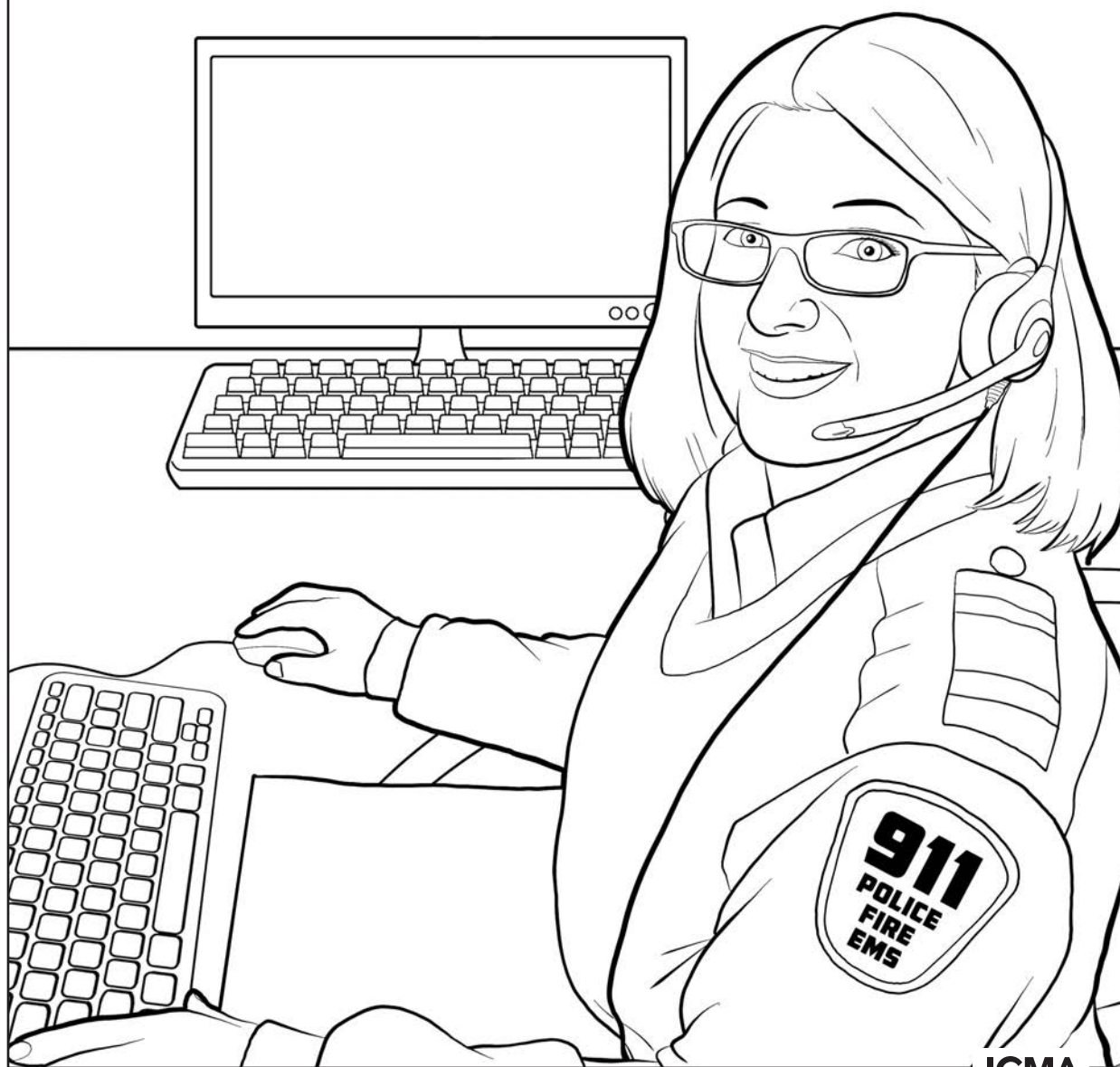
Libraries have a lot of fun activities for people like story times, crafts, and sing-a-longs. They also have lots of books, movies, and music you can check out for free! Have you ever been to the library? What did *you* do there?



**P**olice officers keep us safe from anyone who might try to hurt us. They can also help us if we are lost or scared. Have you ever met a police officer? Did you know how to contact them for help?

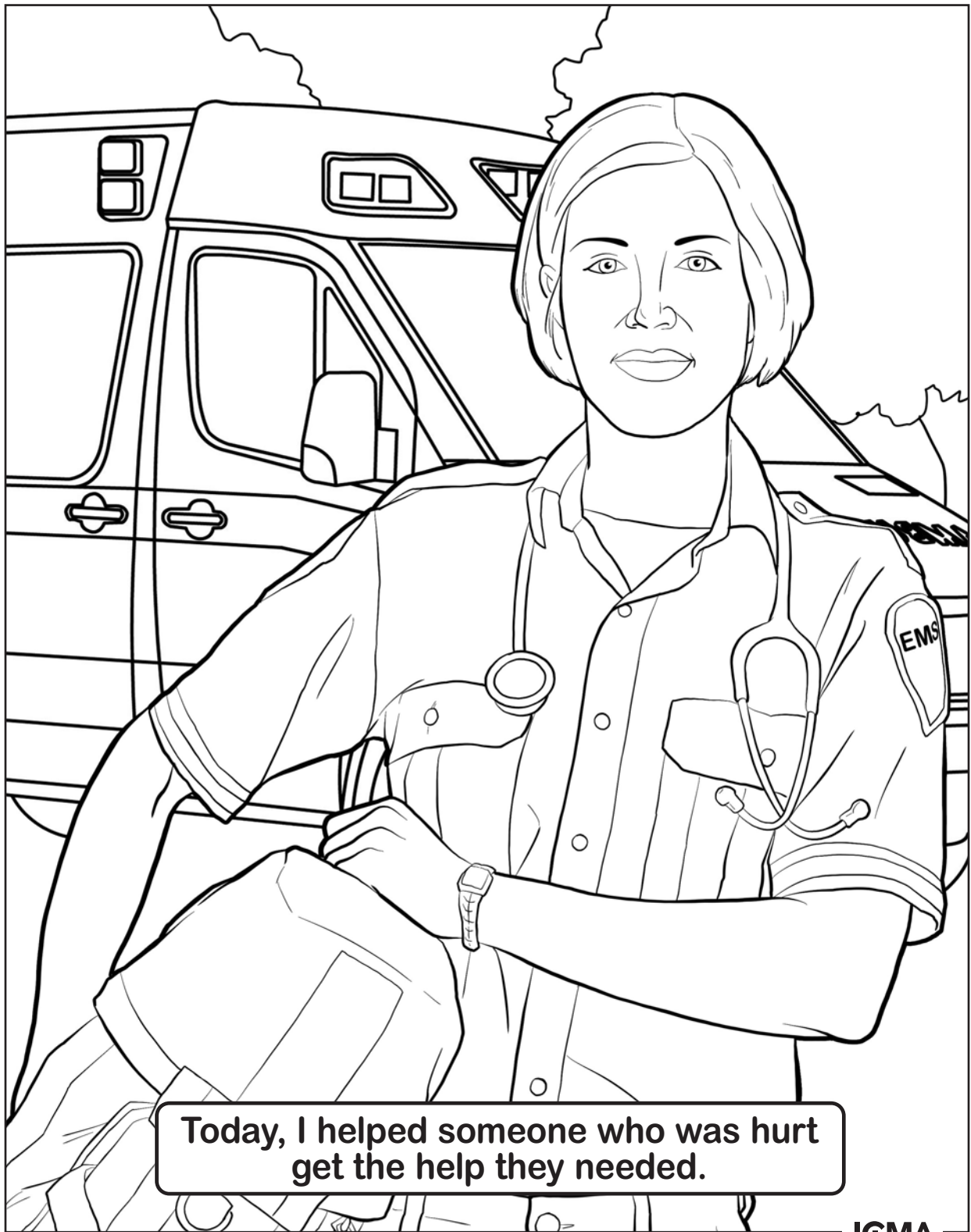


Today, I helped someone to safety.

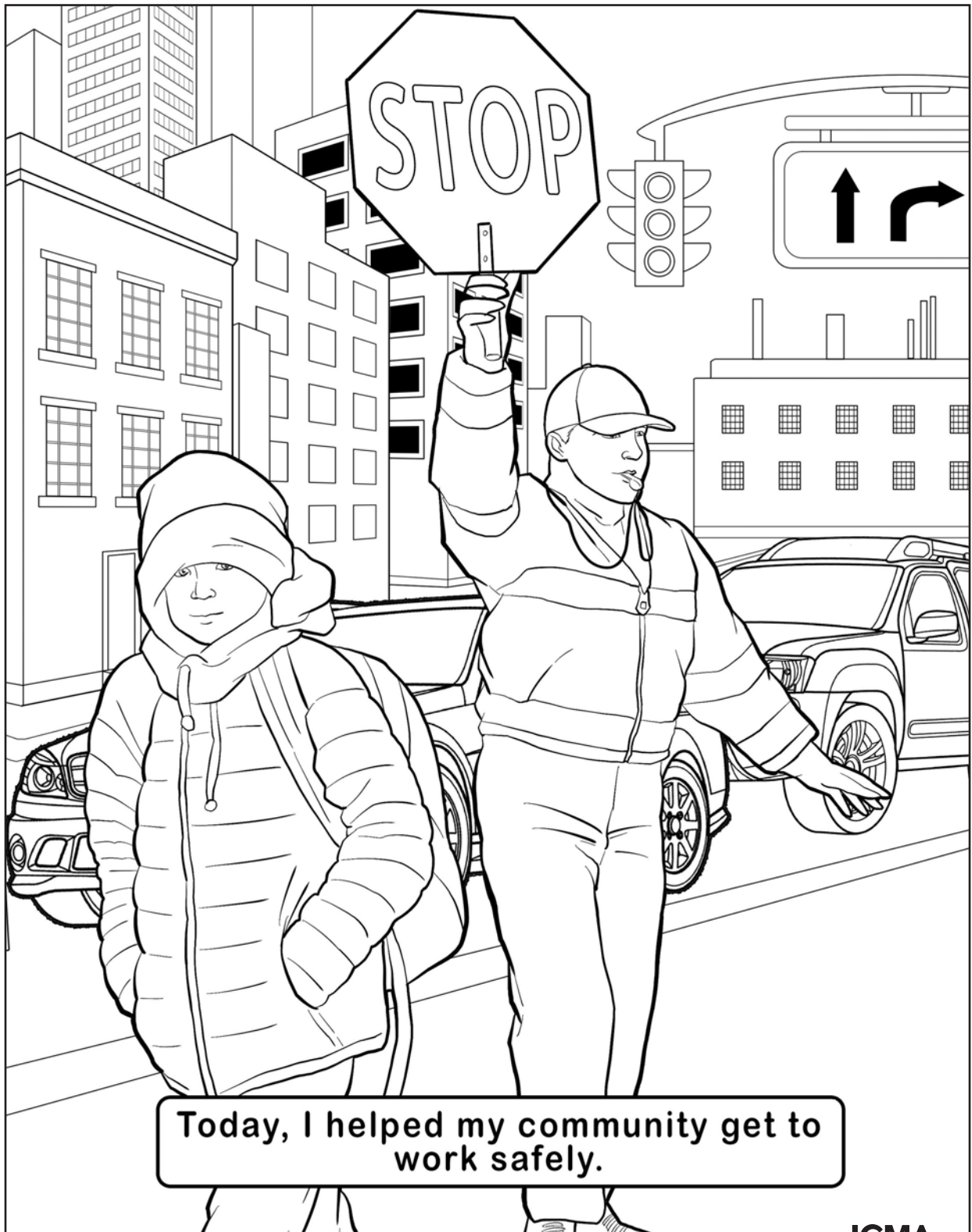


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**O**ur 9-1-1 operators answer all calls for help. If you ever see a fire, if someone in your home is badly injured, or if someone is hurting you, pick up a phone and call 9-1-1. The person who answers will send police, firefighters, and an ambulance if you are in trouble. Do you know how to call 9-1-1 from a phone if there is an emergency?



**E**mergency medical technicians (EMTs) respond to 9-1-1 calls when someone is hurt or seriously injured. They can help you where you are, and if your injuries are bad, they will take you to a hospital in the ambulance. Have you ever seen or heard an ambulance? Why do you think they have flashing lights and sirens?



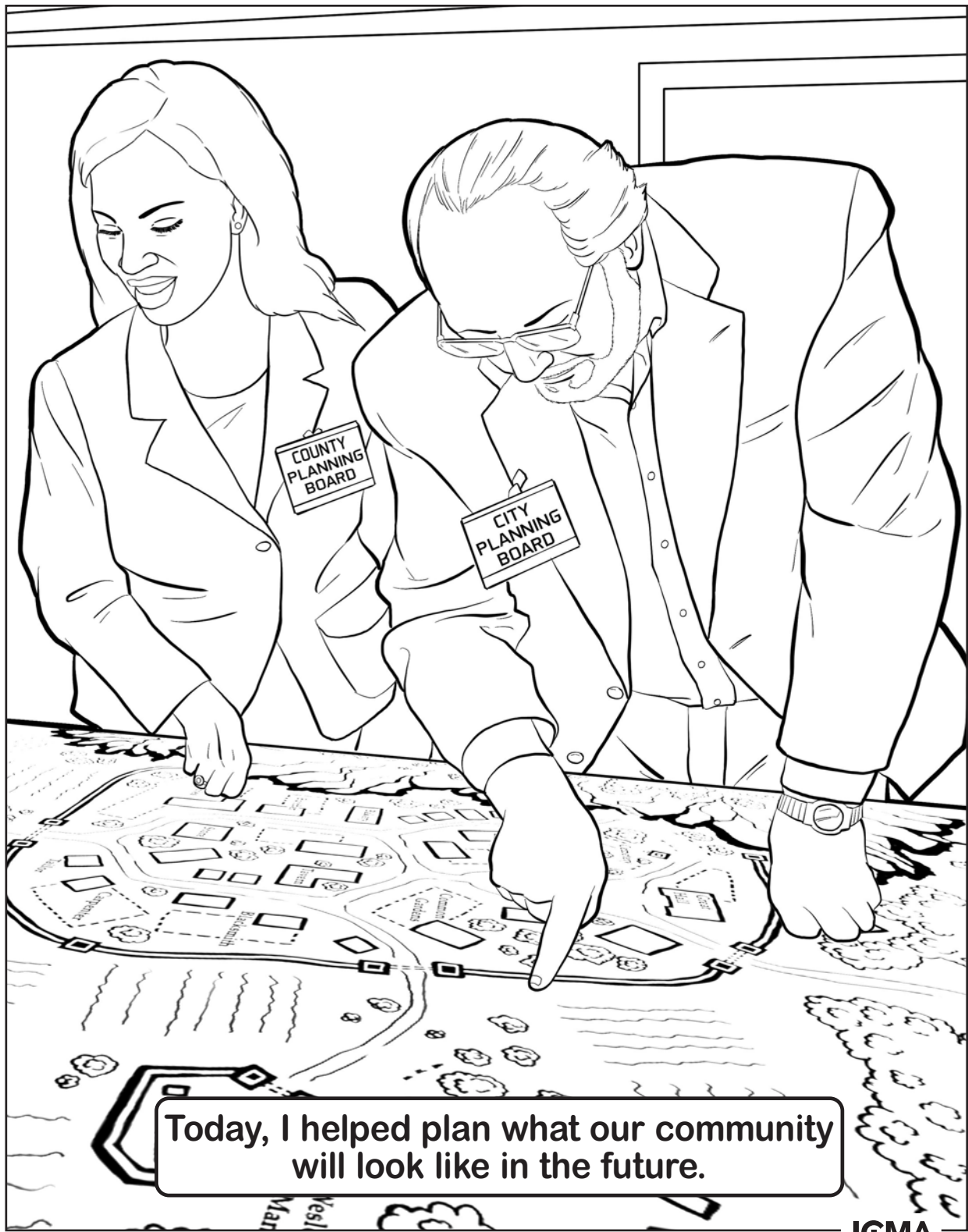
Today, I helped my community get to work safely.

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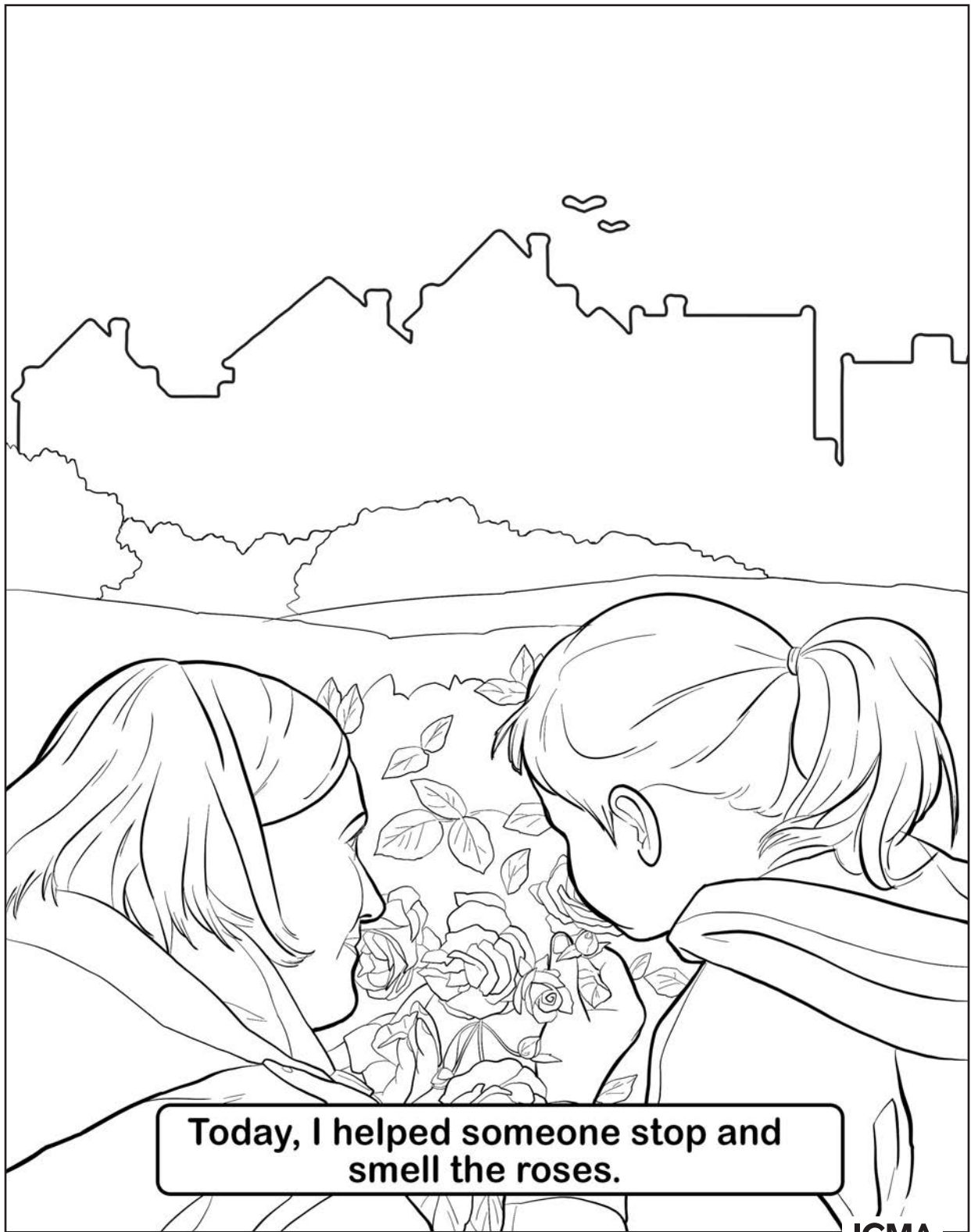
**C**rossing guards help make sure it's safe to cross busy streets. Street signs and traffic lights tell cars and people where they can turn and when they can go or if they must stop. You should never cross a busy road unless there is a crossing guard or a street signal to let you know it is safe. How do you know when it is safe to cross a busy street?



**Y**our local government makes all kinds of parks, pools, sports fields, gyms, and places for kids to play. Do you like fishing, hiking, swimming or playing sports? Do you have a local community park that lets you do those things?

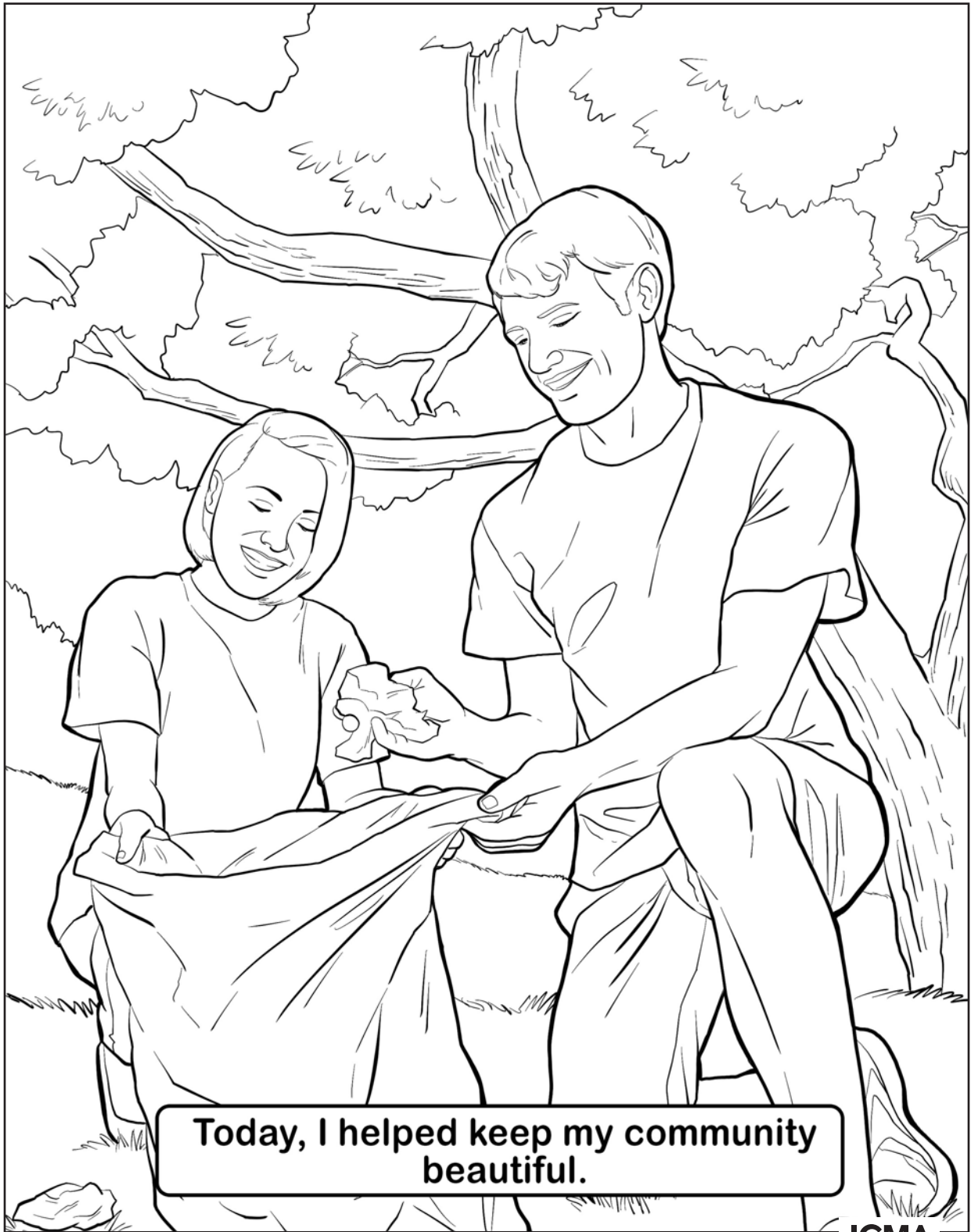


Local governments work to decide where schools, businesses, parks, roads and houses can be built. They also find ways to protect the environment and keep the community beautiful. What is something would you would build or change to make your community better?



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**M**any communities have open park spaces with walking paths to let people explore native trees, plants, and flowers like this rose garden. Have you ever gone in a hike? What kinds of plants, animals and insects did you see?



**Today, I helped keep my community beautiful.**

**ICMA**

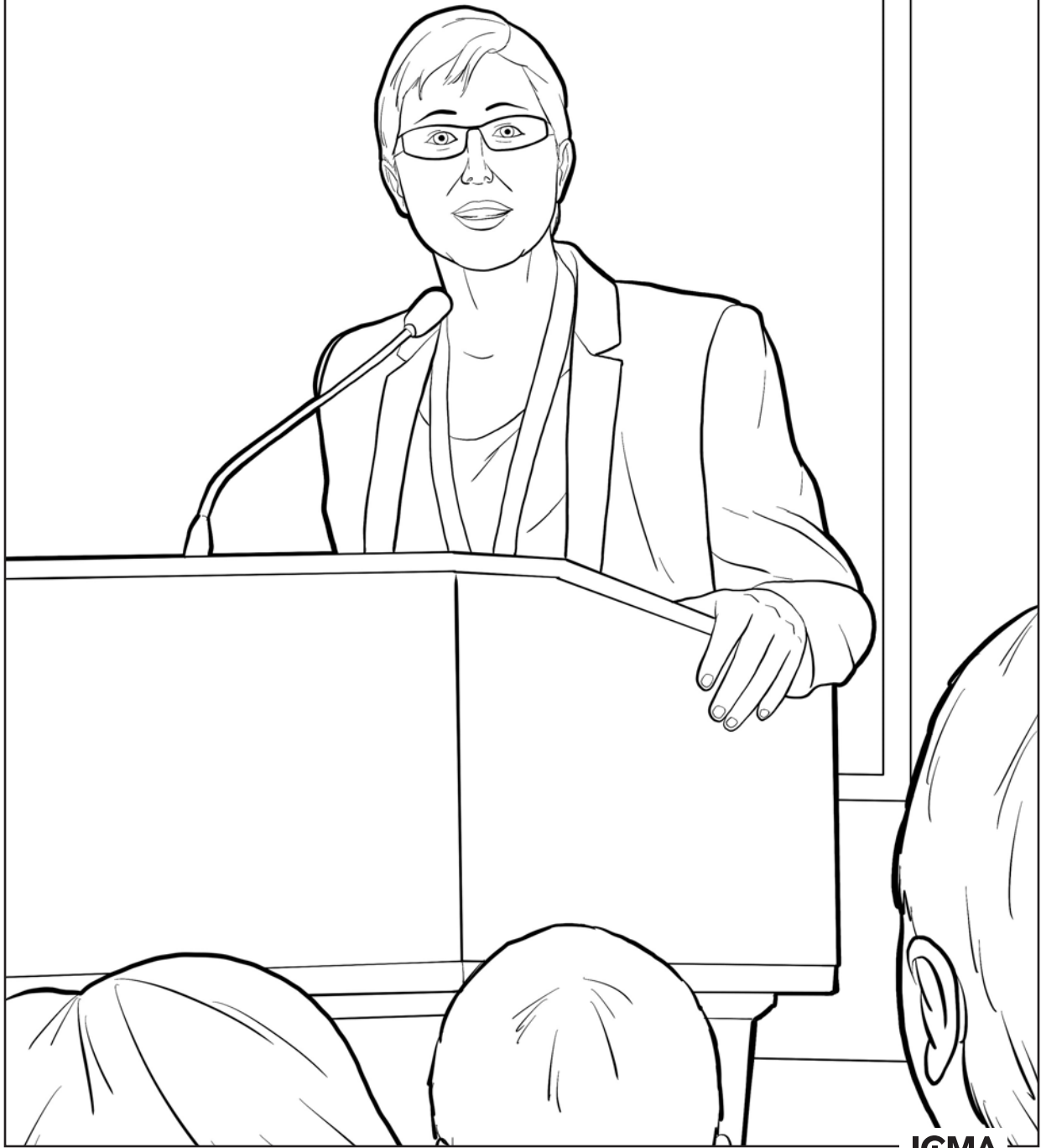
**Y**our local government helps keep neighborhoods, businesses, and parks clean by making sure litter, trash, and recycling is removed. This is an important job, and you can help by always putting your garbage in the right place. Do you know what material to put in recycling and what to put in the trash?



Local governments can help people get doctor checkups, food, and exercise they need to help them stay healthy. Have you ever been to the school nurse? What did the nurse do to see if you were OK?



Today, I pulled together a  
divided community.



**L**ocal governments are here to meet the needs of the people in our community. They hold meetings, elections, and online forums so people can speak up and be heard. What are some of the ways you are able to speak to your teacher when you want to be heard?

Today, I helped a child who needed guidance.

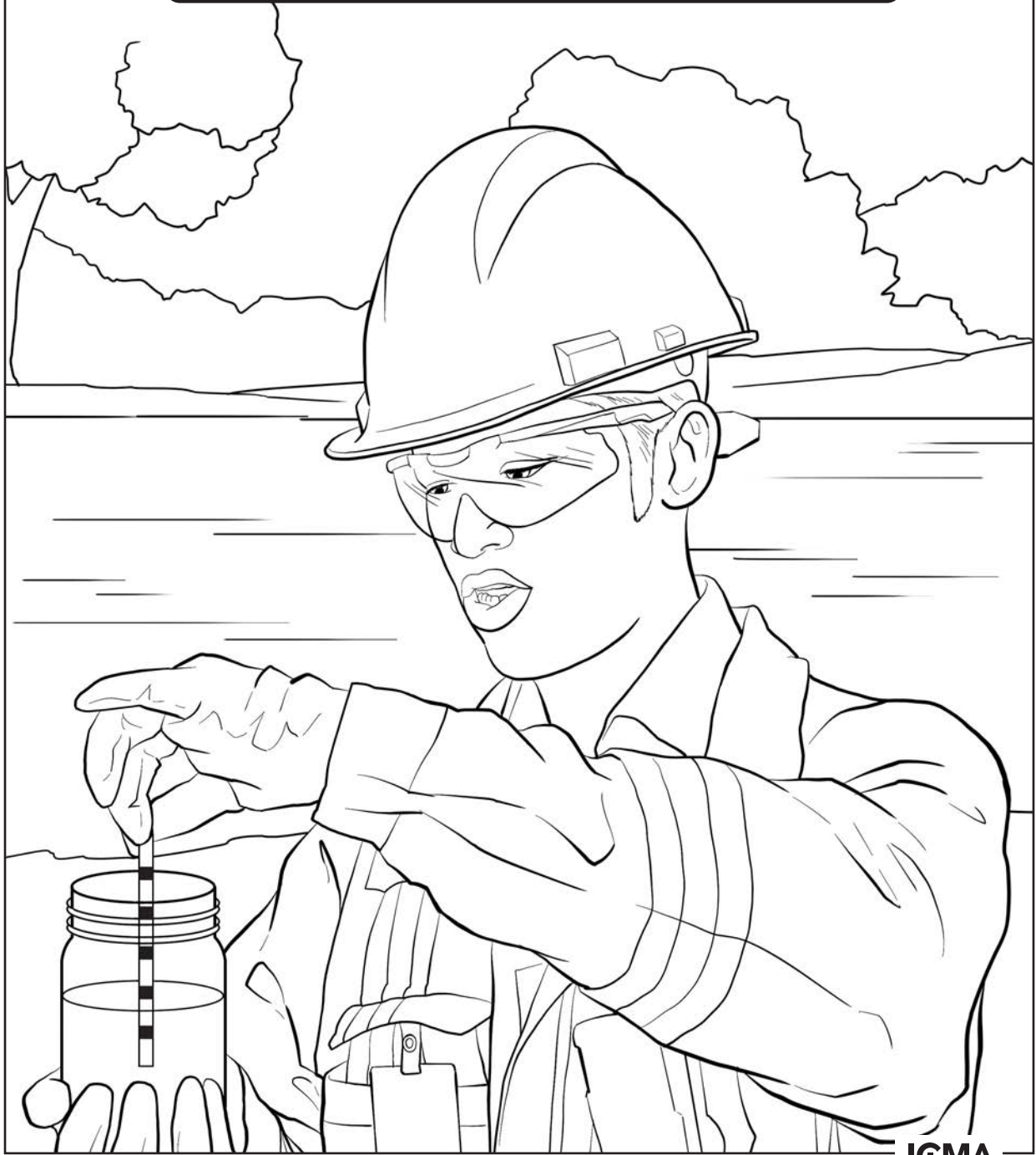
**BELIEVE  
IN  
YOURSELF!**



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**S**ocial workers and guidance counselors are people who listen to others and help them when they are having a hard time in school, at home, or at work. Have you ever had a problem that made you sad or scared? Who did you go to for help?

Today, I helped keep our water clean  
and safe to drink



**H**ave you ever wondered where the water in your house comes from? Your local government builds treatment plants, storage tanks, and underground pipelines to get water to your home, and scientists test the water to ensure it is safe. Your local government makes sure you have water whenever you need it! Why is water so important for people?

Today, I helped keep our environment  
clean and healthy.

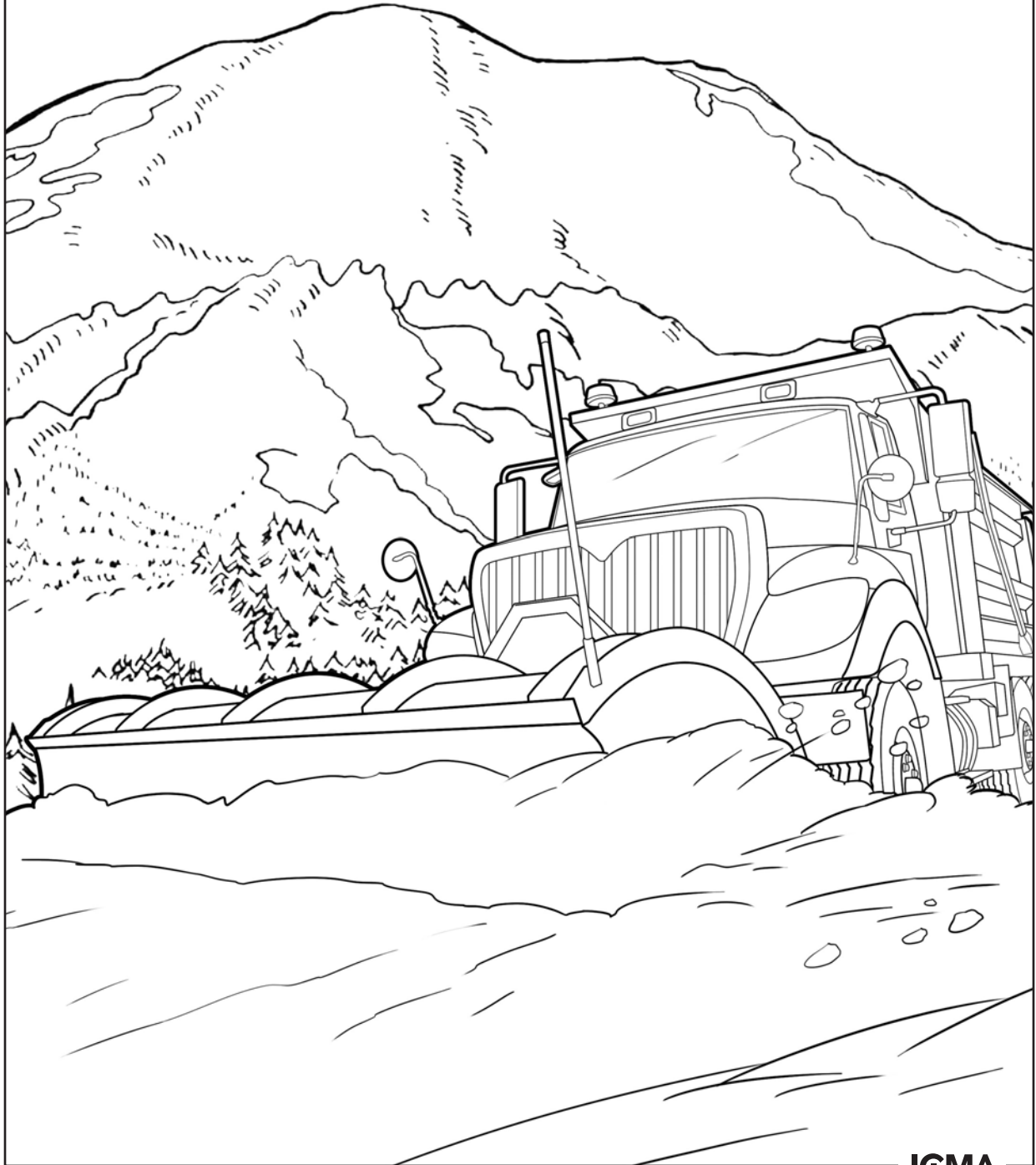


**D**o you know where water goes after we use a sink, bath, or toilet? In most communities, wastewater goes through a separate system from clean water, and goes to a special treatment plant. At the plant the waste is removed from the water so it can go back into the environment without making anyone sick. Remember, never to put anything in the toilet or down the drain that isn't supposed to go there. Why do you think some things shouldn't be put down the drain or flushed away?



**L**ook around your city or town. Every home, every building, every bridge, tunnel or road that was built in your community had to be designed, built, or inspected by engineers and construction experts working for your local government to make certain the structures are safe and will last for years to come. What are some of the coolest structures built in your community?

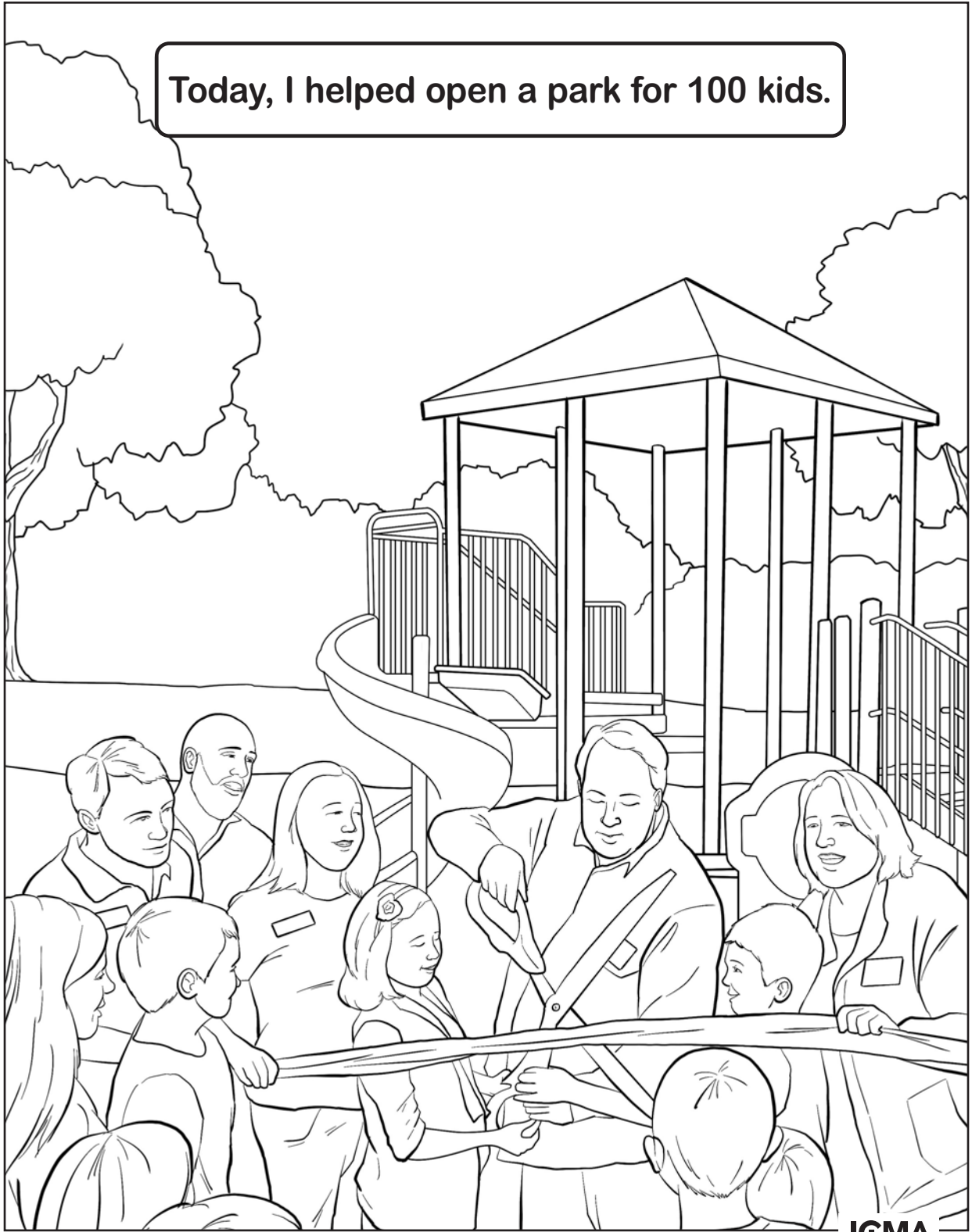
Today, I helped clear the way for my community to get back on the road.



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If you live in an area that gets a lot of snow, you've probably seen big trucks on the road preparing for a storm or plowing the snow off the roads and treating the pavement to keep them safe for people to drive. How do you clear the snow from the driveway, sidewalks, and steps of your house?

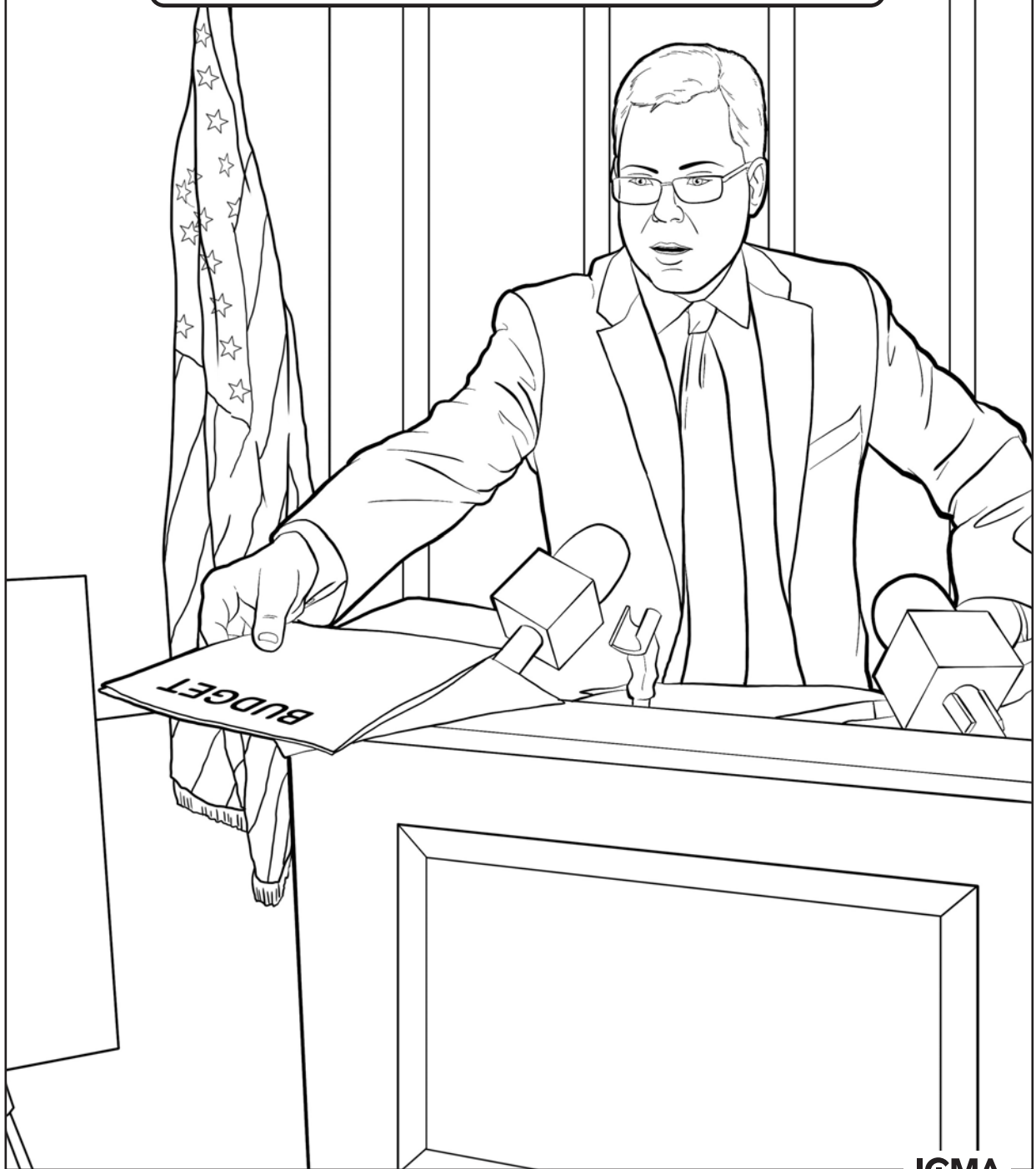
Today, I helped open a park for 100 kids.



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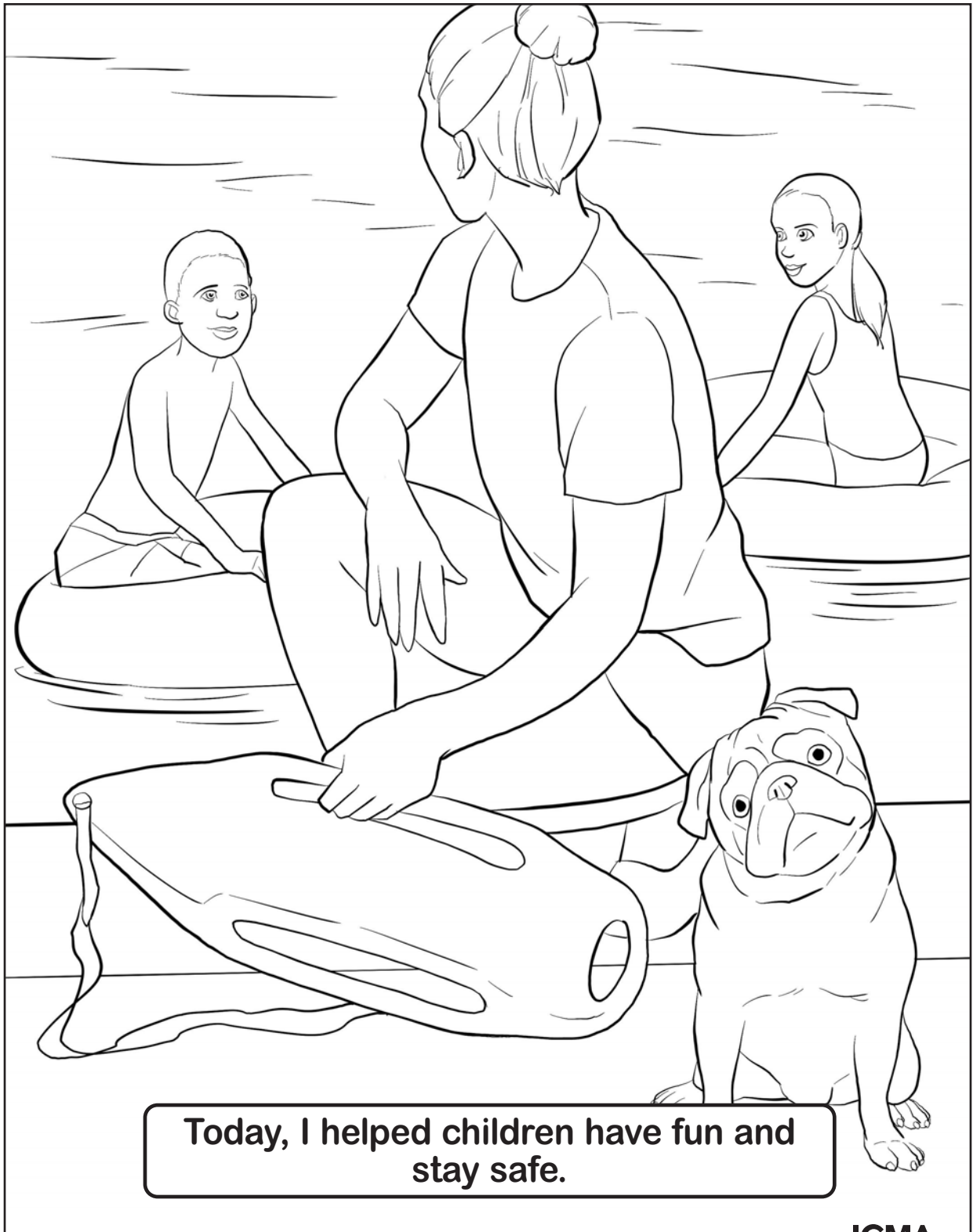
Your local government has elected leaders who try to give the community the types of parks, roads, playgrounds, pools, and libraries the people want. After listening to residents, the elected leaders ask local government employees to build what they ask for. What would you like to have in your community that isn't there today?

Today, I helped make a plan to pay for our programs and services.



**A**ll the programs, facilities, and services your local government offers costs money; that money comes from taxes and fees. Your elected leaders make choices on what to do now, and what to do later with the money they receive. This is called “budgeting.” The city, county, and town staff prepare the budget so elected leaders can make the best decisions for the community to make it a great place to live, work, and play. What community programs do you think are most important for people who make the budget?





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If your local government has a public pool or beach, they have lifeguards to protect swimmers of all ages. Some lifeguards also teach swimming classes. It's a very important job, and one of the many ways your city, town, or county is caring for residents and visitors. What are things you should do when you are at the pool so that you stay safe?



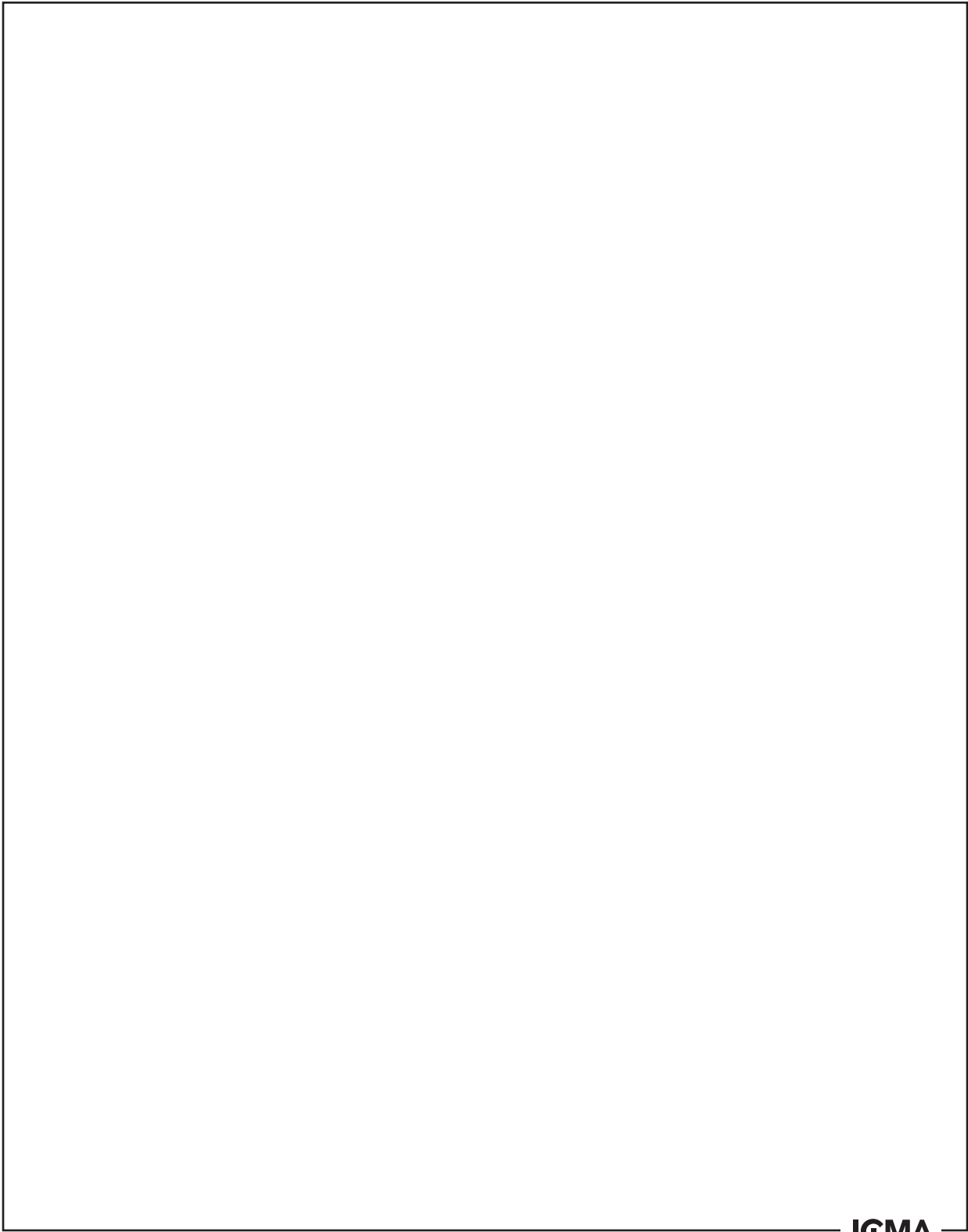
**M**anaging a local government is a big job. Local government managers listen to their staff and give guidance to the professionals throughout local government—librarians, public safety workers, park and recreation employees, engineers, and scientists—to provide the type of community residents are proud of. It’s a big job with a lot of different team members. Who is the person like your local government manager who gives direction sports? What about in a choir or orchestra?



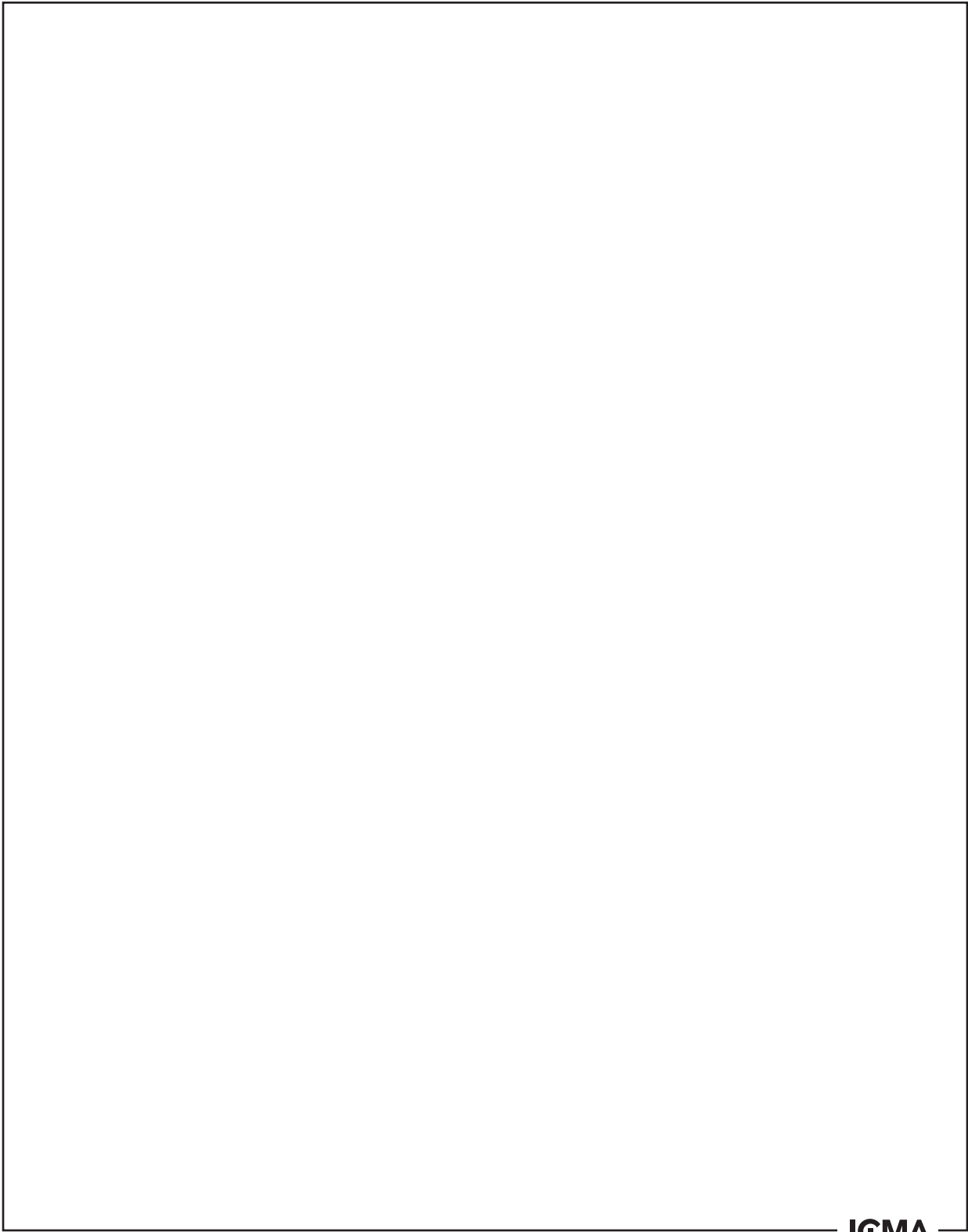
**Today, I helped determine our future.**

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**C**itizens elect other residents to decide what they want from local government. These elected officials solve problems, listen to residents, and determine the community goals. Local government managers serve the elected body by providing insights from their professional experience and education so they can make the best decisions for the community. Who represents you and your family in your local government?



**D**raw your own local government or other local government helper here! Share your colored pages with us using **@ICMA** and **#icma** on social media.



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# Did You Know?

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There are more than 38,000 cities, towns, and counties in the United States? There are large cities with skyscrapers and urban parks, and small towns with historic buildings and summer arts festivals. People you know live in the center of town, just outside of town, or outside of town. But there's a local government looking out for everyone.

What kind of community is yours?

## **Form of Government**

More than half of the towns, counties, and cities in the United States have a city, town, or county manager.

In some larger communities, your elected city or county officials work full time, but sometimes they only work part time and have different full-time jobs. Because they don't work full time, they can't spend as much time on the local government's needs as they would like. These communities often have a manager (sometimes called administrator), hired by the entire council, and they work in what is called a "council-manager" government. The manager oversees the operations of the government and meets regularly with the council.

## **Economic Development**

What is economic development? This is a part of your local government's work that you don't see directly, or right away. The city or county teams in economic development work on projects or help with goals that help create new jobs in the community and keep jobs that exist. This helps the community pay for new programs and services through taxes. The local government staff work for community and neighborhood development organizations, area chambers of commerce, and other business groups that may be government-run, private, or a mix of both.

## **Finance and Budgeting**

Local government finance teams are critical, as in any organization, for making sure the organization can operate. They prepare the city, county, or town budget, ensure staff are paid wages, process payments to the organization, and pay bills owed by the local government. They also make sure all of the government's funds are accounted for, so they have money when they need money.

If that's not enough to do, they also do things like help the government borrow money when they need to build something big with their public works team. Big projects like bridges cost a lot of money, so they borrow all the money at the beginning and pay it off over many years—the lifespan of the bridge. This is called issuing a government bond. There are so many things that go into operating a local government!

## **Libraries**

There are lots of libraries in the United States. There are more than 9,000 public libraries you can visit (those operated by cities, towns, and counties). There are almost 100,000 school libraries (wow!) and other types of libraries, operated by universities and colleges, private organizations, and other levels of government.

You can do more than just borrow books, though. Many libraries help communities get better by offering classes people can take to learn new skills.

This is different than the mayor. In other communities, the mayor may be the full-time manager and is elected by the community. This is called a “mayor-council” government.

## **Park and Recreation**

Public recreation and parks are some of the more visible services that local government offers to residents and visitors. Using our local parks is a great way to keep us healthy and help to build community. When you think of parks, what are some of the things you think of? Like the images in this coloring book, you might think of gardens with paths you can walk along; there might be a pond, fountain, or spray-ground. The recreation and parks staff oversee swimming pools, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, a skateboard park, trails, sports fields, or even a lake where you can rent or bring your own boats.

It's more than just the fields and parks though—spring, summer, and fall recreation programs also help keep kids and families fit and active. Your city, county, or town might offer a summer little league, trail walking groups, exercise classes for kids and adults, or even coordinate a poetry night or music festival.

All kinds of activities to bring the community together and promote health and wellness!

## **Planning**

A lot of people make plans, but in local government, planning is its own career! Planners make sure that the community is arranged in a way that makes sense. Planning involves a lot of work with other people in the local government, and in the community. Planners work with engineers, health and finance experts, architects, landscape designers, and builders to create a plan. The planner sees the whole picture, even a picture of the community that is changing over time, to create the plan vision that helps the community. Sometimes planners have to think about how a community is growing and plan for the future...do we need bigger roads, more roads, how much water? It's a lot to think about...and plan for!

## **Public Health and Social Work**

Your local government helps the community stay healthy in a lot of different ways. It's different from the way your family doctor helps you. There are many different kinds of professionals that work for public health departments: social workers help people and families that may be struggling with school, money, or housing challenges; there are scientists that help find out where a sickness started when a lot of people in a community have the same illness; they help promote programs for exercise by working with the recreation teams; they can even help people quit smoking.

Your community does a lot to keep you, your family, and the whole community healthy, thanks to the public health workers. Pretty amazing!

## **Public Safety**

There are more than 1,050,000 local firefighters in the United States. That's a whole lot of firefighters! But some firefighters (373,000 or 35%) are 'career' firefighters, meaning they work full time for their community fire department. The rest (682,000 or 65%) are volunteer firefighters—meaning they work other jobs but help and are paid when they are needed. All of those firefighters work in almost 30,000 fire departments nationwide.

There are more than 12,000 local police departments in the United States, and more than 3,000 sheriff offices. Then numbers can go up or down every year, but about 670,000 police officers work in U.S. local governments. When you add the support staff who also work for the local police, there are more than 1,000,000 people in the United States involved in local police work.

There are almost 250,000 emergency medical technicians (EMTs) working in our public safety system. Most EMTs work in their jobs full time, but there are some volunteer EMTs.

When you call 9-1-1, there are almost 9,000 different offices—in cities, towns, and counties—nationally that help answer those calls. And we make about 240 million calls to 9-1-1 in the United States each year. That's a lot of calls! About 95,000 9-1-1 operators answer these calls each day.

That's a lot of public safety!

## **Public Works and Civil Engineering**

We benefit from public works every day, but we don't often think about it or how it came to be there. Public works are generally the structures we see around us every day that are too big or complicated for a private company to build alone. Like bridges, water towers, treatment plants, streets and highways, underground trains like a metro or subway, or a water reservoir. The local government staff that do this work have titles like public works director, civil engineer, or fleet manager. It's another big job, and requires a lot of coordination with different governments to build safe projects that last a long time. The engineers and public works teams are ready for almost anything—from removing snow, or fallen trees, to building bridges, roads, and parks structures.

## **Waste and Recycling**

In 2015, U.S. residents generated approximately 262 million tons of solid waste (trash). All of that was collected by your local government directly or by a company hired by your local government.

About half of that went into a landfill—a waste site outside of town to collect trash.

About one-quarter, or 25%, (68 million tons) was recycled, and the rest was composted (beneficially decomposed) or burned to create power.



Your local government might also collect special waste that shouldn't be thrown out with regular trash, like old computers, certain light bulbs, or paint and chemicals. This is called hazardous waste and needs special disposal.

There are more than 2,000 landfills in the United States that collect all the trash we generate from our communities. Everything we can compost or recycle won't go into one of those landfills!

## **Water and Wastewater**

Water and wastewater systems are public works, but they're unique and offer a special service. There are more than 150,000 public water systems in the United States. Many cities and towns have their own systems, or they might share. In some cases, they are operated by the county, or might even be their own special local government. Some people live in areas that are not connected to the local government water system and might have a private well or buy from a water company.

Water systems are designed to bring safe, clean drinking water to your home, and take away your wastewater from toilets, sinks, washers, and baths. There are lots of separate pipes underground that bring this water to you and take it away. Water is taken from lakes, reservoirs, or rivers, then it is treated and delivered to community homes and businesses. It is also tested to make sure it's safe to drink.

Sometimes, water is stored in big water towers, tanks, or reservoirs to make sure we have enough when lots of people need it at the same time. Think about how much water you use getting ready for school. And all your friends, and teachers. So when people are using water, they often use it at the same times of day. But then there are times when we aren't using it at all. That's a lot to plan for!

For references and additional resources to explore, please visit [icma.org/makeadifference](https://www.icma.org/makeadifference).

**Don't forget to visit your own town, county, or city web page for more information about the services they provide to make your community a great place to live, work, and play!**

Share your colored pages with us using @ICMA and #icma on social media.

Thank you for taking this journey in public service with us!

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# ICMA

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