

ABILITIES DIGEST

Prepared. For Life.® Vol. 8, No. 1

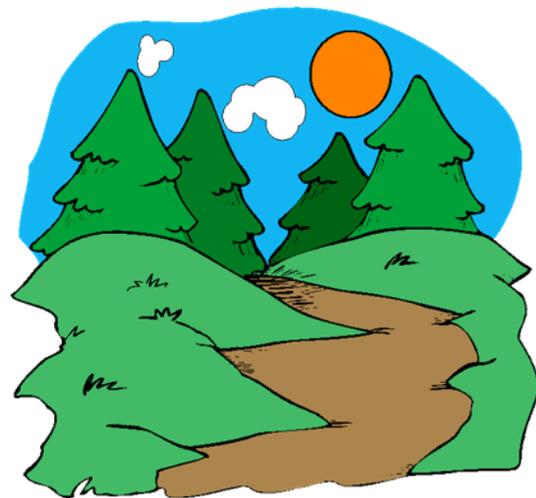
Spring 2021  BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Adapting Activities Preparing for Summer Camp

Camping can provide many successes and experiences youth would never get to experience if not for Scouting. Camping with youth who have disabilities can be challenging. Going into the experience with insight can make the experience more successful. Here are a few tips to get parents, the Scout's leadership, and the Scout prepared for an awesome summer experience.

For Parents

The Leader's Guide – get a hold of it and read it. You can go to any Scout Camp's website and find the Leader's Guide available to you. The guide explains the information needed to have a smooth camping experience at your camp of choice. Within the guide, you will learn about schedules, health lodge information, fees, swim checks, Trading Post hours of operation, dining hall special meals information, and many other things that will pertain to your Scout's time at camp.



Unit Informational Meetings – attend them. Here you will learn about what is expected of you and your Scout prior to, during, and after the event. If you have read the specific camp's Leader's Guide, you will be prepared to

In This Issue

- **Adapting Activities:** Preparing for summer camp; parents and youth with special needs sharing tents; waterfront and boating accessibility.
- **Adapting Advancement:** The ISAP and the IEP.
- **Awareness Events:** Membership and unit growth roundtable for special needs and disabilities; training events at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in 2021; making family memories at Philmont Training Center.
- **Recognizing Abilities:** nominate a fellow Scouter for the Torch of Gold; Warren Wenner and Deb Reidmiller receive the 2021 Woods Services Award.
- **Helpful Links:** Accessing special needs and disabilities materials.

ask questions and gather the information needed to have a successful experience. Each unit will have its own rules and requirements as well, so be prepared to add this information to your research.

Fill out all forms – in full and make sure you are detailed in completing the Strengths and Challenges form. Troop leadership may either not know your Scout or know him/her well. The form will help you “paint a picture” of your Scout and provide valuable information to those who will be with your Scout for the duration of the camping event. Fill out the dietary information form in full, especially if your Scout has special needs in this area. Fill out the medical forms and attach added information as needed. Again, the medical lodge health officers will most likely not be familiar with your Scout. The information you provide on the health forms and additional pages may mean the difference between an awesome week of fun or a dismal experience.



Pre-work for advancement success – if during the week, your Scout will be working on advancement requirements or merit badge requirements, work with your Scout prior to the event. Try to get some of the requirements accomplished BEFORE the classes are held. This way, the Scout with learning difficulties will have some prior knowledge and expectations as to what he/or she will learn during the classes. With that added information, the requirements will more likely be completed during camp and success always brings smiles and feelings of accomplishment. This boosts the fun factor and the self-concept factor up a few notches!

D. Muth/Wikipedia

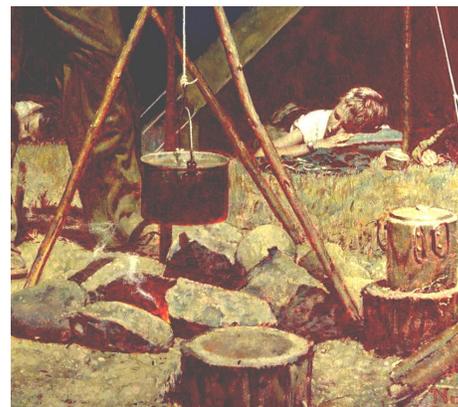
Get a preview – If camp is far away, go online and do a satellite tour of the camp. Locate buildings according to the information in the Leader’s Guide and take the virtual tour. If possible, get yourself and your Scout physically to camp beforehand and tour sites of interest; speak with the Camp Director and possibly staff members and get to know these Scouters before the actual week of camp begins.

Speak with leadership – either on the phone or face to face. Encourage your Scout to get to know the leadership, as they need to get to know your Scout. Discuss strengths and challenges, fears and concerns, expectations, and goals. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and seek solutions together as a team.

Connect with a Peer Buddy – Your Scout may already have a peer buddy within his/her unit. If not, seek to find a Scout who shares empathy, knowledge, and willingness to assist your Scout. Many times, during the school years, youth will lean on each other for various things and become very good friends. If they are in Scouting together, team them up together as Scout and Peer Buddy. In this way, they can look after each other and help keep each other on schedule, safe, and successful. The Peer Buddy is not the same thing as the “Buddy System” buddy which entails pairing up random Scouts during a campout. The Peer Buddy system goes beyond this type of pairing. The Peer Buddy lends a helping hand and watches out for the Scout with special needs and disabilities.

For Camp Leaders

Understanding the Scout's needs and disabilities – as a leader, you will want to sit down and talk with the parent and Scout about what will be needed and what can be expected when the Scout is especially challenged. Encourage the Scout to advocate for him/herself. This not only helps you learn about what is coming, but helps the Scout take ownership of the experience. Do this kind of “conference” as often as needed prior to departure and again during the camp out. Knowing your Scout is critical to the camp out's success for that youth in particular. If you at some point decide you need extra adult leadership, this is the time to begin building relationships. Having done this BEFORE leaving for camp is an extra advantage for everyone concerned.



Use of technology – should not necessarily be denied. A tablet or phone may be critical for many Scouts, especially those with poor short term memory skills, challenging organizational skills, and other cognitive issues. Here's an example of one way to utilize high and low technology. Provide a white board for all Scouts in your camp. List daily schedules, times, breaks, meals, etc. for each individual Scout. Let the

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***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.**

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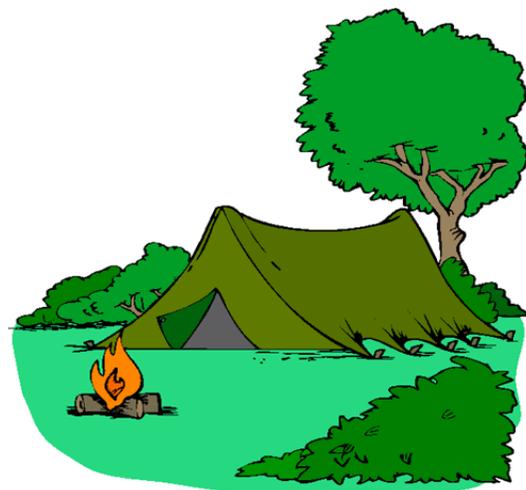
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Scouts who need to, take a picture of their schedules on their phones, and carry the schedules with them to help them not forget where and what they are supposed to be doing. Losing his/her phone is not on the Scout's list of things to do. Losing papers and work folders are!! As a leader, understand the need for technology and its important uses to help keep your Scouts organized and on time to daily events. After all, don't you utilize your calendar, alarms, and contact lists in your own phone? Think about teaching these types of skills to your Scouts. Discuss with everyone what works best and develop systems that will help your Scouts succeed!

FUN – Did someone say “Fun?” This is the bottom line for everyone! Baden Powell specifically emphasized that fun is a big part of the Scouting experience! Yes, all will learn something, and hopefully that “something” is positive and useful. EVERYONE wants to have fun! Even YOU! Don't forget it!

Parents and Youth Sharing Tents

The national office has recently issued a clarification about youth with special needs sharing a tent with parents if there are health and safety reasons to do so. The statement appears as a “frequently asked question” in the “Youth Protection and Barriers to Abuse FAQs.” (scouting.org/health-and-safety/yp-faqs/).



Q. Can I share a tent with my son or daughter who has special needs?

A. Youth and adults tent separately in the Scouts BSA, Sea Scouts, and Venturing programs. Youth who have a special need or disability who may require a parent or legal guardian to tent with them must develop a plan in conjunction with their local council Scout Executive to address their specific needs.

Youth and adults may share a tent if required by a special need or disability. This is an exception to typical practice. It is arranged and approved through the local council's Scout Executive.

Waterfront and Boating

This is an excerpt from the Special Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Toolbox being developed by the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee (NSNDC). The Toolbox will replace the 2007 Scouting for Youth with Disabilities Manual.

Every willing Scout should have opportunity to get in and onto the water and have fun. **Opportunities for recreational time on the water are especially important for Scouts with disabilities** so they can enjoy camp, try new things, and cool off on hot days. While techniques discussed here can be applied to watercraft instruction time like merit badge classes, this module focuses on the less structured recreational time.

The waterfront program area has a natural advantage over other camp program areas. The most widely effective accommodation for Scouts with disabilities in boats and in open water is wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). Since PFDs are required for almost every activity in a natural body of water, no extra equipment or planning is required for many Scouts with special needs or disabilities.



The waterfront program area is more complex than some other program areas. There is a wide variety of watercraft that can be used and there may be aquatics play structures and fishing areas located in or near boating areas. Non-powered craft include canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboats, small sailboats, and standup paddleboards. Motor powered craft include “Jet Ski®” personal watercraft (PWC), motorboats, and pontoon boats. Each type of watercraft has its own procedures and sequences for launching, propelling, steering, and landing that need to be taught and adhered to.

Since passing the BSA swim test is a prerequisite for the watercraft merit badges, we tend to assume that a Scout that can pass the swim test can do everything else it takes to operate a watercraft. The swim test is not a clean dividing line. Some people who could not complete the swim test, like a person with lower body paralysis, could successfully paddle, row, sail, or drive. There are also people who can physically complete the swim test and all the actions needed for boat handling, but need extra instruction or time to learn the skills of boating or need a mature person in the boat as a buddy to assist with decision making.

Communication

Some Scouts have disabilities that are more obvious, like many physical disabilities, blindness, deafness, or Down syndrome. For every obvious disability you encounter, there will be several Scouts with less obvious special needs like learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, or anxiety disorders. Camp is exciting and challenging, and over the course of a multi-day camp session, Scouts with disabilities may tire out or act out more as time goes on. Some Scouts with milder special needs may start camp without needing accommodations but begin to need them later on.

The Scouts that come to participate at the waterfront do not often identify themselves to the staff as having a special need. The key thing to remember is, if a Scout is making errors in following instructions or rules, it could easily be due to a special need or disability rather than lack of knowledge or disobedience. If you take a little time to interact with the Scout directly, you can get a sense of whether and what kinds of extra help will be needed.

If you have a question or concern about an individual Scout and want to know more about him or her, reach out to the adults from the Scout’s unit. First, look around your program area. In some instances, a family member, caregiver, or unit leader is discreetly watching their Scout from a distance. Feel free to approach them while

someone else on your staff watches over the Scout. Otherwise you will have to track down an appropriate adult. If you won't be able to leave the waterfront during "business hours," you can try to catch the Scout's unit leaders at the next mealtime or use your camp commissioners to reach out to the leaders and ask them to come to see you at the waterfront.

Mobility Access to the Water's Edge

It is rare for a camp to have a wheelchair accessible path all the way to the water's edge. Users of wheelchairs and crutches often need vehicle transportation from the central area of the camp to the waterfront. Local conditions, like the steepness of the shoreline, vary too much to give specific advice, but it is worthwhile to think through in advance how the waterfront staff will generally transport such a Scout from the last accessible point to the water and into a boat. If the Scout must be physically carried, take guidance from the Scout, family member, or caregiver on the most comfortable and safe way to do so.



Wheelchairs and other mobility equipment need to be shaded or covered while the user is in the water. Direct sun can make the surfaces hot enough to burn. This is particularly important because some people with physical disabilities also have nerve conditions where they cannot feel heat and/or pain and will not know they are being injured.

Including Nonswimmers and Beginner Swimmers

From *Safety Afloat - Point 3 – Swimming Ability*

For activity afloat, those not classified as a swimmer are limited to multiperson craft during outings or float trips on calm water with little likelihood of capsizing or falling overboard. They may operate a fixed-seat rowboat or pedal boat accompanied by a buddy who is a swimmer. They may paddle or ride in a canoe or other paddle craft with an adult swimmer skilled in that craft as a buddy. They may ride as part of a group on a motorboat or sailboat operated by a skilled adult.

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 specialneedschair@scouting.org.

To restate this in the affirmative, Scouts of any ability level may go out in small boats. They do not have to pass the BSA swimmer-level test first. They may learn to paddle, row, and operate boats if they are willing and physically able to do so. With precautions, Scouts may go out in boats even if they cannot paddle, row, or pedal.

As we will discuss later, you may need to make individualized adjustments to allow a Scout or adult with a special need or disability on the water. Some examples are:

- Equipment modifications like adding backrests, securing the Scout into the seat on larger boats, increased flotation aids, etc.
- An increased level of skill for the Scout's buddy. This could be aquatics skill, demonstrated by merit badges or certifications, or it could be maturity and decision-making.
- A three-person buddy group where one of the buddies could focus attention on the Scout with the disability after an overturn.
- Improving the supervision ratio for the activity as a whole, using aquatics staff and other qualified adults and or support boats.

Be creative. These adjustments might require deviations from BSA Aquatics rules and procedures or deviations from the traditions of the camp. Remember that there is a decision framework (flowchart) in the BSA Aquatics Staff Guide for you to use to meet the objective of safety when not every rule can be followed. It is reasonable to compensate for one rule that needs to be relaxed by making another procedure more restrictive.

Adapting Advancement

The ISAP and the IEP



The approval of alternative requirements or merit badges should be discussed with the Scout, parent or guardian, and unit leader. An agreement is reached and forwarded to the council advancement committee for approval before starting to work on the specific task. The ISAP is the basic plan that can be used for all Scouts to document proposed and approved alternative advancement requirements. The ISAP is modified by addendum. Additional information can be found in the Guide to Advancement, section 10.

Individual Scout Advancement Plan for:

Member's name _____ Date of birth _____
Unit No. _____ District _____ Council _____

Statement of belief: Though it is true every Scout must have the overall ability to fulfill BSA advancement requirements as written, members with a documented disability deserve the opportunity to utilize their remaining abilities to fulfill alternative requirements that represent the same challenge and essential outcome as those written. The only limitations for members with sufficient abilities to achieve approved alternative requirements should be their individual desire, focus, and perseverance.

Objective: Scouting literature provides the requirements, policies and procedures, and related supporting content. It cannot address each individual Scout's abilities, but it can help those involved to reach an understanding as to how certain goals can be met. The ISAP is a road map that Scouts, their parents or guardians, mentors, and other leaders can reference and update as necessary.

Methodology: Within reasonable guidelines, the ISAP will provide Scouts with the opportunity to achieve their personal goals and, through creative thinking and action, remove unnecessary barriers that may impede their advancement. This is done so as not to lessen the relative challenge of the Scouting experience and the primary goal of personal growth.

Expectations of performance: Scouts are expected to do their best to the limits of their abilities and resources.

(Scout's name), promise that on my honor, I will do my best in working toward my personal advancement goals.

I am a (check one): Cub Scout Scout Venturer Sea Scout

Signed _____ Date _____

(leader's name), _____ (title), promise to do my best to deliver upon the statement of belief, objective, and methodology expressed above.

Signed _____ Date _____

So many of us figure that if our Scout with special abilities needs an ISAP (Individual Scout Advancement Plan), then why can't we just use the Scout's IEP (Individualized Education Program) when developing an alternative plan needed for a Scout's success?

Well, we can, but we should only use parts of an IEP. Let's look at this idea a little more closely.

An IEP is exactly what its name states: an individualized education plan or program developed as a specific plan for a specific student who has been diagnosed with a specific disability. The **IEP is a legal contract between the school district and the parent/guardian/student**. The IEP is fairly complex,

having many required parts, but foremost it must provide a free and appropriate education to the student who is eligible for services. The IEP includes educational goals and objectives from each state's various learning require-

ments for every grade level. It also includes ways to accommodate the student when he/she can't seem to catch on to the content being taught. The IEP is specific to the student and the student's strengths and weaknesses. After all, every student has a right to be educated.

It is important here to repeat that the IEP is a LEGAL DOCUMENT under United States law. It is developed by a team of school personnel familiar with the student and his/her parent/guardian, and as applicable, the student her/himself. There are legal consequences if any part of the contract is not followed. However, know that there are many students out there who have reached educational success because of this tool that paves the way for learning.

Those who work with Scouts who have different abilities and knowing about such tools as IEPs are happy to work up ISAPs for them. They know that the IEP helps at school so it should naturally help the Scout working on rank requirements. However, an ISAP is not an IEP. It is **NOT a legal document** and has no legal ramifications. It is developed by volunteers within Scouts BSA to encourage success in rank advancement, and like the IEP, includes suggestions as to how the Scout could achieve a rank in a way suitable for his/her cognitive and/or physical abilities. It is a plan designed with the Scout in mind without the legalities. The IEP goals or accommodations can be used within the ISAP, but **it is not legally binding**, and should not be viewed as such. An ISAP is developed by the leadership familiar with the Scout, his/her parent/guardian, and as applicable, the Scout her/himself. In sum, an ISAP can utilize parts of the IEP in order to help the Scout achieve rank in a way that is suitable.

With that being said, as parents of a Scout with different abilities, we should not go off and hand a Scout leader an IEP and say use this to help develop the ISAP. A parent should select the pertinent parts of the Scout's IEP, which often contains many pages. It is not a good idea to expect a leader to understand what he/she should look for. IEPs are chock full of legal jargon, testing results with percentiles and other confusing data, and long paragraphs of family history which are not anyone's business except the family's. An ISAP should only be about 4 pages in length, and it should highlight the specific items that are listed on the ISAP form posted on Scouting.org (filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-936_WB.pdf). Keep in mind the ISAP is a road map to success. Knowing your Scout, her/his strengths and weakness and how to encourage growth is very important to advancement and success in the Scouting program.

Utilizing the ISAP as a tool toward a specific end and use pertinent information from the IEP, if available, to help the process. With careful and considerate planning, our Scouts have a better chance of achieving success.

Awareness Events

Special Needs and Disabilities Online Roundtable: Membership and Unit Growth

When: Wednesday, 26 May 2021, 8:00pm ET/7:00pm CT

The BSA's National Special Needs & Disabilities Committee is hosting a Roundtable for Council Champions/Chairs, staff advisors and Unit Leaders on May 26, 2021 at 7:00 CDT. This Zoom meeting will focus on membership and unit growth.

Register in advance for this meeting online at [scouting-org.zoom.us/meeting/register](https://scouting-org.zoom.us/join/1234567890). After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with instructions and a link to join the meeting on May 19.

Questions? Email: SpecialNeedsChair@scouting.org

Training Events at the Summit!

If you've never been to the Summit Bechtel Reserve, here is a terrific opportunity to enjoy its adventures and to share experiences with other Scouters working with special needs and disabilities. Registration is open for two conferences offered August 2-7, 2021. Registration is open at summitbsa.org/training.

DIVERSEability and DisABILITY: Develop and Grow Scouting for Youth and Special Needs - this conference expands your knowledge to positively impact youth with disabilities within your local council. The conference covers the essentials of helping unit, district, and council leaders support today's growing population of Scouts with special needs and disabilities. See how volunteers across the country become empowered to make a difference in the lives of others.



Special Needs Committees in Your Council – this conference helps volunteers take special needs advocacy to the next level in their districts and councils. Topics include:

- Starting a Disabilities Awareness Committee
- Camping Considerations and Program Strategies
- Advancement Information
- Accommodations versus Modifications

... and Much, Much More!

Making Family Memories at Philmont Training Center

The Flather family attended the Philmont Special Needs Scouting Conference in 2019. Here are a few highlights from their adventure and why they believe you (and your tot) should pack up for PTC 2021! The **Adaptive Special Needs & Outdoor Camping Program Conference** takes place at Philmont June 23-July 3. Visit philmontscout-ranch.org/ptc/ for further information and registration.



Hello! We are a military family currently stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Bill, an Eagle Scout, and Britt, a nurse (and Scouting camp nurse), and our son Eli, who was just 2 years old for his first Philmont experience. We know the thought of packing up your youngest family members and taking them to a Scouting conference seems daunting. That was us!! However, we had a wonderful PTC ambassador lead us through the process and friends within the special needs scouting community encouraging us. We hope to ease your mind and show you how it was the best experience for our family, and it could be just as wonderful for yours.

Not only was our tent comfortable (and we use the word tent loosely, it felt like a cozy cabin) but Philmont provides a porta crib, SCORE! Plus, it was already inside our tent when we arrived along with a bag of goodies for our family to enjoy during our stay. And now, PTC has expanded their options to include deluxe family cabins. We started each morning dropping our tot off at Small Fry, where he always had a blast. Mom and Dad then headed over to the classroom to start our day of conference where we had a mix of special guests, breakout activities with our group, share in our favorite disability awareness activities and participate in adaptive shooting sports. We were also able to schedule private villa tours, and fellowship over a cup of coffee. Then it was off to pick up a happy tot, where we received a sheet with the run down from the day. Small Fry activities include a craft center, nature walks, petting animals, music, toys, story times, naps, and lots of snuggles.

A call from Philmont's dietary team a few weeks before our conference resolved our concerns regarding a food allergy in our family. PTC accommodated our needs, and everyone was well fed. Too well fed, if we are being transparent.

Afternoons were spent focused on family, looking at wildlife, flying kites, exploring Philmont from museums, the craft room, playgrounds, and just enjoying the gorgeous views. Of course, theme nights were family favorites.

Cobbler night, movie night with popcorn, Western night with amazing BBQ and music, and you cannot have a Scouting campout without campfire songs.

We were also able to catch up with Special Needs champions from across the country, hear their stories and their struggles. Offer support and networking. Most of all, we were able to fellowship with those who share in our calling to serve.

We have also posted two videos about our experience: the conference: youtu.be/QRr_ajJXsIA, and the family experience: youtu.be/aYQzH1hnrVU. While we left with minds refocused on our Scouting mission, it is the family memories that will continue to bring us back to Philmont. We hope to see you there in the 2021 PTC season!

Recognizing Abilities

2021 Woods Services Award Honorees



During a Zoom call in March, Warren Wenner and Deborah Reidmiller were announced as recipients of the 2021 Woods Services Award.

The Woods Services Award is sponsored and given annually by the Woods Foundation in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, to a BSA volunteer for exceptional service and leadership in the field of Special Needs Scouting. The award was established in 1978 in memory of Luther Wellington Lord, a residential supervisor at the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center, for more than 23 years. An active Scouter, the award was established in recognition of his service to youth through Scouting at the local and national levels. This year, the Woods Foundation, is presenting two awards.

Warren Wenner (above) is retired from a career as a professional Scouter. He currently resides in the Greater Tampa Bay Area Council. Through all his years as a professional, he spent countless hours as a volunteer working for, and with, Scouts with special needs. Warren worked tirelessly at each council where he served, to make sure all youth, especially those with special needs, were included in the Scouting programs. He was active in these programs with his son, Jason, as well as with other youth with disabilities of all kinds. He has served as special needs liaison on committees too numerous to name, and is currently chair of the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee (NSNDC). He has been working with special needs Scouts since the 1980s.

Deb Reidmiller (right) has been an active volunteer in the Patriots' Path Council for more than 10 years. A very few of her special needs Scouting activities include: First Aid and Disabilities Awareness Merit Badges Counselor, Council Advancement Committee, Council Special Needs Advancement Chair, and the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee both as a member and as Education and Training Chair. Since 2015 Deb has helped develop, manage, and assist at every one of her council's special needs events. She served as EMT at summer camp while guiding special needs Scouts through any difficulties they encountered. She has been a member of the faculty at Philmont Training Center, and at the Summit. Deb is totally committed to special needs Scouting.



Nominate a Fellow Scouter for the Torch of Gold

The TORCH OF GOLD award has been available for at least thirty years! However, very few volunteers or professional Scouters are aware of it. Originally, the Torch of Gold was recognized with a certificate ([BSA No. 33733](#)), but since 2016 it also has been recognized with a medal ([BSA No. 645077](#)) and a lapel pin ([BSA No. 645078](#)). This award recognizes Scouters who provide solid leadership value in their work for Scouts who have special needs and disabilities. Better recognition of the award will encourage greater use and increased awareness within council leadership of the resources within their volunteer members. Subsequently this will improve the quality of program delivery and success for Scouts who have special needs and disabilities, thus increasing membership within that under-served population.



This is a Council-level award that the recipient must be nominated to receive. The qualifying requirements are not onerous. The nominee must:

- Be currently registered with the Boy Scouts of America.
- Have a least three years of service in any Scouting leadership capacity related to Cub Scouts, Scouts BSA, Venturers and/or Sea Scouts with disabilities, including educating other Scouters about disabilities and working with youth who have disabilities.
- Have completed all activities related to Scouts with disabilities on a strictly volunteer basis.

A Council may only award one Torch of Gold per year and it should be presented at a Council-level recognition event. The nomination form ([BSA No. 512-945](#)) must be submitted to the council Special Needs and Disabilities committee, or its designee, according to council procedures and deadline.

Helpful Links

Scouting with Disabilities landing page: scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/

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

Guide to Advancement, section 10: scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/

#ScoutingAtHome: scouting.org/scoutingathome/

Links in Articles

Youth Protection and Barriers to Abuse FAQs: scouting.org/health-and-safety/yp-faqs/

ISAP form: filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-936_WB.pdf

Summit Training Registration: summitbsa.org/training.

Philmont Training Center: philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/

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

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

Social Media



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Email your comments and questions to specialneedschair@scouting.org.

