

ABILITIES DIGEST



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Spring 2019  BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Adapting Activities

Chief Scout Executive on Accommodating Scouts with Special Needs

*An excerpt from a statement in the January-February 2019 issue of **Scouting Magazine**. These comments were inspired by troops in Palmetto Council, whose story will be reprinted in the next issue of **Abilities Digest**.*

One of the many things I appreciate about the Scout Motto is the way it demands self-reliance. To “Be Prepared,” one must take personal responsibility. Self-reliance is one of the main values we work to instill in Scouts, and our program is uniquely positioned to help young people practice it in their daily lives. Something that brings me great joy is the way our movement includes young people who have special needs or disabilities. In our organization, every Scout is a Scout first, and a Scout with unique needs second.

... [T]hroughout my career, I’ve witnessed the important role Scouting can play in the lives of Scouts with special needs. Welcoming young people with various challenges into our movement benefits everyone involved in the Boy Scouts of America.



With reasonable accommodations, all youth can thrive in our programs. In its effort to involve youth with functional needs due to disability, the BSA allows these Scouts to advance using requirements and a pace that most

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benefit them. But beyond advancement, the way we manage our programs can simultaneously impact the lives of our members with special needs and their non-disabled Scouting peers. By offering opportunities to better understand the needs of others and having all youth participate together, we help young people experience the value of diversity and build an appreciation for one another's abilities.

Throughout the nation, dedicated volunteers have helped Scouting serve youth from different ethnicities, faiths, abilities and walks of life, just like those from the Palmetto Council. The common values that bind us together are far greater than any differences that exist among us. Our program rests on that universally applicable foundation of character building and leadership development, but it is built with enough options and flexibility that it can be customized to fit so many different circumstances.

As we strive to serve the needs of as many young people and families as possible, I want to thank all of you who make this an inclusive organization. Our program works in so many different situations, for so many unique communities. I can't wait to see more of these stories in the years to come.

Yours in Scouting,

Michael Surbaugh

Chief Scout Executive

Summer Activities for Scouts with Disabilities, and Special Needs



Summertime means summer camp for most Scouts. Every Scout wants to take part and, more importantly, have fun. This takes preparation, especially for Scouts with special needs.

The unit leader should take some time to think about each Scout as an individual and how each will react to summer camp routine - this is especially true of new Scouts who have not attended camp before. Identify roadblocks: features of camp life that prevent the Scout from participating or feeling comfortable. Make sure that one or more unit leaders watch for those roadblocks and are ready to help bring the challenge within reach of the Scout's abilities.

Involve the camper's parents in the planning process. Invite them to attend camp with the unit if appropriate.

All campers have buddies, but those with special needs should have a buddy who understands their disabilities and can help with roadblocks.

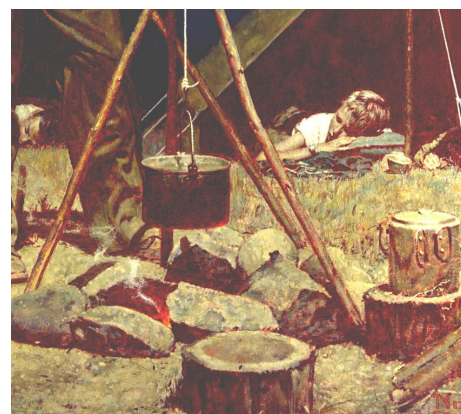
If Scouts have anxieties about unfamiliar places, make the camp familiar ahead of time. For example, one venture crew produced a videotape of their campsite. This helped smooth the transition from home to camp. In another

case, campers actually visited the camp ahead of time and saw their assigned campsite, the trails, and the activity centers.

Mobility poses a challenge, especially on camp trails. Use a camp map and pay attention to travel needs when planning a camper's activities. Some campers with Down Syndrome, for example, have low muscle tone. They tire easily from walking repeatedly back and forth between the campsite and activity areas. After lunch, instead of walking all the way back to the unit campsite to "rest" for an hour, campers and buddies should just hang out in the dining hall to wait for afternoon activities.

Campers with wheelchairs should be made aware of camp trail conditions. The unit should plan to bring a set of tools to maintain wheelchairs or other mobility equipment: bolts often shake loose on bumpy trails.

Contact camp staff ahead of time about each camper's special needs or restrictions. The staff may have suggestions for appropriate activities or alternatives for ones the camper should avoid. A bit of forewarning also lets staff and counselors make adjustments where possible. But remember, merit badge requirements cannot be changed to accommodate a disability. Not all camp directors can adapt their programs, but all strive to give campers a fun and rewarding experience.



Managing Subscriptions to *Abilities Digest*

***Abilities Digest* is designed for council and district disabilities awareness committees, related staff advisors, and any leader who would offer a Scouting program to youth who have special needs. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.**

Subscribing. Send a message to disabilities.awareness@scouting.org, with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

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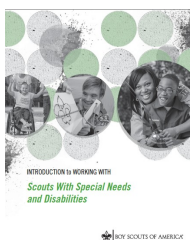
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When arriving at camp, leaders should identify a “cool zone” in each area the campers will visit. This is a quiet place campers can go to when feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated, fed-up, etc. This is good for any Scout, not just Scouts with special needs. Caring leaders realize sometimes everyone needs a break to gather themselves. “Cool zones” should be within view of the leaders responsible for the area.

Summer camp is a special part of any Scout’s experience and one that will be remembered and talked about for years to come. Planning and preparation can make summer camp fun for everyone.

Enhancing Awareness

Revised Special Needs and Disabilities Introduction Now Available



The national office has released a revised version of the “Introduction to Working With Scouts with Special Needs and Disabilities,” item #510-071. It is now available on the Disabilities page of Scouting.org and AbleScouts.org.

Philmont Training on Special Needs Scouting

This summer, June 9-15, the Philmont Training Center hosts the one-week program “Learning to Serve Scouts with Special Needs.”

Serving Scouts with special needs is volunteers working together creating solid Scouts with DisAbilities programs. Both Scouting volunteers and BSA professional staff will be exposed to best practices for building or strengthening council and district DisAbilities Awareness Committees. Training, publications, program resources, and advancement issues are addressed as well as providing general support for units serving Scouts with visible and invisible disabilities. All participants will come away better equipped to deal with the many questions and situations involved in working with Scouts who have - DisAbilities. Participants will also be trained in how to provide support and education for Scouts, families, leaders, and council staff in delivering a quality Scouting experience.



The Philmont Training Center offers a distinctive opportunity for Scouters and their families. There are activity programs for youth of all ages and for spouses who are not in a training conference. Older youth may be eligible for a Philmont “Mountain Trek” - a week-long version of the famous Philmont Trek. The Training Center offers “Scouting’s Best Family Vacation.”

For further information and registration, visit www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/.

Recognizing Abilities

Scouters Recognized for Serving Scouts with Disabilities

The Boy Scouts of America have established three awards to recognize Scouters for their service to Scouts with special needs or disabilities. These include the Special Needs Scouting Service Award (SNSSA), the Torch of Gold Award, and the Woods Services Award. Links to application and nomination forms appear in the Links section of this newsletter. While we do not track exactly how many awards are given each year, we may estimate them based on insignia sales.



The SNSSA recognizes Scouters or professionals who have completed training and tenure requirements serving Scouts with special needs and disabilities. In 2018, councils ordered 65 square knot devices for recipients of the SNSSA. Medals and certificates are also available.

The Torch of Gold is a council award given annually to an adult Scouter for dedicated work for youth, particularly Scouts, with disabilities. Although there are specific criteria for this award, each council should have its own selection procedure. In 2018, councils ordered 58 Torch of Gold award pins. Medals and certificates are also available.



The Woods Services Award is given to one Scouter per year nationally for exceptional service and leadership in helping Scouts with disabilities. Typical winners have served in several capacities at the unit, district, council, or national levels of the Boy Scouts of America. The award is presented at the National Annual Meeting every year.

Adapting Advancement

A Special Needs Advancement Specialist is a Great Resource!



*This is an edited version of an article appearing in the January-February 2019 issue of **Advancement News***

Past issues of *Advancement News* have talked about the importance of having a special needs specialist functioning at the Council level, It is just as important to have a special needs specialist at the district level, and even at the unit level if possible..

While the *Guide to Advancement* is always available to serve as a great resource for leaders on all levels, having a point person who really understands it and can provide guidance and suggestions is a great idea. We all want to be sure that Scouts with Special Needs have the opportunity to participate in the advancement program, and having leaders who are well versed in how that can happen is very important.

District and unit special needs specialists can assist the council chair at the grassroots level and be sure that everyone has a local resource to whom to turn. It also provides another leadership opportunity for people to serve in.

If districts and units are able to appoint the right person to serve in this role it's important that they know where they can go for help. Here are some places that provide great guidance:

Chapter 10 of the *Guide to Advancement* provides detailed explanations of what's possible as far as alternate requirements, merit badges, and important registration tips, and can be found at <https://www.scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/>

The official BSA website offers great resources and they have been gathered at: <https://www.scouting.org/programs/boy-scouts/the-building-blocks-of-scouting/disabilities/>

Another way to stay in the loop with what's happening is to subscribe to the *Abilities Digest* which is an electronic newsletter prepared by the National Disabilities Awareness Subcommittee.

We always encourage our leaders in Scouting to seek the training that is available to help them with their specific positions, and hope that these resources will help everyone improve the Scouting experience for those with special needs.

Perspective: Comparable Challenge

Advancement perspectives by National Committee member Roger Tate

We want all Scouts that earn a rank to have been challenged to a degree that is fair to everyone who earns that rank - past, present, and future. The honor that goes with the rank needs to be deserved and it needs to mean the same thing over time. The "challenge" of advancement for Scouts with disabilities is to be "fair". As all parents know "fair" is not always "the same as for everyone else". Even "challenge" is challenging to measure because it



About *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Its mission is to expand membership through helping parents and Scouting volunteers to improve their understanding, knowledge, and skills related to including and serving the special needs population. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute four issues of *Abilities Digest* annually, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.

could mean different things in different circumstances, such as required strength/skill, level of effort, amount of time needed, or the quality of the product made. So if we assume the objective of alternative requirements is to make a rank no harder to earn for a Scout with a disability than for an “ordinary” Scout, there will always be a devil in the details. That is why we entrust the responsibility for developing alternatives to responsible people rather than to a rulebook. It is also why both the advocates for a Scout with a disability and those who must approve alternatives need to be considerate of one another and treat each other according to the Scout Law.

Perspective: What is Expected of Scouts without Disabilities



It is easy to lose track of what is expected from others when you are an advocate for someone with a disability. A Scout rank is a multi-faceted array of challenges, and youth without disabilities will find some tasks easier than others. That fact presents a challenge for those responsible for evaluating alternative requirements for those with disabilities. If a Scout with a disability finds that a few requirements are really hard to complete, many requirements are doable with an effort, and a few requirements are really easy; she or he is effectively “normal” and it is questionable whether alternatives should be allowed. At the other extreme, any requirement that a Scout could not possibly complete (like with some physical disabilities) must have a more reasonable alternative provided.

Where those entrusted with approving alternative requirements struggle is how to handle situations where a disability makes many requirements very difficult but not impossible. We want it to be somewhat difficult to earn a rank, like it is for everyone, but not unfairly difficult for a

Scout with a disability. When you are developing proposals for alternative advancement requirements for Scouts who can proceed but with undue difficulty, it would be wise to consider the entirety of the requirements for a rank rather than being laser-focused on a specific requirement.

Helpful Links

Here are links to current materials to aid volunteers and Scouts with disabilities:

Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org

Scouting with Disabilities landing page: <https://www.scouting.org/programs/boy-scouts/the-building-blocks-of-scouting/disabilities/>

The materials on this page are being reviewed by BSA's national staff. Materials are reposted as soon as they have finished review.

Resources from Articles

Philmont Training Center: www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/

Revised Guide to Scouting with Special Needs: filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-071.pdf

Special Needs Scouting Service Award form: filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-067.pdf

Torch of Gold Award nominating form: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-495.pdf

Woods Services Award nominating form: filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf

AbleScouts: Abilities Digest articles posted online – ablescouts.org

Other Web Resources

Autism Empowerment website - www.AutismEmpowerment.org

Autism and Scouting website - www.autismempowerment.org/autism-scouting-program/

Social Media



Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest



Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165

Email your comments and questions to: disabilities.awareness@scouting.org