Adapting Activities
Adapting the COPE Challenge at Philmont

Last summer, Scouter Angela Glunt participated in the Philmont training course DIVERSEability and DisABILITY. Here are her experiences in adapting the COPE Challenge for people with disabilities.

Our class was approached by the COPE team. We were asked if we would be willing to participate in the COPE Course to help develop strategies for assisting Scouts with special needs. The goal was to show the struggles a Scout with special needs might encounter during the event.

Our group was very excited for the opportunity to engage in this adventure. We split our...
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class in half. One group took the Lower Course and the other took the Upper Course. Each group member exhibited the characteristics of a different disability. By working with our class as if we were Scouts with special needs, staffers were able to gain knowledge through the hands-on experience. Participant Amy wore a blindfold, showing that the course can be completed with visual impairments. She was absolutely brilliant as she braved the high-wire bridges. The staff quickly realized that Amy required a ‘one on one’ staff member to guide her up the flights of stairs, over the obstacles that each new trial held, and to make sure she safely belayed down the tower.

Participants Curt and David represented Autism and ADHD. They did a magnificent job portraying related behaviors by not paying attention or listening to details, not staying on task, having difficulties following or understanding directions, fidgeting, talking too much, blurtling out, interrupting, and so on. The COPE team worked hard to adjust their routines, instructions, and communication to adapt in a manner that would best suit each participant’s needs. This was no easy task.

I myself had recently undergone vocal cord surgery and was unable to speak. As I advanced through the course, I had to make sure I could properly communicate with the staff. We needed to have verbal permission to transfer our harness cables from one bridge to another. I could not communicate vocally from the crow’s nest posts to staff in the tower. Instead, I snapped my fingers and made eye contact. I was then granted permission to transfer my cables.

After I completed the various ropes, cables, and wood bridges, I proceeded to the wall where I could belay down. I have been rock climbing and belaying before, and knew I needed gloves. The staff member gave me instructions, told me to lean back and jump down. I signed that I needed gloves. Again, the staff member encouraged me to jump down. I signed again, that I needed gloves. I saw the gloves sitting on the side. Part of me wanted to reach out and grab them, but then I thought, “What if this were a Scout who had never done this before and wasn’t able to communicate? Would that Scout know they needed gloves?” After the third round of reassuring instructions, and still no gloves, I jumped.

Half way down my descent, I heard that staff member scream, “I forgot to give her gloves!” BINGO! At that moment I knew they would always remember to check to make sure every Scout had gloves, regardless of their communication abilities. After I zipped through my landing, I showed the staff my hands and neither hand had blisters or rope burns. I was fine. Their concern was sincere and I felt very safe.
I finished up the course by climbing the rock wall twice. It was an incredible feeling to overcome my fears and anxieties while building self confidence. Each of us stretched beyond our comfort zones for a bigger purpose, to make the COPE course a place all Scouts can go and feel included. Afterwards we all reconvened to share our observations and evaluations. Both the staff and our class grew that day. Each of us has special attributes and talents that we bring and share within Scouting.

**Disability Adaptions at Philmont Training Center**

The COPE course was not the only focus of disability adaptations at Philmont Training Center. Instructors and participants in last summer’s *DIVERSeability and DisABILITY* training course experienced several other adaptations. Long-time PTC instructor Scott Hellen (right) was pleased to find the classrooms already prepared for individuals in wheelchairs. In a previous summer the PTC staff had produced wood blocks to raise table heights to better fit wheelchairs and the blocks were already installed when the course staff arrived. New picnic tables better accommodated people in wheelchairs as well as others with mobility problems.

The course instructors and participants last summer posed a challenge by reflecting a range of disabilities themselves. One participant had had vocal cord surgery that restricted the use of her voice. She used a combination of American Sign Language, pantomime gestures, and a writing slate to communicate. Another had survived a recent stroke, limiting both mobility and word memory. Another was recovering from a broken foot.

The training course was itself arranged to accommodate multiple disabilities. As noted earlier, the room was mobility-friendly. Material was presented both orally and in text form. Images were designed to be comprehensible to participants with color blindness.
The kitchen adapted very effectively to help a participant with severe food allergies. The Philmont staff was alerted ahead of time and effectively addressed the cross contamination risks.

In addition to the COPE course, the PTC also organized a wheelchair orienteering event. This posed different challenges from a traditional orienteering event. The paths had to be wheelchair accessible and landmarks had to be visible at wheelchair level. For participants unfamiliar with wheelchairs, this was a form of “disability awareness challenge.”

**Recognizing Abilities**

**Be sure your council presents the annual Torch of Gold Award**

The Torch of Gold is a council award given annually to an adult Scouter for dedicated work for youth, particularly Scouts, with disabilities. It is not an award that is earned by simply fulfilling specific requirements. It is given in recognition for service in multiple areas for many years.

The nominee should show a level of dedication and service comparable to a Scouter receiving the Silver Beaver Award, but for service specifically in the area of working with Scouts with disabilities.

A Scouter must be recommended to his or her council by another individual. Although there are specific criteria for this award, each council should have its own selection procedure. The nomination form can be found at [http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-495.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-495.pdf)

The criteria are:

- Each council may recognize one Scouter per year with the Torch of Gold Award.
- The completed nomination form must be submitted to the council Special Needs or Disabilities Awareness committee or its designee, according to council procedures and deadline.
- The nominee shall:
  a. Be currently registered with the Boy Scouts of America.
  b. Have at least three or more years of service in any Scouting leadership capacity related to Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Venturers with disabilities, including educating other Scouters about disabilities and working with youth who have disabilities.
c. Have completed all activities related to Scouts with disabilities on a strictly volunteer basis.

- This award shall be given only once to an individual, and is not dependent on, or to be influenced by, other awards.
- Presentation should be made at the council annual recognition dinner, district recognition dinner, or other appropriate Scouting event.
- The Scout executive must approve the recipient.

The Torch of Gold recipient may receive a certificate (item #33733), a medal with neck ribbon (item #645077), and a lapel pin (item #645078).

After selecting a Torch of Gold recipient, the council should consider nominating their recipient for the national Woods Services Award. The Woods Services deadline is December 31, as described below.

**Nominate a Council Scouter for the Woods Services Award**

The Woods Services Award is given to one Scouter per year nationally for exceptional service and leadership. The nominee should have served Scouts with disabilities in several capacities at the unit, district, council, or national levels of the Boy Scouts of America. The nominee for this prestigious award must have served Scouts with disabilities for at least three years strictly as a volunteer. This is a BSA award sponsored by the Woods Services Foundation in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, in memory of Luther W. Lord. The recipient receives a plaque from the Woods Foundation and may wear the BSA community service square knot.

The Woods Services Award nomination form, BSA form #512-258, can be found at [http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf). After being completed, the nomination must be signed by the nominee’s Scout Executive and received by the national BSA office by December 31 for the following year’s award. The Woods Services award is presented in May. Because of the limit of one award per year, each council may only submit one nomination per year.

When completing a nomination form, remember that those evaluating the nominee do not know the Scouter. They evaluate a nominee based only on what is contained in the form. Therefore, be sure it is complete. You may continue any section on an additional page. A good writeup will also include one or two specific examples of exceptional service. Emphasize the number of Scouts with disabilities affected both directly and indirectly through the nominee’s leadership at the unit, district, council, and national levels.
Earning the Special Needs Scouting Service Award

District and council volunteers who look over nominations for the Torch of Gold or Woods Services Award may learn of Scouters who don’t receive these awards, but deserve recognition for their service. These Scouters may qualify for the Special Needs Scouting Service Award (SNSSA), an earned recognition. It may be presented to adults, volunteer or professional, who show outstanding service and leadership to Scouts with disabilities.

To earn this award the Scouter must complete the specified requirements listed on BSA form 512-067. Their active service includes (1) working with Scouts who have disabilities/special needs, (2) promoting disabilities/special needs awareness in Scouting, and (3) advocating the recruitment, inclusion, and full participation of youth who have disabilities/special needs in the programs of the Boy Scouts of America.

After completing the application form, it should be turned into the local council for approval. Once earned and approved by the local council, the recipient qualifies to receive a knot with device, certificate, and pendant suspended from a ribbon.

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.
Adapting Advancement

Perspective: Advancement is a Method not a Mission

National Committee member Roger Tate has produced a series of “Perspectives” on advancement that will appear in this and upcoming copies of Abilities Digest.

The mission of the BSA is to prepare young people to make ethical choices throughout their lifetime. Advancement is one of several methods for promoting the mission. There are many wonderful Scouts who never become Eagle Scouts (author included). However, many of us that focus our attention on Scouts with special needs want to see these Scouts advance, by any means necessary. Such a viewpoint does not always mesh with the mission, aims, or traditions of the BSA. While we are advocates for our Scouts, the purpose of this column is to help Scouter and parents of Scouts with special needs/disabilities better understand other leaders who are advancement specialists, and vice versa. This allows us to focus our advocacy in ways that truly benefit the Scout and fulfill the promise of Scouting for the Scout. Don’t let the method become the mission.

Perspective: Achievable Challenge

Alternative advancement requirements bring the challenge within the capability of the Scout, but the Scout must still have the desire and willpower to meet the challenge. No Scout is asked to attempt an advancement challenge beyond his or her capability, if that capability can be objectively determined. A Scout is never set up for failure, but a Scout should expect to be challenged and leaders should prepare Scouts to be challenged and encourage them to overcome.

What will your child be able to do later that she or he cannot today? Advancement challenges are expected to be met over a period of years. Not everything is within the capability of a new 11 year old Scout nor should it be.

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.
When we apply for and grant approval for alternative requirements we need to do so from a perspective that will allow the Scout to “grow into” as many challenges as practical.

**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](http://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf)

Special Needs Scouting Service Award form: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-067.pdf](http://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-067.pdf)

AbleScouts: *Abilities Digest* articles posted online – [ablescouts.org](http://ablescouts.org)

**Other Web Resources**


**Social Media**

Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165)

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