

W: Commissioner Service for Units

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OVERVIEW

This module is addressed to commissioners, who are called in when units are struggling. One of the key unit service functions is “**Linking unit needs to the district operating committee and other resources**”. The *Inclusion Toolbox* is one of those resources to help you help others. The editors of the *Inclusion Toolbox* encourage you to review the table of contents to get familiar with what you can find here. In addition to this module, we ask you to skim [Modules C, D, and E](#), to set a foundation for your commissioner work.

In this module we draw a distinction between **special-purpose Scout units**, where all of the members share a common special need or disability, and **traditional Scout units** that have a diverse group of members. Most of the attention of this module is focused on traditional units. While special-purpose units have their place, we hope to mainstream most Scouts with a special need into a traditional unit.

Our best sources indicate that about 15% of youth already in Scouting have an identified special need or disability. This is based on council-wide surveys taken in four BSA councils. This is supported by data on the general population of school-age children. There is good reason to believe youth with special needs are over-represented in Scouting. We also need to remember that there is a general bias in parents to underreport special needs, especially less severe ones.

Even more youth in Scouting have milder special needs or haven't received a diagnosis. This means that **the vast majority of traditional Scout units are serving Scouts with special needs**, whether the leadership realizes it or not. There is also room to grow Scouting membership by being more inclusive of Scouts with differing abilities

From its founding, Scouting has been a world-wide movement that celebrates what we all share as human beings and the common ground we all have as Scouts. That means respecting each other's differences and finding ways to include everyone in our programs if at all possible. When you consider these ideals at your local level, there are two aspects. The first is respecting the differences between one unit and the next in your district and council. The make-up and personalities of the leadership of each unit give the unit a distinctive culture. The second aspect is respecting the differences between the families and Scouts that are part of an individual Scout unit.

As a commissioner, you seek to have healthy units in order to fulfill the promise of Scouting to the most number of youth possible. This is not always easy for every unit. On one hand, people have a natural affinity for others that are like them, but on the other hand, people benefit from sharing life experiences with those who are not like them. There is also a habit in Scout units to keep doing things in the same way they did in the past (traditions). **It often takes extra work to be inclusive, but it is worth the effort.** A commissioner can gently encourage units to be more accepting and inclusive by helping them broaden their horizons beyond their unit traditions. Maybe the unit can plan a joint outing with another group where their Scouts interact with others who are different from them. Maybe the unit can play games where Scouts get to simulate a disability. Maybe the unit can recruit at a special needs parents group in addition to their usual schools, faith groups, etc.

JOINING CONFERENCES

Joining conferences are one of the most powerful tools for getting a Scout with a special need, the family, and the unit leadership working as a team. Module F has complete information on how to conduct a joining conference. A joining conference is similar to a parent-teacher conference at the beginning of a school year. Ideally, the adult leader that will have the most interaction with the Scout meets with the parents or guardians to get to know the Scout better. In Cub Scouting, where new leaders and youth often arrive at the same time, experienced leaders in the Pack help provide "quick start" mentoring for new leaders to do joining conferences.

Ideally, joining conferences are held for every Scout in the unit. This keeps Scouts with more obvious special needs from being singled out, and it keeps Scouts with less obvious special needs from being left out. A good argument can be made that every Scout is an individual and has unique strengths and struggles and is worth getting to know better through a joining conference, diagnosis or not. This is also a time to respond to concerns that parents and guardians may have but are not comfortable bringing up in a larger group.

PRACTICAL COMMISSIONER CHALLENGES

We are not going to repeat your basic commissioner training in this module. Many detailed questions you might have are covered in other modules of the Inclusion Toolbox, so we are going to trust you to seek out what you need. For the remainder of this module, we are going to give practical advice for situations you may encounter as a commissioner. These situations focus on Scouts with special needs and disabilities, but you will probably come to appreciate how things we do to support these Scouts will often benefit all Scouts.

Starting up Joining Conferences

How do I help a unit start using joining conferences when they have never done so in the past?

Here the answer is probably different for a Cub Scout unit than for other types of Scout units. In Cub Scouts units, the program has a natural annual cycle that usually aligns with the school year and the new Scouts are often concentrated in the lowest grade level dens. The best solution is to plan on joining conferences with the new Scouts' families in the first month of the program year, but try to have a similar follow-up conference with all of the Scouts' families towards the end of the program year. The follow-up conference can also be used as a chance to learn likes and dislikes and get ideas for the Pack's annual planning conference that typically takes place in the summer. You may question the need for repeated conferences, but there is a good reason. There are a lot of kids that do not get identified as having special needs until they have been in school for a few years. They may have been struggling before, but with more knowledge comes more opportunity to serve their needs.

For Scouts BSA, it is fairly easy to organize joining conferences with new Scouts after your recruiting events or the cross-over of Webelos into your troop. For existing Scouts in the troop, a joining/follow-up conference can be planned to happen near the same time as a Scoutmaster Conference. To clarify, the two conferences serve different purposes and cannot be combined into one event, but a Scoutmaster Conference represents a time for reflection on how a Scout's journey has gone and where it is going next. This reflective moment is a good time for a joining/follow-up conference. Wise Scoutmasters plan Scoutmaster Conferences with Scouts that have not advanced in rank in more than a year as well as those who have completed ranks.

For older age programs, the key difference is the role of the Scout in the process. With Venturing and Sea Scouts, the joining conference is primarily with the Scout, with a parent or guardian attending, rather than the other way around. It is still worthwhile to have a conference with each Scout in the unit. However, it is less likely that follow-up conferences will be needed. By the time a Scout is a teenager, the difficulties associated with a special need are pretty well understood by the family and the Scout and not likely to change as much over time.

When joining conferences start up in a unit, it needs to ultimately include all of the Scouts, so the purpose and the plan need to be communicated with all of the families in the unit. Obviously, a positive outlook in the communication helps rather than looking at it as a task to check off to be "good Scouts".

Units that steer Scouts with challenges away

How do I deal with a unit that is chasing Scouts with disabilities away rather than seeking to include them?

First, let's understand that the unit leaders probably mean well, even if they are not handling the situation well. The most common reason for this diversion is that the unit leaders lack confidence that they can do well by a Scout with a special need. They honestly believe there are other Scout units that would serve the Scout better. That may in fact be true for any one individual, but it can form a disappointing pattern where rather than try, the unit leaders push difficulties off on someone else. Sadly, the other Scouts/families in the unit never get the benefit of knowing people with special needs and practicing the Scouting values of kindness, helpfulness, and loyalty. When a Scout is turned away from a unit, there is a risk that a youth that could have been a great Scout gets discouraged and never joins any unit.

Another reason we see for diversion is when unit leaders put the welfare of the Scouts of their unit as a whole above those of an individual Scout. They don't want to "hurt" the rest of their Scouts by slowing them down to accommodate a Scout with a disability. While we don't want to see opportunities withheld from any Scout, sometimes it is good for a "high-performer" to be challenged to slow down to make an activity possible for another Scout that is less capable. This is little different than having older Scouts mentor younger ones.

A third reason we see diversion is that the unit leaders have a "health and safety" rationale for not being comfortable accepting the Scout. There is a mistaken notion that people with disabilities are fragile. A few are fragile, but that is not the norm. As the rest of the *Inclusion Toolbox* makes clear, the limitations on a Scout with a special need are usually due to a lack of imagination about how to make an activity possible, rather than an inherent limitation of the Scout.

A commissioner can make a difference by letting the unit leaders know about training opportunities on the topic of inclusion of special needs. If you can identify specific concerns, there are portions of the *Inclusion Toolbox* you can use for handouts or training. There may be a way to get the unit to help at an event for a special needs/disabilities service organization, like Special Olympics, where the Scouts and leaders can have first-hand interaction. Another suggestion would be to ask the District Committee to organize a "disabilities awareness camporee" or community event that involves several units. **Changing hearts and minds is a slow process.**

A Scout that could be better served by a special-purpose unit

When is it appropriate to redirect or transfer a Scout away from a traditional unit to a specialty unit?

A Scout should not be excluded from a traditional unit when the family is willing to provide the supportive care that the unit cannot directly provide, but there are times when even the best intentions are not sufficient for the Scouting program to

serve that youth. If the Scout cannot help but be left out of a major part of the traditional unit program, a special-purpose unit that operates a more functional program may be needed. As a commissioner you will want to help link these families to units. Your council's special needs and disabilities committee or council special needs and disabilities champion can help you locate the special purpose units in your area.

The most common situation is with intellectual disabilities where the intellectual "age" and chronological age of the Scout are much different. A special-purpose unit can offer a Cub Scout program to an older youth or a Scouts BSA program to a chronological adult. Most other special-purpose units are chartered to special schools or group homes, where Scouting can be a part of their educational or developmental purpose. Adults with intellectual disabilities, for example, have both adult and child-like aspects to their self-images (identities) and their interests. It is difficult to reconcile these aspects in a traditional unit. If a youth attends such a school but the family approaches a traditional unit to join, a frank discussion to understand what goals the family and youth have for Scouting would guide the decision to join a traditional or special-purpose unit.

Scouting has options to serve people who are too old to register for a particular BSA program but intellectually function as a younger person. With appropriate documentation they can be "registered beyond the age of eligibility" (RBAE). This could include a teen registered as a Cub Scout or an adult registered in Scouts BSA, Venturing, or Sea Scouts. Since a Scout with a disability may be approved to participate in Scouting indefinitely, the chartered organization and unit leadership should carefully consider at what point the age difference between the Scouts in the unit and the Scout with special needs is no longer appropriate. For example, the age and size mismatch between a 9 year-old Bear Cub and a 14 year-old Bear Cub may be too much for safety. In this situation, helping the Scout with special needs find a unit that is made up of older Scouts more like him or herself will provide a better experience for the Scout and the Scout's family.

There may be a practical reason why a family wants a special-purpose unit for a non-intellectual disability. This makes sense when a disability requires substantial support infrastructure or accommodations and those resources could be shared between several Scouts. Maybe they can share modified transportation vehicles, tactile models (visually-impaired), a sign language interpreter, or special instruction methods. In these situations, a family should not be forced into a special-purpose unit, but we should be willing to help them find or start one if that is their desire.

Exhausted or frustrated leaders

How do you encourage a bedraggled leader who is exhausted or frustrated by a Scout (or Scout family) with a disability?

This is one of the most common difficulties in a unit that has Scouts with special needs. Often, the time and effort it takes to support a Scout with special needs is significantly higher. It is easy for a unit leader to become discouraged or to be overworked. It is important as a commissioner to recognize when this is occurring

in a unit.

These difficulties typically take one of three forms: (1) The leader knows that Scout behaves differently from the other Scouts but doesn't know why and sees the Scout as a behavior problem. (2) The leader knows the Scout has a disability, but doesn't know how to accommodate it. (3) The leader knows what to do, but just doesn't have enough help with the Scout during activities.

This is where unit contacts can make all the difference. It is unlikely a commissioner will know what is going on before a serious conflict occurs unless the commissioner is visiting the unit and keeping an eye out. The things to watch for are grouchy/snappy behavior from leaders or chaotic behavior from the youth. Be careful not to label specific Scouts as troublemakers when they may be acting out to compensate for their special needs or are anxious because their needs are not being accommodated.

To deal with the first two types of situations, begin by talking to the frazzled leader when the youth are not around and find out what he or she knows about the Scout. If there was never a joining conference for the Scout, that would be the next step. It is amazing how much patience you can have once you know a Scout has a disability and that the "misbehavior" is an effort to cope with or compensate for his or her struggles. If the family does not disclose a special need or disability, that is not necessarily the end of the trail. The leader can take a guess about the special need and read the module of the *Inclusion Toolbox* that discusses it. Then the leader can start experimenting, trying out different types of accommodations until something works. If the accommodations work, the problem is solved even if the family never acknowledges or discloses a special need.

The third situation, where there just isn't enough help, comes up most often with Cub Scout dens, where there are typically only two or three adults available at meetings. A Cub Scout with a special need may need one adult dedicated to him or her to manage stress or to assist. Additional training, so the leader understands the disability and what accommodations may work, can reduce the burden by reducing overstimulation or other triggers for difficult behavior, but it may not be enough. However, the ultimate solution usually includes getting more adults to help.

The unit committee needs to be encouraged to take initiative to obtain more help for the overloaded leaders. Their options include (1) asking for greater involvement by the family of the Scout that is struggling, (2) getting another parent or committee member to step in as an additional assistant leader, (3) see if an older Scout can serve as a Den Guide or Troop Guide to provide an extra hand, and (4) reaching out to the charter organization for some additional volunteers.

Parents that don't understand how their child is being treated

How do you help a unit avoid or deal with conflict with parents over how their child with a disability is treated?

Conflict will always be a part of what we do in Scouting. We constantly challenge

everyone involved to do difficult things and by its nature the challenge will create conflict. A typical unit will also have a turnover of both youth and adult leaders which, by nature, will also cause “storming” within the unit.

Most conflict with families of Scouts with special needs can be avoided with good communication. Once more, joining conferences are the first step to come to common expectations. But even so, parents and guardians of Scouts with special needs may be accustomed to people catering to their needs or having schools and other institutions cater to their needs. These families may not understand the personal challenge and managed-risk environment of Scouting. [Module B](#) and [Module D](#) of the Inclusion Toolbox were written to be tools to help new parents understand how Scouting works for a youth with a disability.

When a unit has a Scout with special needs, it often forces a unit to make changes. They may change what activities are planned, the speed with which the unit moves, or many other aspects. With these variations, it is easy for conflict to arise if we don’t communicate the purpose or desired result of the changes. A significant amount of conflict can be generated by the families of the other Scouts, who do not want their child “held back” to accommodate others. The best way to avoid conflict with the entire unit is to have a clear plan and to communicate it with the entire unit of Scouts and Scouting families. This plan would address not only potential changes to Scouting activities to accommodate different abilities, but more specifically how the program will still offer opportunities for more capable Scouts and how advancement will not be changed without substantial reasons.

Once conflict occurs, we should be aggressive at solving the issues. The longer misunderstandings exist, the greater the chance of hard feelings building or worse yet, broken relationships developing. The biggest risk is for the unit leadership to set itself up in opposition to the family, trying to dictate terms and conditions, when we should be trying to partner with the family as a unified team in the best interests of the Scouts.

A commissioner may serve as a mediator. Speak with each side to gather the information. Though you will know some people better than others, keep an open mind, don’t take sides, and put aside preconceived notions. Assure the people you talk to that your goal is unity and great relationships in the unit. The more individuals trust you the more likely you will be to get the vital information. Once the problems have been identified, search for solutions. The search may mean talking to individuals one at a time or it may involve the whole unit. It may mean bringing in a special needs and disabilities specialist from your Council. A consensus solution gives you the best chance to bring peace back to the unit.

Advancement expectation disconnects

How do you help units and families form appropriate advancement expectations for their Scouts with disabilities?

Many of the most serious conflicts we see in Scouting related to disabilities and special needs are related to advancement. Two modules have been provided in the Inclusion Toolbox on the topic of advancement to use for better understanding.

Module E is for parents, guardians, and unit leaders and Module V is for district and council professionals and advancement volunteers.

It is rare for issues to come up in the Cub Scouting program because the standard for performance is “do your best”? When the standard changes to “as written, nothing more and nothing less” at the Scouts BSA level, problems emerge when the people involved in advancement (parents, Scoutmasters and Assistant Scoutmasters, merit badge counselors, and advancement committee members) are not reading from the same playbook.

As a commissioner, there are some things you can look for. If parents at the back of the room are asking you questions about advancement during a unit visit, the unit has not been communicating well with the families and the entire group may need a training session. If you hear rumors about a unit being unusually lax or rigid in their interpretation of requirements, that is something to investigate further. You can also look for patterns in advancement, where first year Scouts seem to advance unusually quickly or slowly.

There are two faulty beliefs that parents or guardians may have that you want to pay attention to. One is that their Scout should be given credit for a requirement when the Scout has made his or her best effort, regardless of quality, like in Cub Scouts. The other is that requirements should be interpreted or flexed to the point that every Scout with a disability can pass the requirement. While there is a lot of reasonable flexibility to be had in interpreting advancement requirements, this flexibility has its limits. There are advancement requirements that are out of reach for certain Scouts. That is why we have procedures to develop and approve alternate requirements. These are detailed in the *Guide to Advancement* and there is supporting information in Module E and Module V of this *Inclusion Toolbox*. A Scout can earn ranks but is not entitled to them.

For an individual Scout, the best approach is for the unit leader to start talking with the family about advancement early, when the Scout begins the Scouting adventure. **Advancement is a method of Scouting, but not an aim or mission.** The Scout may not benefit from pressure to advance in the ordinary way as much as from having the opportunity for experiences. The family would be well served if they understand that you don't have to earn ranks to be a good Scout or to benefit from the program.

The second part of the early discussion is to help the family understand what opportunities for advancement requirements are built into the unit's plans and what things the Scout needs to do “outside of class”. The leaders and families need to decide how they are going to provide extra teaching and practice for a Scout with special needs, and who will take responsibility for what. In an ideal situation, there will be a person like an Assistant Scoutmaster to be a mentor and liaison between the Scout, the Scout's family, and the rest of the unit leadership.

The third part of the early discussion is pacing. Do they want to work extra hard to advance at the same speed as others? Do they want to maintain a slower effort that balances other personal and family needs, even if other Scouts advance in rank faster? If they have the Eagle rank as a goal, a Scout with a special need may have

to work more efficiently than others and need more guidance in planning his or her work.

Once a Scout has been in the Scouts BSA program for a year or so, some thought needs to be given to whether the Scout will need alternative advancement requirements in order to reach First Class. In this review, remember that Scouts mature and become more capable as they grow, with or without a special need. A task that looks impossible today may not be impossible in a couple of years. But if there are requirements through First Class rank that look insurmountable within the next year or two, encourage the unit and family to begin applying for alternative requirements. When a Scout has been in the Scouts BSA program for three years, thought needs to be given to the remaining Eagle-required merit badges and whether alternative badges will be needed. If so, that approval process should be started.

Acceptance of others and bullying

How do you coach a unit to improve the diversity acceptance of its members and/or reduce bullying?

A commissioner can help a unit understand how important the unit culture is to having a good program. A healthy unit pays conscious attention to the values of the Scout Law, and in the context of acceptance, especially the laws Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, and Kind. While every instance is unique, bullying generally occurs when a lack of understanding or even fear exists between individuals. In a Scouting unit, Scouts may pick on individuals that are different from most of the group and the motivation may be varied. Scouts with special needs and disabilities are particularly attractive and vulnerable targets for bullying.

Remember, bullying has subtle forms, not just physical abuse, threats, and coercion. Taking advantage of weaker, more vulnerable, Scouts when playing games is also bullying. So is taking advantage of a Scout's naiveté. Making a Scout the regular butt of jokes is a problem. Defaming or telling lies about someone is bullying.

A good strategy for building empathy and preventing bullying is to employ activities and games that give Scouts the opportunity to experience life from the perspective of another. The Special Needs & Disabilities Activities Guide has information on some activities that could be used and there are more ideas in some of the modules on specific types of disabilities.

When bullying is already occurring in a Scout unit, it is best to try and understand the nature of the bullying and if possible, the motivation. A unit leader can try to identify what makes the victim different from those that are doing the bullying. If so, some individual discussions should occur to gain control of the bad situation.

In the long-term, group training is a better solution. This training should consist of general anti-bullying lessons. In the case where a Scout that is different is being picked on, it would be appropriate to build activities and training surrounding the special need in concern. Having the Scout or the Scouting family participate in the

training may personalize the training and build some empathy in the unit. In the end, whole-unit training builds a shared investment in the message and allows the entire unit to be conscious of offending situations and then self-police. When the unit holds itself accountable for the behavior, you are more likely to stop bullying before it starts.

Overwhelmed disability-friendly units

How do you get extra resources for a unit that is disability-friendly but becoming “over-saturated” with kids with disabilities?

Any unit that is highly successful at serving youth draws extra attention from prospective Scouts. This is also true of traditional Scout units that do a good job of serving those with special needs. An unintended consequence of these good efforts is that the units grow and end up with an unusually high fraction of Scouts with special needs. There are other unintended consequences that a commissioner, or more correctly a district commissioner corps, needs to prevent.

Before discussing how to help the overloaded unit, we should not forget that this is also a sign about how other Scout units in the area are handling Scouts and potential Scouts with disabilities. The leaders of other units are likely making referrals to send families away rather than invite these youth to join their own units. They may be well-intentioned in the short-run, but limiting the experience of their other Scouts and the diversity of their units. It is also possible that other Scout units are doing a poor job of accommodating and integrating Scouts with special needs so families are voting with their feet. However, for every poorly treated Scout who finds a new unit, many more will leave Scouting altogether, with a bad taste that they share with others. **An overloaded disability-friendly unit may be a sign that leaders throughout the district need better training about disabilities.** Roundtable is one vehicle for doing this training, but it may be necessary to have a special training event for leaders of all units.

When the ratio of Scouts with special needs in a unit goes up, so does the required ratio of adults to Scouts. Before the situation reaches a breaking point, a commissioner may need to step in. The initial focus is on the unit committee. The unit committee itself will need to grow in size and some of the committee members will need to take a more active role in the unit than is typical. In the short run, the committee may need to depend on the families of the Scouts with special needs to bridge the gap until a more permanent solution is discovered. It may also be necessary to scale back activities until more help can be brought on board.

If the unit is struggling but not in a crisis, the committee will still need to grow, but can focus on longer term solutions. There are often untapped and underutilized resources to be found. One opportunity is to see if grandparents of Scouts are willing to become active volunteers. Another is to reach out to the charter organization to see if they have members who would get involved in Scouting, knowing that there is a need. A third opportunity is to reach out to affinity and parent’s associations for youth who have the same special needs as Scouts in the unit. It may also be possible to use contacts within the district committee to find Scout volunteers that stopped participating actively with a unit when their children

became adults, but would be willing to start a “second career” as unit leaders.

If a unit is having success serving Scouts with special needs and has a manageable amount of support, these unit leaders are a valuable resource for spreading those skills to other units in the area. A district commissioner corps can work strategically to spread these skills to other units by inviting a unit leader from the effective unit to visit the committee meeting of another unit, or better yet, to come along on a campout and give pointers.

Resistance to non-parent caregivers

How does a unit respond to having a paid, professional caregiver for a Scout on an outing in lieu of a parent or guardian?

The general BSA youth protection training assumes that Scouts are capable of self-care in things that require privacy, such as toileting, bathing, changing clothes, and sleeping quarters. Parents and guardians are given special privileges to be alone with their child and help with these tasks. While not very common, there are some Scouts with disabilities that need full-time, round-the-clock assistance with basic life functions, including the previous list plus feeding and administering medications. While the families of these Scouts often provide the bulk of this care, the burden is more than many can handle alone. They often will have paid professional aides that care for the Scout for part or all of the day.

Generally, paid caregivers have the legal permission of the Scout’s parents and guardians to render care to their child and to make certain decisions as if they were the parent or guardian. They also generally have a close relationship with the Scout and can be a great resource in making the program a success for that Scout. We should recognize that these paid caregivers have legally been given these permissions and responsibilities.

The current (2020) BSA youth protection training does not directly address this situation, presumably because it is not common. Not knowing better, unit leaders sometimes obstruct a Scout from going on an outing, or require a parent to attend an outing even though the parents have a professional caregiver who can stand in their place. Though acting in good faith as they understand the YPT rules, the leaders can create unnecessary hardship and conflict that could come to a commissioner’s attention.

If we treat a professional caregiver like a parent, there are still things the caregiver must do: (1) Meet any state or local requirements for professional caregivers. (2) The caregiver needs to complete BSA YPT training like any other adult on an outing. (3) The caregiver needs to be registered as an adult with the Scout unit, primarily to obtain BSA background checks. (4) The caregiver must complete the BSA annual health and medical record (medical form) appropriate to the outing, long-term or short-term. (5) The caregiver should have appropriate power-of-attorney documents from the parents or guardians. (6) For long-term camps, the camp director should be given advance notice that a non-parent caregiver is coming to camp and make sure that any special documentation the camp needs is brought to camp.

Including special-purpose units in larger events

How do I help a special-purpose unit engage with other Scout units and participate in larger or more challenging outings?

Special-purpose units are always at risk of becoming isolated from the larger fellowship of Scouting. While we can set up special sessions or programs of camp for Scouts with disabilities, and it may be necessary to set aside special areas for them to be located at camp, we need to work at including these units in the regular activities to the maximum extent possible. In addition to a long term camp or camporee situation, a special-purpose unit may struggle with just going on a regular camp-out, because they need help over and above what the usual leaders and caregivers can provide.

While Module AA and the [BB Series](#) go into the details of how to make camp disabilities-friendly, a commissioner for a special-purpose unit has a matchmaker role to play. A special-purpose unit can accomplish much more when they go on outings or go to camp with a “buddy” traditional unit. The buddy unit can often offset the need for additional full-time adult leadership in a special-purpose unit. Pairing up with a buddy unit for a camporee allows for integrated patrols to participate more fully in the events and activities than a patrol made up of all special needs. A commissioner helps put leaders from different units in contact so that they can camp together. Let’s not forget that the Scouts from the traditional unit will have an experience that will change their lives as well.

Another way a commissioner can help is with recruiting buddy Scouts to attend camp with a special-purpose unit. It may be possible for the special-purpose unit and its financial supporters to give ordinary Scouts a campership to a second week of camp to serve as assistants to Scouts with disabilities.

USING LONE SCOUTING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

It is our preference for all Scouts with disabilities to participate in traditional Scouting units in an inclusive manner. When traditional units are not workable, we typically look at special-purpose units as the next best option. For a few Scouts, being part of a traditional or special-purpose unit just did not work. This might include Scouts with severe intellectual disabilities, emotional control/mental health struggles, lower-functioning autism, or other disabilities where a unit could not provide a safe and inclusive experience for that particular Scout. The last remaining option for such a youth to benefit from Scouting is the Lone Scout program (Fact Sheet BSA 210-515). Commissioners need to bring this option to the family so they can decide if it will work for their child and family situation. Sometimes Scouting program ideas and requirements can be integrated into the school-based individualized education plan (IEP) or into a therapeutic plan for applied behavioral analysis (ABA), recreation, music, aquatic, equine, physical, occupational, and/or speech therapy.

It needs to be highlighted that while a Lone Scout does not belong to a Scout unit, he or she can still participate in all of the district, council, and national events that

other Scouts do. This includes pinewood derbies, fundraising sales, service projects, day camp, camporee, summer camp, and jamboree experiences. The Lone Scout Counselor (often a parent, but not always) will need commissioner support and need to receive district and council communications like any other Scout unit. The Lone Scout Counselor may be a special education teacher, teacher's assistant, ABA therapist, or even a direct support professional (see the Lone Scout Friend and Counselor Guidebook – BSA 511-420).
