

ABILITIES DIGEST



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From The Committee

Welcome to the First Issue of *Abilities Digest*!

The National Disabilities Awareness Committee publishes *Abilities Digest* to spread the word about Scouting for youth who have disabilities. On a quarterly basis we will provide advice, program updates, resources for parents and leaders, success stories, training pointers, and from time to time, surveys to find best practices and to determine gaps in information our readership is seeking. Anyone wishing to subscribe to *Abilities Digest* should send a message to disabilities.awareness@scouting.org. Place "Subscribe" in the subject line, and include your name and council in the body of the message.

The National Disabilities Awareness Committee was officially established October 29, 2013. The committee's purpose 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. In addition to the chair and ten volunteer members, the committee will engage more than 100 Scouters on an advisory panel. The panel members will be invited to provide opinions on the issues and to serve on our committee's task forces and other panels. Currently, these include an education and training task force, a subject matter consultants panel, and a disabilities awareness surveys and research task force.

The chair for each of the above panels and task forces serves on the National Disabilities Awareness Committee along with volunteer specialists for publications, relationships and resources identification, social networking, and program resources. The committee also includes our *Abilities Digest* e-letter coordinator and a representative of the National Advancement Committee.

Feel free to send questions or comments to the committee at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.

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Council Abilities

What Can Councils Do to Help Scouting for Those with Disabilities?

Councils are a key resource for providing local understanding, experience, and knowledge to Scouters who serve youth with disabilities.

- How is this possible? Councils can provide information to volunteers, leaders, and parents about how Scouting can benefit youth with disabilities and how the leaders and volunteers can address the challenges encountered.
- Why is providing this information an important function for a council? Most, if not all, units have at least one member who has some sort of disability. In fact, recent surveys suggest the percentage of Scouting youth who have disabilities may be close to 15 percent! The requirement for information and resources is thus greater than most think. Consequently, youth with disabilities may not be getting the most out of Scouting.
- How can a council fulfill this function? The answer lies in the *Scouting for Youth with Disabilities Manual*, No. 34059, available at www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34059.pdf. The chapter entitled “How to Organize the Scouting for Youth with Disabilities Program in Your Council” outlines the committee responsibilities recommended to help units in the council. The information may be used as a starting point. Councils should consider which areas of responsibility are most important, and prioritize recruitment of volunteers based on specific needs. If the council chooses not to have a “disabilities awareness committee,” it is recommended they consider recruiting, at a minimum, a contact person to serve as a resource. **This person will be quite busy!**
- Does this organizational approach stop at the council level? No, not necessarily. In some councils, districts have formed similar committees or points of contact. This has been especially helpful in large councils.

Council and district committees are not alone! The National Disabilities Awareness Committee stands ready to provide guidance and support to any volunteer who e-mails inquiries to: disabilities.awareness@scouting.org. A network of volunteers from across the country are eager to help.

Measuring a Council's Special Needs Program

Scouters often ask, “How many Scouts with special needs do we serve?” The Special Needs Committee of the Three Fires Council, headquartered in St. Charles, Illinois, was interested in understanding the breakdown of Scouts with disabilities throughout the council in an effort to better serve parents, volunteers, and Scouts. Towards this end, a one-page special needs survey was developed and submitted to the council to be included with the 2014 recharter packets. The survey was also available electronically for volunteers and council staff.

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At the time of the survey, the Three Fires Council had a total of 18,004 Scouts registered in either traditional or non-traditional units. While all eleven districts provided data, the survey rate of return varied from 22 percent to 95 percent. Overall, the council rate of return was 39 percent. *Traditional units* reported 581 Scouts with special needs out of 5,157 members, representing 11.3 percent. Within five of the districts, 14 *non-traditional* units reported a total of 776 Scouts with disabilities. Two non-traditional units operating as regular packs and troops were included in the traditional unit group, but care was taken to report the data collected from these two units accurately. The survey report is available online at www.threefirescouncil.org/images/Council/Images/TFC%202014%20Special%20Needs%20Survey%20Report.pdf

Survey results overall showed the projected number of Scouts with special needs represented 2,718 youth or 15.05% of the 18,004 Scouts registered in both traditional and non-traditional units. Further survey analysis revealed specific disabilities:

- 47 percent of Scouts were identified with ADHD
- 17 percent were identified on the autism spectrum
- 10 percent were identified as “other,” which includes diagnoses not listed
- 7 percent were identified as having learning disabilities
- 5 percent were identified with emotional disabilities

As a result of the information gained from the study, the committee is now better able to tailor district trainings based on understanding the various special needs identified in each community, and provide specific support and resources to more efficiently serve the district or unit.

Creating Awareness

Simulating Sightlessness

A popular attraction at the National Jamboree is the disAbilities Awareness Challenge. Participants face almost two dozen activities, each teaching about, or simulating, a physical or mental disability. Most challenges simulate either partial or complete blindness, including BB Target Shooting, Beeper Baseball, One-eyed Fishing, and the Cane Maze. Some require special equipment, like Beeper Baseball or target shooting, while others utilize simple construction materials.

To simulate sightlessness, these challenges use easy-to-make blinder glasses. First, buy a quantity of clear safety glasses. These are widely available and often cost less than a dollar each. Next, buy some black spray paint. The easiest way to prepare several pairs of glasses at one time is to mount the arms to a piece of cardboard by poking the earpiece through the cardboard. Then spray paint the lenses evenly and thoroughly.

Most supervisors instruct participants to keep their eyes closed during the event. This is because the blinders don't completely cover their eyes, and peripherally, Scouts can manage to see their way around.

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Blinders do, however, help participants get started with the simulation, and remind them to keep their eyes closed.

Some challenges like the One-eyed Fishing cover only one eye. The same technique with the safety glasses can be used; just cover one of the lenses with tape before painting. Creating a mix of left-only and right-only blinders allows participants a different experience by merely switching one eye covered to the other.

The Cane Maze

The Cane Maze challenges participants to sightlessly traverse a maze using a cane to find their way around. The maze is laid out as a trail between PVC pipes. Participants navigate the maze by tapping the ground with a cane to locate the pipes.

The maze is constructed from 1½" diameter PVC pipes placed directly on the ground. It may be on grass or other stable surfaces where pipes can be taped down or hammered in with stakes. Arrange the maze as a parallel track between pipes 36" to 48" apart. Use standard pipefittings (no glue) to hold the pipes together.

A simple course might consist of pipes laid out in right angles that produce a single path with hairpin turns. This can pose a worthwhile challenge to beginners. More complicated mazes simply require more pipes and fixtures. A good course includes: dead ends, loops, and any other maze trick that might come to mind. A Jam-boree maze is about 130 feet long.

Before starting, the maze attendant tells participants how the maze works and to keep their eyes closed. Participants wear blinder glasses (see previous article) and use a telescoping cane or a less-expensive 4' fiber-glass wand. The attendant then ushers new participants one at a time, giving each player some time to make a little progress before the next one starts.

Some attendants make a show of keeping eyes closed by asking participants to make the Scout sign and recite: "On my honor as a Scout I promise not to peek while in the Cane Maze." While some Scouts make steady progress, others get partly or completely turned around. Sometimes they tap each other's canes or bump right into each other. The attendant should step in before chaos ensues.

As with many Scouting activities, this is fun with a purpose. The attendant should take time to talk about what the participants learned or what it would be like to have to do this all the time.

About *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is the official e-letter of the BSA 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 when there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.

Adapting Advancement

Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility

Youth members with severe physical disabilities and youth and adults with developmental or cognitive challenges may be able to “register beyond the age of eligibility” in the BSA. This allows them to work through the advancement program at a pace appropriate to their needs. The steps to do this are relatively easy and you will find them outlined in section 10 of the *Guide to Advancement*.

A collaboration of parents, Scout leaders, and qualified health professionals can complete the information that must be submitted to the local council for approval. This team should have a good understanding of the Scout’s abilities and disabilities, and how these will affect his ability to complete requirements for advancement. The information submitted will help the council make a proper assessment, so preparers need to be sure to include as much detail as possible.

Once approval is granted, the Scout executive or a designee will send a letter to the Scout’s parent or guardian, and the unit leader or committee chair. A copy of the letter is then retained in the unit’s registration file for as long as the Scout remains registered. It is suggested that any Scout who qualifies should be registered this way as soon as possible so he or she has ample time to complete the requirements. The advancement program is challenging but many members with disabilities have found ways to succeed. Providing them extra time to work on requirements and merit badges, when approved in advance, has proven to be helpful.

A Resource for Advancement Planning

The Individual Scout Advancement Plan (ISAP) is similar to an Individual Education Plan, which is used in schools to establish a student’s special education eligibility. It can also help plan an approach for the education of a student who has disabilities that preclude his or her full participation in a typical curriculum. An ISAP is specific to each Scout and is usually prepared in a cooperative effort between parents, Scout leaders, and a health care professional. The objective of an ISAP is to chart a course through the advancement program that helps a Scout or Venturer with disabilities achieve as much as any limitations will allow, and to facilitate applications for alternative requirements, merit badges, and registration beyond the age of eligibility, as appropriate.

A new volunteer task force has been established to create a standard ISAP form. This form will help Scout leaders and parents provide a quality program for youth with disabilities. Besides clearly stating requirements that provide specific advancement considerations, establishing the ISAP will also create a standardized approach to document decisions.

A sample ISAP can be found in the “Fact Sheets and Forms” section of the Appendix, Chapter Ten, of the *Scouting for Youth with Disabilities Manual*, or can be accessed as a Word document by visiting: www.scouting.org/filestore/doc/ISAP-WWSWD.doc. A downloadable version of the *Manual* can be found by visiting: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34059.pdf.

In The News

Sonya Whitehead Honored with the Woods Services Award

Sonya Marie Whitehead of Maumee, Ohio, is the 2014 recipient of the **Woods Services Award**.

The Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center of Langhorne, Pennsylvania, presents the Woods Services Award to one BSA volunteer each year. The award recognizes exceptional service and leadership to Scouts with disabilities.

Sonya has been actively involved as a Scouting volunteer since 1979, and has worked directly with Scouts with disabilities since being recruited to serve on staff for the “disAbilities Awareness Challenge” at the 1989 National Jamboree. She continued to serve on the next four Jamborees, and was selected to chair the activity at the BSA’s Centennial Jamboree in 2010.



She directly contributed to the development and expansion of the challenge during those six Jamborees, personally introducing three activities that replicate the experiences of those afflicted with certain “invisible” disabilities, i.e., dysgraphia, dyslexia and hearing loss. As a result, more than 15,000 participants experienced the “disAbilities Awareness Challenge,” taking part in more than 95,000 individual disabilities awareness activities. Sonya credits her Jamboree experiences for giving her “the inspiration, motivation, and knowledge to bring disAbilities Awareness back to her home council.”

Since 1979, Sonya has served in many positions at the unit, district, and council-level. Her work has impacted the lives of increasing numbers of youth with disabilities. Since 2004, she has provided disabilities awareness training at the Erie Shores Council’s annual University of Scouting. During the past four summer camping seasons, Sonya has conducted disabilities awareness training for the council’s Boy Scout resident and Cub Scout day camp staffs. In 2010, she organized the council’s “disAbilities Awareness and Inclusion Committee.” Her service has been recognized with numerous awards at the district and council level.

Outside of Scouting, Sonya recently retired from a 37-year career as a special educator and in 1995 was named Outstanding Special Educator of the Year by both the Northwest Ohio Resource Center and the State of Ohio Department of Education. She credits her brother, who was developmentally disabled, as her inspiration for lifelong service to those with disabilities. She is married to James Whitehead and they have three Eagle Scout sons and six grandchildren.

Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center and the Boy Scouts of America join in recognizing this great Scouter—Sonya Marie Whitehead—with the Woods Services Award for 2014.

Helpful Links

Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org.

Scouts with special needs information: www.scouting.org/specialneeds.aspx

Advancement for members with special needs: www.scouting.org/scoutsource/guidetoadvancement/specialneeds.aspx

Guide to Working With Scouts with Special Needs and DisAbilities: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-071.pdf

Other Web Sites

Working With Scouts With disAbilities: www.wswd.org/

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

Three Fires Council resources for Scouting with Special Needs: www.threefirescouncil.org/index.php/programs-mainmenu-73/special-needs-mainmenu-96

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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