

Camping Low Income Youth

Introduction

Since its earliest days, making Scouting available to all kinds of boys has been a part of the moral commitment of the Scouting movement. Indeed, Baden-Powell was reaching out to boys of the inner-city of London in his first camp on Brownsea Island.

Today, both the national office and local councils continue to fulfill this commitment to serving low-income youth—both in urban and rural communities. Over the past decade, a considerable body of knowledge has evolved—both of the obstacles that confront us and many of the techniques to overcome them.

But how many youths are we talking about?

- Approximately 20 percent of our country's children live in low-income circumstances—one in five.
- Poverty is concentrated. In more than 700 Scouting districts poverty is a prevailing influence that affects most every aspect of Scouting operation.

So in our camps—whether we are talking about a few individual campers, a number of low-income units, or whole districts—we should prepare ourselves to grasp the opportunity of camping low-income youth.

Three Different Opportunities

The opportunities available to local councils may be varied—some may have one, some another, and others will have a variety. Let's consider three:

- Serving individual low-income Scouts
- In-camp support of certain typically weak and struggling low-income troops
- Low-income non-Scout camp use

Serving Individual Low-Income Scouts

Here are some of the issues:

- Options for paying the camp fee (more on this later)
- Understanding and thoughtful handling of personal adjustment problems
- Preparing for lack of personal clothing and equipment
- Preparing for medical examinations and health follow-up

- Diet needs and food preferences

In-Camp Support of Certain Typically Weak and Struggling Low-Income Troops

Here are some of the issues:

- Council-level camp personnel, including camp staff members, must accept the reality of such units. Some troops will walk in the gates of camp with a single leader lacking camp skills, and without much evidence of normally expected troop operation.
- Our attitude is key; it must be one of caring support, not rejecting judgment.
- Design of in-camp support systems must be geared to assist such troops.
- Precamp identification of such troops is vital.
- There may be potential, frame-of-reference conflicts between low-income-serving district staff members and council-level camping personnel. These must be understood.
 - Reasons for differing frame-of-reference
 - Coordination and communication problems between camp and district
 - Problems of district service and low-income units
- Variety of troop leadership options in camp must be considered.
- All the issues presented above for serving individual low-income campers will also apply to the low-income troop.

Low-Income Non-Scout Camp Use

Consider these issues:

- A variety of alternative models—each of which may achieve different objectives, depending on the situation.
 - Use of camp by another organization serving low-income campers
 - Separate week(s) for council non-Scout camp
 - Provisional troop(s) for council-run non-Scout boys
 - Entire camp—all season
- Identification and recruitment of non-Scouts—a key function of districts working with grassroots community groups and agencies
- Precamp preparation of the camper—a function of district Scouters and provisional camp leaders
- Camp staff preparation
- Adjustment of camp program routine
- Qualifications of provisional troop leadership
- District follow-up after camp
- Special camp programming to meet special urban needs. We can provide both ADVENTURE and RELEVANCE—they are not mutually exclusive.
- Preparing for possible prejudices of traditional campers and leaders.

- Plus all the issues presented above for serving individual low-income Scout campers and units.
- Insurance
- Why non-Scouts in camp?

A Few Basic Principles Vital for Success

Take care not to confuse income and race in our understanding of people.

The typical middle-class black or Hispanic Scout is little different from any other typical middle-class Scout. He needs little different emphasis from camp staff members or district personnel except

- Being clear our racial values are morally straight
- Being aware of potential racial prejudice
- Having respect for racial and ethnic heritage and history

Special Scouting and camp needs are linked more to circumstances of poverty. More than just a lack of dollars, poverty involves a whole pattern of attitudes, feelings, values, habits, and practices that permeate all areas of life for people who are needy. These lifestyles affect how people perceive and respond to Scouting. Some of usual methods and materials may not fit low-income lifestyles and needs.

In actual numbers, there are twice as many poor whites in America as there are poor nonwhites. However, a larger percentage of the nonwhite population is poor.

Link camp procedures to fit the lifestyles and needs of low-income people. Scouting adaptations must not mean giving up basic values and principles, but rather reaching the same ends through alternative means.

As a program people, let's distinguish between Scouting ends and means. Don't confuse program outcomes with program methods.

Attitudes and personal relationships are of top importance. It is important to have people with good camping and Scouting program know-how assigned to assist low-income people who often lack program experience. However, it is far more important to have people with the right human relations ability.

Don't assume all camping people can relate effectively to low-income situations. Quietly select individuals and build a team of people who can best relate and assign them to work with low-income units.

The fundamental quality is "empathy." Empathy is "mentally walking a mile in the other guy's moccasins." The latest dictionary defines empathy as "the vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another person."

It's recognizing and then being able to get out from behind the "filters" of our own individual experiences. Success will help develop an empathy for low-income persons.

Money-Raising Options for Summer Camp

Consider these options:

- Camp savings card
- Saving canned foods (can-a-week)
- Unit fund-raising
- Council camperships
- Special fund-raising event
- Company, union, or credit union matched with a troop
- Special donor
- Government programs
- Bus transportation provided by the council or district

Other guidelines:

- Avoid the image the Scouting costs a lot of money.
- Protect people's pride. Provide help quietly and confidentially.
- Understand both financial needs and financial resources of each neighborhood and each unit.
- Keep fees and dollar requests to a minimum.
- Avoid unit leader personal loss of deposits and registration fees.