

ABILITIES DIGEST

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National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee

Welcome Warren Wenner, Our New Chair

In this issue we announce our new committee name: the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee (NSNDC). We also welcome Warren Wenner as the new chair for the NSNDC. Warren took over from Tony Mei at this year's BSA National Annual Meeting. Warren served 34 years as a professional Scouter and has served on both our advisory committee and the national committee since his retirement 5 ½ years ago.



One of Warren's first tasks was to represent the Committee at the First National Program Planning Conference held at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. He attended with three other Committee members. Other participating committees included Cub Scouting, Scouting BSA, Venturing, Sea Scouting, STEM Scouts, and the next National Chair of the Boy Scouts of America. The conference included leadership from national, regional, area and council committees. The conference included training on the BSA's new Polaris method. A Big Thank You to members from the NSNDC for giving a week of their time to attend the National Program conference.

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A Note from the Chair

Warren Wenner, CNP, Chair of the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee

I am honored to be named Chair of the NSNDC. We have a great national committee ready to support local councils, districts and unit programs for special Scouts and their families. Great plans are being developed for this coming year.

We are the nation's best family program, thousands of girls and boys are joining Scouting. The NSDNC is committed to making sure every family with a special needs child has a chance to experience Scouting.

Since the National Annual Meeting in Denver, we have made some structural changes to the NSDNC. We have

reorganized into three committees – Membership and Unit Growth, Program Support, and Operations Support - to better focus the work. We hope this will help local councils with the support they need to serve special needs Scouts and their families.

Committees

Membership and Unit Growth – This committee works to support units and special needs membership growth in local councils and districts. **Jane Grossman**, past NDAC Chair and Vice Chair, leads this committee

Program Support – This committee supports other national program and support committees like advancement, outdoor programs, and health and safety. **Nathan A. Schaumleffel, PhD**, leads this committee. He is associate professor, Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sports and campus/executive director, Nonprofit Leadership Alliance Certification Program, Indiana State University.

Operations Support – This committee works with the regions and councils to answer questions from volunteers, staff, parents and others. The committee will assist in developing educational information for national courses at Philmont and other national and regional events. **Roger Tate**, an autism advocate and member of the NDAC since 2012, leads this committee.

The NSNDC is planning some big events coming up with some great surprises, so keep reading this newsletter and then, please, share it with a Scouter, friend or a parent. Thanks for all you are doing for Scouting.

Enhancing Awareness

Seabase Training Opportunity:

January 12—18 , 2020

Title: DIVERSEability and DisABILITY: How to Develop and Grow Scouting With Special Needs in Your Council

This course is for volunteer Scouters, professionals, chartered organization leadership, school district personnel, and parents who have a passion for helping youth with disabilities become involved in and benefit from all that Scouting has to offer.

- Find out how to start or strengthen a disabilities awareness committee within your council.
- Learn about proper procedures, modifications, resources, and supports that can help Scouts with special needs experience the outing in Scouting.
- Develop a plan to partner with local agencies, organizations and schools to start new units and recruit youth with special needs.

Feel empowered to make a difference in the lives of others.

Registration fees: \$495 per conference participant.

Register online at <https://laserfiche.scouting.org/Forms/2020-Florida-Sea-Base-Volunteer-Conference>.



Philmont Adventure for Disabled and Special Needs Scouts :

July 26—August 1, 2020.



The Zia Experience, an innovative Philmont adventure for Scouts with special needs, takes place next summer. A team of Philmont staff and highly-trained volunteers will help Scouts with a wide range of functioning and abilities have an awesome Philmont Experience!

Registration is through the Philmont Training Center. Further details to follow.

Philmont Adaptive Special Needs Conference: July 26 to August 1, 2020

This national training teaches best practices in outdoor and camping programs for Scouts with special needs. Both volunteers and professionals will learn how to integrate Scouts with special needs into everyday outdoor/camping programs. Adults will also learn about the latest adaptive programs including field sports, Project COPE and other outdoor skills. The conference includes discussions on risk management, program and facilities management, health and safety and program development for serving Scouts with special needs. Finally, this course will also share how you can use your camp properties for outside special needs groups including schools and special needs agencies.



Adapting Activities

Special Needs at the World Scout Jamboree

Adapted from a report by Tony Mei, the Inclusion Advisor for Centro Mondial at the 2019 World Scout Jamboree.

The 2019 World Scout Jamboree (WSJ) took place last summer at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in West Virginia. It was the first World Jamboree to take place in North America since the 1983 Jamboree in Alberta, Canada. It was the first to take place in the United States since 1967.

BSA National Jamborees have traditionally included a specific program, the Disabilities Awareness Challenge, as a focal point for disability awareness events and activities. The World Jamboree, which has not previously included these activities, placed these events and activities under Centro Mondial's "Living in the 21st Century" which were spread across five of its focus area programs (Communications/Media, Exploration, Food, Transportation, and Workforce). These programs implemented ten of the twenty activities typically appearing in the Disabilities Awareness Challenge plus eight new activities.

The Food focus area provided a food-related sensory challenge. The sensory challenge activity resided on Action Point and was developed by program partners from the Un-prescription Foundation for Autism.



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Registration is through the Philmont Training Center.

The Communications/Media focus area provided the Communications Inclusion Tent in Summit Center that hosted seven challenge activities. The Workforce area hosted another seven activities in the Tent of Possibilities.

Transportation hosted the Crutch Obstacle Course and the popular Cane Maze (see photo), this time featuring Walk/Wait lights with audible warnings. Exploration hosted a “talking” blind compass course.

These activities collected hundreds of written comments from participants throughout the world. Volunteers have reviewed these comments, translated them into English, and are posting them to the Facebook Group, “Unlock a New World through Inclusion.” The volunteer sharing these comments describes them as “truly inspiring and wonderful to see a glimpse into the youth today who will be our adults of tomorrow.”

The Jamboree activities staffs were expecting challenges from the disabled and were well prepared. All activities welcomed participants with disabilities. Many participated in activities they never dreamed they could do. Volunteers in the Adventure activities took pride in making their activities accessible. The Bows

About *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is the official e-letter of the **Boy Scouts of America National Special Needs and Disabilities 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 *Abilities Digest* annually, but special editions may go out is to distribute four issues of whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.



activity offered a “rig” to enable archery shooting by disabled users. A blind Scout used the rig to hit 10 out of 10 shots in the target! Many participants on crutches, or using wheelchairs, were actively involved throughout the Summit Center. The fishing program, residing on the Goodrich Lake waterfront, provided active support for mobility-challenged Jamboree participants.

The WSJ also deployed a Special Needs Support Services team to help disabled participants reach Jamboree activities. They had three buses with professional drivers from West Virginia University and the WVU Medical school. Each could transport two wheelchairs and twelve others. Additionally,

the team used two 15-person vans. These services transported approximately 1100 Scouts to activities and back to their camps during the ten days of the WSJ. This included the disabled as well as the “walking wounded” (those who were injured during the Jamboree).

Three Fires Council’s Wizard’s Academy

The following was reported by Sherry Herzog, a Three Fires volunteer and the Chair of Education and Training for the National Disabilities Awareness Subcommittee

Scouts and Scouters of the Three Fires Council hosted a “Wizard’s Academy” in Aurora, IL, last May with the theme “The Magic of Seeing the Ability not the Disability.”

We partnered with community organizations to host various activities. We chose a Wizard theme to make it fun for Scouts and the community. These are the activities we had at Wizard Academy.

Wheelchair Quidditch: Quidditch as an Adaptive Sport

Defense against the Dark Arts: Wheelchair Archery as an Adaptive Sport

Ancient Runes Translation: Vision Impairment

Ancient Runes Advanced: Mirror Boxes (Dyslexia)

Food Alchemy: Food Allergies

Study of Magical Creatures: Comfort Dogs

Herbology: Alternative Communication (Drawing)

Ancient Runes Language: Signing

Potions Class: Alternative Communication/STEM

[Wizard Chess](#): Learn Disability Facts

[Wizard Racing](#): Adaptive Pinewood Derby

[Wizard Sensory Challenge](#): Autism Awareness

[Wizard History](#): Historical/Fictional Figures w/
Disabilities & Motor Skills

[Wizard Quest & Wand Ceremony](#): Complete the
activities and receive a wand at ceremony



We also had a climbing wall, promoting adaptive climbing for those with disabilities.

Not-for-profit service providers shared with the community and our Scouts what they do, why they do it, and how it helps the disability community. If Scouts visited all of the nonprofit service providers, they received an entry form for a drawing to win one of four [Harry](#) Potter Wands.

The community and Scouts had a lot of fun. A big favorite being Wheelchair Quidditch. The organization that provided the sport wheelchairs plans to borrow our Quidditch Hoops for one of their camps.

This event built new relationships between Scouting and the community. The city hopes we will do this again next year, and we plan to do so. We expect to add new activities, like adaptive fishing and we are going to look at how to we can include other disabilities not covered in our first year.



This event was fun with a purpose. Community relationships raise Scouting's visibility, create more opportunities for community service, and increase membership.

[Breaking down barriers at a school for the deaf and blind](#)

*This is an edited version of the article by Aaron Derr, with photos by W. Garth Dowling, appeared in the March-April 2019 issue of **Scouting Magazine***

When members of the Palmetto Council in Spartanburg, S.C., committed to an aggressive multicultural marketing program several years ago, they weren't messing around.

They promoted Scouting to predominantly African-American communities where it wasn't already a staple. They pushed the program to Hispanic families that seemed to be just waiting for someone to ask them to join.

They even started two troops for adults with special needs.

About half of the school's students sleep on the property in dorms Sunday night through Thursday night; the other half stay for the day. Residential students return home after lunch on Fridays. Then it's back to campus on Sundays.

That was a huge challenge since the kids aren't available for Scouting activities on weekends. Understandably, they very much value their time with their families. "Knowing we only had limited time, we said, 'How can we make this as traditional a Scout experience as possible?'" says Thomas. The answer, it turns out, was complicated.

The South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind has a long history. The School for the Deaf opened in 1849, founded by a minister who recognized the need for deaf education in the state. The accompanying School for the Blind opened six years later. Then, more than 100 years after that, a third branch was added: Cedar Springs Academy serves students who have a vision or hearing disability with at least one additional physical or intellectual disability.

As it turns out, there's a long history of Scouting on the campus as well. A short article in the January 30, 1929, issue of *The Spartanburg Herald* described the chartering of a Boy Scout troop at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind. Six decades later, Troop 212 was still going.

At some point, though, things changed.

The Palmetto Council and South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind officials aren't sure what happened to Troop 212. It's believed that it was last led by a school staffer who eventually retired, and it seems the unit died off without him, leaving the students without a Scout unit of their own.

A New Beginning

The new units are officially chartered as Pack 9539 and Troop 9539 to a local Veterans of Foreign Wars post. Drawing students from the School for the Deaf, School for the Blind and Cedar Springs Academy with parental permission, Scouts range from 2nd graders to 11th-graders.

There have been plenty of adults willing to help out. What the unit really needed, though, was someone who knew sign language. If Glymph, the mother of a 12-year-old Boy Scout and a member of the Palmetto Council board, has been



around Scouting as an active parent since her son joined as a Tiger. She also is a former teacher at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind. Additionally, she worked for several years as a speech therapist.

“Communication overall has always been a focus of mine,” Glymph says. “The deaf community — learning about their culture and the way they communicate — is fascinating.” To this day, she takes adult classes at the school for those who want to learn — and then master — the art of sign language.

Thomas had a passion for expanding Scouting to the school’s students, but he is not a sign-language expert. Glymph had a passion for volunteering in the deaf community, but she wasn’t an experienced Scout leader. It was a match made in heaven. “I told her, ‘I can help bring the Scouting knowledge if you can help communicate it,’ ” Thomas says.

Now Thomas and Glymph run the meetings together. He talks, and the blind and visually impaired students can hear and understand him fine. At the same time, Glymph translates his instructions into sign language for the Scouts who are deaf and hard of hearing. She also takes questions in sign language and interprets them to Thomas.

One more barrier torn down.

But it wasn’t the last. No Scout — disabled or not — wants to sit still for an entire meeting. They had to figure out a way to get these boys outdoors.

Building Trust

With weekends out of the question, Thomas and Glymph had to come up with a way to make their regular meetings exciting enough to hold the boys’ attention. Like every other unit, the kids had other extracurricular commitments. Sports are popular at the school, as are other recreational activities. That means the students were available for Scout meetings only about once every two weeks. And it had to be in the afternoon or early evening after classes are over. And the meetings couldn’t run too late, because the boys have homework and classes they have to be ready for early the next morning.

Their solution: Make the most of the time they have. As we say in Cub Scouts, “Do Your Best.”

They brought in volunteers from the Department of Natural Resources to teach the boys how to use a rod and reel- even though they didn’t have access to a body of water. They hosted a rain gutter regatta and Pinewood Derby race. They conducted a Scouting for Food drive and learned archery. They built a campfire and ate s’mores. They practiced Scout skills while at the same time practicing the Scout Oath and Law.

Then something really interesting happened. School administrators began to notice something different about the boys who were involved in Scouts: They stood out among their peers as leaders and models of positive behavior. As trust grew between the Scout volunteers and the school, the school began to give the unit more leeway.

A volunteer from the school agreed to type the Scout Oath and Law in Braille.

The Scouts were allowed to camp outdoors on a Thursday night, provided the boys were up and ready to go by 7 a.m. for classes on Friday.

A volunteer stepped forward to provide buses to a nearby pond so they could put into action the casting techniques they had learned at the earlier meeting. No more casting on dry ground. This was real fishing, and it was this event that really got things going. It turned into an outing that was more successful than perhaps even Thomas and Glymph could have imagined. “It was so pure,” Glymph says. “Just ... joy. Many of them had never touched a fishing rod or anything like that.”

Consider it another barrier torn down.

“I always liked the outdoors, but now I enjoy being part of a group,” says Tyrek Capers, a member of Troop 9539.

Heck, it was more like that barrier was obliterated.

“It’s real easy to say, ‘That’s too much work’ or ‘I don’t have the skill set to help these young people,’” Thomas says. “If you have a passion, you take it wherever it is.

“Some of the hardest-to-reach areas are the ones that need Scouting the most. Our goal is to prepare them for life, and everybody can help out.

“All you have to do is care.”





Recognizing Abilities

Dori Hammer Receives the Annual Woods Services Award

Doris (“Dori”) Sue Hammer of the Denver Area Council, Western Region, received the 2019 Woods Services Award at the BSA National Annual Meeting.

As Assistant Council Commissioner since 2011, Dori has provided leadership to the Council Committee on Special Needs. Prior to that she served in several Commissioner and Unit positions providing opportunities and resources for youth with different abilities.

She has taught special needs courses at Wood Badge, merit badge college, commissioner college, and University of Scouting. She has led education in special needs awareness for troops and leaders, Scouting committees, district roundtables, the Scout show, council camporee, fishing derby, and adventure days, among others. She was part of a team that started a website and newsletter. Among the Scouting awards she has received are the District Award of Merit, the Torch of Gold, the Silver Beaver, and the Council Commissioner of the Year.

Her background in disability advocacy goes back over twenty years. She has served on the board of directors for Jeffco First Steps, the Family Support Council, a member of Arc of Jeffco, and Jefferson County Schools Accountability team, all of which have to do with advocacy, accommodation, and work with special needs youth. In the Denver Area Council, anytime someone asks about or mentions Special Needs Scouting, Dori is immediately the first name others think of.

The Woods Services Award is granted nationally each year to the nominated BSA volunteer who best exemplifies exceptional service and leadership in the field of Scouting with disabilities. The award is sponsored by the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center of Langhorne, PA, in honor of Luther W. Lord, a pioneer in Scouting with disabilities.



Adapting Advancement

Advancement help may be right down the street

Observations by Warren Wenner, CNP, Chair, National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee

One of the most common questions the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee receives from leaders and parents is where do I go for help with advancement for my Special Needs Scout. Well, the best answer may be right down the street at the Scout's school. Meeting with your Scout's school's special education teacher or reading specialist teacher could be the best answer.

Both teachers work with students who have disabilities daily and know the challenges and the needs of your Scout. Most Scouts who are in a special ed program at school have an , Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is a written document that's developed for each public school child who is eligible for special education. The IEP is created through a team effort and reviewed at least once a year. Parents have input into their child's plan and Scouting can be a part of that plan. Many school districts see the importance of what is being learned in classrooms being applied in the Scouting program.

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

Seabase Training Registration: laserfiche.scouting.org/Forms/2020-Florida-Sea-Base-Volunteer-Conference

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

AbleScouts: *Abilities Digest* articles posted online: ablescouts.org

Philmont Training Course: <http://www.philmontscoutranch.org/PTC/conferencesE/DIVERSEabilityAndDisABILITY.aspx>

A special education or reading specialist teacher may be helpful in planning what your Scout can achieve and the pace that Scout can get the work done. They may be able to help a unit committee breakdown the steps needed to achieve the next rank or award.

In many cases special ed teachers are doing some requirements for advancement in their own classroom with other special education students too. Take the cooking merit badge for example: many high school special education students are learning lifetime skills and learning to cook is one of those. You have to know what you are going to cook, set the plan, go shopping and cook a meal. The same skills special ed teachers are teaching in the classrooms are being taught in Scouting which can reinforce the IEP for the Scout. The unit committee working hand-in-hand with the special ed teachers on a Scout's IEP will enhance the Scouts abilities to learn.

Scouts that have physical disabilities may be working at school with their physical education teachers on adapted physical education skills. These teachers also may help a unit learning the limits of what a Scout can do to complete, physical type merit badges such as swimming, personal fitness or hiking. A physical education teacher might be able to set limits and goals that a Scout can reach in a reasonable amount of time or in blocks of distance that still could help the Scout achieve the merit badge.

Remember, Scouts must meet advancement requirements as written for merit badges and all ranks –no more and no less – and they are to do exactly what is stated. For more information, see section 10, “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.” *Guide to Advancement* And don't forget to ask the parents for advice and help. They know their child the best. Elisabeth Shelby, a member of the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee who has a PhD in Special Education, told me, “I used to say that the parents know their child and educators know techniques.” Parents, unit committee members, and educators working together will enhance a Scout's ability to advance at the Scout's level of learning.



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