Recognizing Abilities

Eagle Project of the Year: Fully Accessible Musical Playground


For Nathan Fain, the toughest part of completing his Eagle Scout project wasn’t building an innovative musical playground or making sure it was fully accessible for students with physical or mental challenges. And it wasn’t raising $40,000 for the project or leading 19 fellow teenagers who helped him complete the work. For Nathan Fain, the hardest part was telling a bunch of grown-ups what to do. Grown-ups who are professionals in their fields, no less.

“It became pretty difficult to step in and say what I needed to say and get my two cents in so I get the job done right,” Nathan says. “I just had to overcome it and let them think whatever they thought of me but get the job done right anyway.”

He did just that, and the result is a resounding success.

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There are more than 50,000 Eagle Scout service projects completed each year, but only one is deemed the Eagle Scout Service Project of the Year. For 2018, that one was the work of Nathan Fain. Nathan, an Eagle Scout in Troop 326 of LaGrange, Ga., won the 2018 Glenn A. and Melinda W. Adams National Eagle Scout Service Project of the Year Award.

**Behind the scenes**

Nathan secured $40,000 in donations, including equipment and cash. Some 50 businesses pitched in with money or materials.

With everything ready, Nathan got to work on the playground at Lafayette Christian School in LaGrange. Like all Eagle Scouts, Nathan didn’t do his project alone. He led more than 100 volunteers who collectively provided 1,254 hours of service.

The name of the project — LCS Joyful Noise — comes from Psalm 98:4, which reads “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.”

Dale Jackson is co-founder of LCS Discovery Cottage, a program at the school that helps students with learning differences. His students will benefit from Nathan’s project. In his role, Jackson often is approached by people who want to raise money for the school but don’t know where to start. Not so when Nathan showed up. “He simply sat down for 30, 40 minutes, I gave him advice, and then he’s gone,” Jackson says. “And he did it.”

**Mary Lynne Capen receives the 2018 Woods Services Award**

Mary Lynne Capen of Patriots Path Council, Northeast Region, is 2018 Woods Services Award recipient. One 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 Langhome, PA, in honor of Luther W. Lord, a pioneer in Scouting with Disabilities.

Mary Lynne began her special needs Scouting career in 1990 when she became a commissioner, den leader, Webelos leader and committee chair for several special needs units. That was just the beginning. For more than 7 years, she coordinated the Scoutoree and
Fishoree and continues to volunteer for those events. She has also managed a council wide Disabilities Awareness Challenge.

She has taught special needs related topics at University of Scouting for more than 10 years, and merit badge workshops, belt loop bonanzas, and Elective Extravaganzas for over 5 years. She has been a Disabilities Awareness merit badge counselor since the days it was called Handicapped Awareness merit badge.

Mary Lynne has rewritten programs so they better meet the needs of Cub Scouts with special needs. She learned American Sign Language so she could work with a unit of deaf Scouts, as well as be an interpreter.

In addition to all she has done for her council, Mary Lynne has served on the National Disability Awareness Task Force. In her position there, she helped rewrite and update the Disabilities Awareness Manual, the “Registration Beyond the Age of 18” form, Disabilities Awareness merit badge, and the new Cub Scout manuals.

Nominations for the Woods Services Award due December 31, 2018

Every council is authorized to submit one nomination for the Woods Services Award every year. An appropriate nominee would be recent recipients of the council’s Torch of Gold Award. The nomination form and instructions are available at file-store.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf. Nomination forms should be signed by the Council’s Scout Executive and received at the National Service Center by December 31.

Adapting Advancement

Advancement Committees Need Special Needs Representation


The Guide to Advancement addresses council advancement committee responsibilities in Section 3.0.0.1, and it is always wise to ensure that the committee has someone well versed in special needs awareness issues so that other committee members can properly address them when they arise. Better still, the committee can “be prepared” by having a plan in place that will enable it to address things in a proactive instead of a reactive way.
A member of the advancement committee who has experience with special needs Scouting can lead short committee sessions—or even presentations at roundtables or Universities of Scouting—to help everyone understand important tasks, e.g., how to register a Scout with a disability beyond the age of eligibility, how to request alternative merit badges, and, most importantly, to be sure that those charged with leading units that have Scouts with special needs completely understand the requirements for advancement.

This representative can also be the “go to” person when the local council service center receives calls or requests on the topic. Having a single person (or an actual committee, if you are lucky enough) to help answer questions properly the first time, in conjunction with a designated member of the council staff, can ensure that we provide accurate information to ensure advancement can proceed properly for each Scout.

The Scout motto can be used in many different ways, and by having a special needs Scouting representative on your council advancement committee you can be sure that those individuals are prepared to properly guide Scouts, unit leaders, and family members towards a positive experience in Scouting.

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.

Receiving Multiple Copies. If you receive Abilities Digest at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with “REMOVE” in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we remove only that email address.

Duplicate Copies. If you receive more than one copy of Abilities Digest at the same email address, please reply to all but one of them with “DUPLICATE” in the subject line.

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.
Enhancing Awareness

Counting the Scouts with Disabilities in your Council

Councils have tools available to estimate the number of Scouts with disabilities they serve. Three Fires and Erie Shores Councils have conducted surveys over the past few years to quantify and understand the breakdown of Scouts with disabilities within traditional and special needs units. This information helps the council Disabilities Awareness Committees improve service and support the Scouts, parents and volunteers. A one-page survey was included in the re-charter packets for each unit within each district of the councils. Specific objectives include:

- Identify the various disabilities represented within the council’s membership.
- Determine the need to target specific training events by district or council.
- Understand the breakdown of different disabilities within each district.
- Determine how the committee may provide support and/or resources to individuals, units or districts.

Results From Two Councils

Erie Shores Council has been gathering this data since 2015. In the 2018 year, the top 3 disabilities were Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at 8.88% of Scouts, Autism Spectrum Disorder at 2.89%, and Cognitive Disabilities at 1.70%. The total percentage of Scouts with disabilities per year was 13.59% in 2015, 14.4% in 2016, 15.4% in 2017, and 18.65% in 2018. These total percentages do not include non-traditional units within Scoutreach.

The accuracy of these numbers depends heavily on how many Scouting units fill out the surveys and return them. The response rate shows the percentage of surveys returned. The higher the response rate, the more accurate the statistics are. Typically, a rate above 30% is considered pretty good. In 2018, the Erie Shores response rate was

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.
49.49% of the council’s total units. The top two disabilities identified in Erie Shores are ADHD and Autism. The total numbers may change from year to year based on retention, survey responses, and new membership.

Three Fires Council has been gathering this data since 2014. For the 2018 year, the response rate by district within the Council varied between 43.20% and 72.02%. The Council-wide response rate in 2018 was 55.25%. The top 3 disabilities were Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at 4.78%, Autism Spectrum Disorder at 1.88%, and Learning Disabilities at 0.84%. The overall total percentage of Scouts with disabilities per year was 11.28% in 2014, 10.95% in 2015, 10.61% in 2016, 12.74% in 2017, and 10.48% in 2018.

The Survey Tool

The survey starts by identifying the unit and the leader filling out the survey:

- Unit number, district
- #Scouts in unit, #Scouts with disabilities, #Leaders with disabilities
- Name of person completing survey, position, phone, email address

The remainder of the survey asks for the number of Scouts who fall into these categories:

- Scouts w/ Disabilities who have earned the unit’s highest rank in the past year (i.e., Arrow of Light, Eagle, Summit, Denali)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (including Asperger’s syndrome, PDD-NOS)
- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
- Blind or Sight-Impairment
• Deaf or Hard of Hearing
• Cognitive disability (learning disabilities, reading disorders such as Dyslexia, writing disorders such as Dysgraphia, Auditory Processing Disorder, Speech Impairments, Down Syndrome, etc.)
• Developmental delay (Down Syndrome)
• Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities (Bipolar Disorder, Depression, Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Tourette Syndrome, etc.)
• Physically disabled (Cerebral palsy, spina bifida, paralysis, mobility impairments, etc.)
• Seizures / Epilepsy
• Traumatic brain injury
• Multiple Coexisting Disabilities

The survey tool is posted at AbleScouts.org: ablescouts.org/tools/membership/

**Should Adults with Bipolar Disorder be Leaders?**

Bipolar disorder is one of many special needs that we need to understand in Scouting and in life. The negative side of a bipolar individual can be frightening and this prejudices many against anyone with bipolar disorder. Psychological and medical help can control bipolar behavior. Unit leaders can’t automatically exclude anyone based on a disability, especially if a youth member’s parent. Instead, leaders should find out how well the behavior is controlled. Bipolar disorder, like other disabilities, shows different degrees of affliction. Individuals should know where they fit on this scale. This keeps Scouting open to the family where practical and ensures the safety of other youth members.

Many units accept new leaders more-or-less “on approval” by giving them limited tasks as they fit themselves into unit activities. The new leader can show they are not someone to be feared and can prove their steadiness in control. They can demonstrate their strengths and participate in activities that help the unit, like being a merit badge counselor, going on trips to assist in the activity, sending emails with updates to the unit, finding used uniforms, driving and of course, helping with his/her child. Every adult volunteer must take training and YPT, understand BSA guidelines, and follow the policies, rules and regulations.
The unit should try to accommodate any adult willing to help. Look past any disability and accept a person that is willing to volunteer with Scouting. Not all leaders do everything, and many parents sincerely want to help with their child’s unit. Talking to a spouse and/or family member about their disorder, with permission, can help understand what might trigger an episode and what can be done if one occurs. No one solution can fit all situations. Both sides need to work together.

Scouting is a multidimensional. We all have to deal with various situations and people. Training, attitude, understanding, communication, the 12 points of the Scout Law, all help us as leaders deal with any circumstance.

**NDAS Resource Lists**

The BSA’s National Disabilities Awareness Subcommittee has a Resources Task Force that maintains lists of resources to help Scouts and leaders address special needs and disabilities. Lists of web site links and mobile apps have been posted to the AbleScouts.org web site under the “Tools” menu.

The list of helpful websites is at [ablescouts.org/tools/ndas-links/](ablescouts.org/tools/ndas-links/).

Here is a list of applications for mobile devices or for personal computers that can assist with special needs. Applications are available through either a web site or an app store, as indicated below. App stores include those for Microsoft, iOS (Apple products), and Android (Google and compatible products).

**Blind**
- Be My Eyes - Bemyeyes.org

**ADHD**
- ADHD-Am Overview - Microsoft
- AQR-ADHD- Microsoft

**Autism**
- Autism Treatment Plan- Microsoft
- Avaz - iOS, Android
- AAC Speech Communicator - aacspeech.org

**Deaf/Hearing Impaired**
- Live In - Microsoft
- ISL for Beginners - Microsoft
• RogerVoice - Rogervoice.com

**Diabetes**
• Diabetes News - Microsoft
• Diabetes Manager - Microsoft
• Glycemic Index & Local Diet Assistant - Microsoft

**Disabilities**
• Disabledcare - Microsoft

**Dyslexia**
• Read Type & Spell Well - Microsoft

**Heart**
• Doctor Cardio Pro - Microsoft

**Multiple Sclerosis**
• Multiple Sclerosis - Microsoft
• MS Notes Journal - Microsoft

**Speech-Language Disorders**
• IUVO Communicator - Microsoft
• Pen Pad - Microsoft
• VoiceITT - voiceitt.com
• Text to Speech - Android

This list of helpful applications also appears at ablescouts.org/tools/ndas-apps/.

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**Helpful Links**

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

**Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org**


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**

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

Membership survey tool - ablescouts.org/tools/membership/

List of helpful websites - ablescouts.org/tools/ndas-links/
List of helpful applications - ablescouts.org/tools/ndas-apps/

AbleScouts: Abilities Digest articles posted online – ablescouts.org

Other Web Resources

Working with Scouts with disAbilities - www.wwswd.org/

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