

ABILITIES DIGEST

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BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

The New Chief Scout Executive

Chief Scout Executive Mike Surbaugh's Vision for Scouts with Disabilities

Spend a few minutes talking with Chief Scout Executive Mike Surbaugh about Scouts with disabilities and his enthusiasm is apparent. *Abilities Digest* staff advisor Frank Ramirez did just that recently and was able to capture the Chief's vision for growing programming for Scouts with disabilities. What follows are highlights from Ramirez's recent visit with him.

FR: Chief, can you share your own experience working with Scouts with special needs?

MS: It's always been part of my DNA. Beginning in Jacksonville early in my career, we had an active special needs committee and district where the program was school-based. In Syracuse, I helped organize a special needs committee which supported a district. In Minneapolis, I served as Field Director for our special needs-focused Challenger District and saw how powerful a volunteer committee can be in delivering high quality Scouting to special needs youth. These experiences inspired



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We hope everyone had a terrific summer of Scouting experiences!

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me in the three councils I served as Scout Executive to initiate volunteer Special Needs committees and dedicate staff to providing a high quality program to meet the needs of youth.

FR: Did you observe commonalities along the way serving this market?

MS: Yes. There appears to be no consensus among parents on the type of unit that's best for a youth with disabilities. Their experiences vary. Some parents chose to mainstream their sons into a traditional Scouting unit, while others prefer putting their sons in a special needs unit. So, offering both options for parents is the best approach. Don't assume parents of Scouts with disabilities are disadvantaged. They come from all walks of life and sometimes will be some of your best volunteers and supporters.

FR: Chief, what should be a starting point for any council that wishes to grow Scouting for youth with disabilities in their community?

MS: Council executives should start with a strategic plan. Determine what your potential market is and include serving the special needs population. Then develop a good execution model. Be sure to involve volunteers with expertise in special needs education and let them help you develop the program. They can better help you determine if there are barriers to participation in your council.

FR: Shouldn't a gratifying outdoors program for Scouts with disabilities be part of the plan?

MS: Absolutely! Ask yourself, "Is your camp accessible?" If it isn't, this should be a priority because parents want to see that your outdoor program is accessible. So making significant camp improvements needs to be part of your strategic plan. If, for example, your action plan includes upgrading the shower houses, this helps to motivate both council volunteers and professionals to do something about it.

FR: Chief, our National Disabilities Awareness Task Force volunteers emphasize improving understanding, knowledge and skills for including and serving Scouts with special needs. This really points to our training focus. What are your thoughts on this effort?

MS: This too needs to be part of your strategic plan for Scouts with disabilities. As any professional Scouter responsible for special needs programs can attest, it's more difficult and it takes more time to organize a special needs unit. So, training youth-serving executives on how to organize a special needs unit is important. Also, having a special needs district with volunteer professionals in the field can provide the resources district executives need to grow their Scouts with special needs membership and program.

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FR: So what would you say to council executives and volunteers who don't have a disabilities awareness program?

MS: Look at what Special Needs Scouting can do for your council! It doesn't have to be a drain on your resources. In fact, it will increase staff capacity and potential funding sources such as foundation grants. If you have a very active Scouts with Special Needs Committee, your special needs Scouting will strengthen your traditional Scouting program.

FR: Chief, I know my time is up. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

MS: One of my fondest memories in my professional Scouting career is the Special Needs Camporee held in Minnesota. This was a highlight of the Challenger District's year. Everywhere, I would see Scouts from host troops helping their fellow Scouts with disabilities in various activities. What really made it all worth-while was watching Scouts with special needs camping for the first time. This demonstrated for me how much of an impact the program can have and that we all need to commit to making Scouting accessible for all youth.

Recognizing Abilities

Remember the Torch of Gold Award



The **Torch of Gold** is a council award given to adult Scouters for dedicated service to Scouts with disabilities. It is not an award that is earned by fulfilling specific requirements, but rather a recognition for years of service in multiple areas. Certificate No. 33733 is the recognition piece.

A Scouter must be recommended by another individual to the council. Specific criteria and the nomination form can be accessed at www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf. Each council should have its own selection process. Consideration for the Torch of Gold should not be dependent on or influenced by other awards earned. It is comparable to a Scouter receiving the Silver Beaver award; however, the volunteer's level of service is focused on Special Needs Scouting.

Since this award is given only once to an individual, presentation should be done during an annual council or district recognition dinner or other appropriate Scouting event. Nominee eligibility requirements include:

- Be currently registered with the Boy Scouts of America
- Have at least three years of service in any volunteer leadership capacity related to Scouts with disabilities, including educating other Scouters and working with youth who have disabilities
- Have completed all activities related to Scouts with disabilities as a registered volunteer.

The completed nomination form must be approved by the Scout executive and submitted to the council special needs or disabilities awareness committee or its designee, according to council procedures and deadline. Each council may recognize only one Scouter per year with the Torch of Gold Award.

Woods Services Award Nominations Deadline Fast Approaching

The Woods Services Award, presented annually in May, is granted to a BSA volunteer for exceptional service and leadership in the field of Special Needs Scouting. To be nominated for this prestigious recognition, a volunteer must have served Scouts with disabilities for at least 3 years.

The Woods Services nomination form No. 512-258 can be accessed at www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf. When completing the form, writers should be mindful that, for the most part, National volunteers evaluating the nominee may or may not know the Scouter. So, it is incumbent upon the person filling out the form to carefully read all instructions and provide clear and concise information. A good write up often includes one or more specific examples of exceptional service, emphasizing the number of Scouts affected directly or indirectly through the nominee's leadership. An additional page may be used if space is limited for the narrative sections. Once the nomination form is complete, it must be signed by the nominee's Scout executive and mailed to the National Office by **December 31** in order to be considered for the following year's award. Councils may only submit one nomination per year.

The Woods Services Foundation located in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, sponsors the award in memory of Luther W. Lord. The honoree receives a Woods Services plaque and may wear the Community Service knot on the uniform.



Enhancing Awareness

Remembering Yogi Berra's Dedication to Scouts with Disabilities

Yogi Berra, the baseball legend whose Scouting service earned him the Silver Buffalo Award, has died. He was 90.

While known worldwide as the New York Yankees catcher with an unmatched sense of humor, Berra was also a fervent supporter of Scouting. He established the Yogi Berra Golf Classic in 1991, a tournament that went on to raise more than \$1 million for Scouts with special needs in the Northern New Jersey Council. Berra even hit a hole-in-one at his own tournament in 1998 at the age of 74.

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A Peek Ahead

Topics Planned for Future Issues:

Enhancing Awareness: American Sign Language Interpreter Strip

Adapting Advancement: Updated Disabilities Awareness Merit Badge – Teaching it to All Scouts.

And the Survey Says: Results from the 2015 Random Survey

Professional Corner: Organizing a Scouts with Special Needs Unit

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The Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center located in Little Falls, N.J., continues to educate and inspire thousands of youth. Berra and his wife, Carmen, also established an endowment fund to support special-needs Scouting and other youth programs.

In 2003, this commitment to the community earned Berra the Silver Buffalo Award, BSA's highest honor for service to youth. In his acceptance speech, Berra offered up a classic Yogi-ism:

"It's a real honor to receive the Silver Buffalo Award. Kids are our future — even if the future isn't what it used to be."



As he presented Berra with the award, Chief Scout Executive Roy Williams took a moment to honor the Hall of Famer.

"[Berra] is a true American legend who believes in the basic values of hard work, common sense, fairness, integrity and commitment — and his good sense of humor has helped to make him an American icon. Yogi embodies the values of the Scout Oath and Law and all that's great about America."

[Excerpt from "Bryan on Scouting," September 23, 2015, by Bryan Wendell]

Middle School Hosts the disAbility Challenge

Scouting volunteers across the country have developed a set of activities to demonstrate disabilities first-hand. These activities make up the disAbility Challenge at recent National Jamborees. They also appear at other Scouting events, such as local or regional camporees.



Volunteers in the Northern New Jersey Council recently hosted the Challenge for a local middle school, the Teaneck Community Charter School. Over 140 students in grades five through eight participated. The local newspaper also published a story about it: www.northjersey.com/news/in-teaneck-a-program-teaches-students-about-life-with-disability-1.1421221. Students, teachers, and school staff all participated. "It really is an eye-opener," the principal said.

Adapting Advancement

Registering a Scout as Disabled or Having Special Needs

Question: How do I register my new Scout as having a disability or special needs? He won't need to register past the age of eligibility and he might not need advancement accommodations. But we still need a way to share the information with his unit leaders.

Answer: There is no procedure to collect such information when a new Scout or Venturer signs up. Instead, the parents need to talk to unit leaders about their sons' or daughters' particular challenges. A good unit can and does make simple accommodations for individual members whenever possible.

If the youth has mobility or health restrictions that will affect camp activities, these are generally collected on the camp physical examination form. Camps don't necessarily share this information with the entire staff, so adult leaders may find it helpful to talk directly to camp counselors about these restrictions. The disability or special-needs status of a Scout or Venturer isn't otherwise relevant outside the unit unless the youth requires – and qualifies for – advancement accommodations or additional time to fulfill requirements. These accommodations are generally restricted to youth with “permanent and severe” disabilities.

Abilities Training

The Disabilities Awareness Conference at Philmont

Y'all missed a fantastic experience! From July 12-18, 19 “passionate” Scouters learned about “Disabilities Awareness: Building Council and District Level Resources.” Instructors representing the National Disabilities Awareness Task Force were impressed by the enthusiasm, knowledge, interest and energy expressed by these volunteers from sixteen councils across the country. The participants learned about the Task Force's nine functional areas and how to tailor a council disabilities awareness committee to address those functions. They were introduced to the most current resources and disabilities awareness presentations, and received an electronic version to take home. Participants shared a full spectrum of personal experiences and discovered solutions to issues they were facing (and some they hadn't anticipated!) Practically every concern was addressed. (Continued on page 7)

About *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Its intent is to help 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.

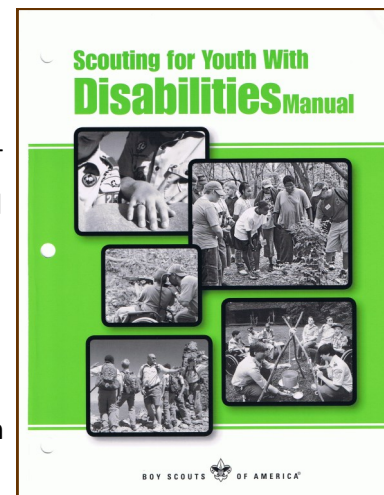
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This was definitely not a “death by PowerPoint” conference! In one exercise, the class was divided up into groups assigned to organize a council disabilities awareness committee. The Houston group had the serendipitous opportunity to get a head start crafting their council’s new disabilities awareness committee during this session.

Another project undertaken after viewing the 2013 National Scout Jamboree video: “disAbilities Awareness Challenge” was hosting a “mini-disAbilities Awareness Challenge” for all PTC participants and families. The class set up six different activities to simulate dyslexia, dysgraphia, blindness, loss of an arm, loss of mobility and loss of fine motor skills (dexterity.) Replication of these activities at various district and council events at their home councils is anticipated! The class also got a firsthand accessibility challenge assisting two fellow participants with mobility challenges on their way to the backcountry for an afternoon’s class. The class even had an honorary member --- a service dog named “Scout!” Discussions during the classroom sessions often extended well past the classroom, with lively interaction during meals and beyond.

Conference outcomes far exceeded the instructors’ expectations. The participants networked so completely that they’ve established a Facebook group, *PTC Disabilities Awareness Committee Training 2015*, all sharing their experiences since returning home. Also, at least six new committees have been organized as a result of the skills learned and Information received during the conference.

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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.

Unsubscribing. To decline future issues please reply and enter “REMOVE” in the subject line. We will remove the subscription within the next two weeks.

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Address Change. If you want *Abilities Digest* sent to a different address, reply and enter “ADDRESS CHANGE” in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.

Serendipity was alive and well throughout the conference! As it happened, one faculty member and a participant were Woods Services Award honorees, and the class met last year's recipient by chance while on a field trip to the Kit Carson Museum. As if that wasn't enough, the conference was held in the "Buster" Brown classroom building. A dedicated volunteer, "Buster" was a Silver Buffalo honoree and the 2006 Woods Services Award recipient.

Volunteers interested in attending the 2016 Conference "Serving More Scouts with Disabilities in Your Local Council" held the week of August 7-13 should start planning now! Extending beyond the 2015 experience, Philmont promotional brochure offers this summary about the conference:

Come learn effective ways to support parents and unit leaders who work with Scouts with disabilities. It's worth the effort! Facilitators will include members of the National Disabilities Awareness Task Force. The focus will be on building and strengthening council and district disabilities awareness committees. Strong committees provide general support for units serving Scouts with disabilities by addressing training, program resources and advancement issues. Unit leaders will benefit from the course as well. All participants will come away better equipped to handle the many questions and situations involved in working with Scouts with special needs and provide support for Scouts, families, leaders and council staff in delivering a quality Scouting experience.

Don't miss it!

Helpful Links

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

Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org

Scouting with Disabilities new landing page: www.scouting.org/disabilitiesawareness.aspx

Torch of Gold Application: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf

Woods Services Award Application: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf

Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-935_WB.pdf

Guide to Working With Scouts with Special Needs and Disabilities, No. 510-071:

www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-071.pdf

Other Web Resources and Social Media

Working With Scouts With disabilities: www.wwswd.org/

Autism and Scouting Website - www.AutismandScouting.org



Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest

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