

## **Reinvigorating Scouts' Commitment to Service**

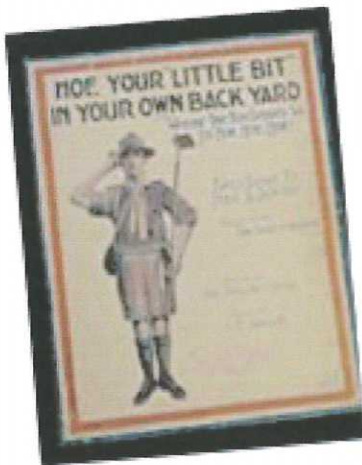
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## **Reinvigorating Scouts' Commitment to Service**

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Service to others in the form of community development is one of the universal principles that characterizes the World Brotherhood of Scouting, and community service has been at the heart of the Boy Scout movement from the very beginning. In fact, it was a young scout in London, England "doing a good turn" in 1909 that led William D. Boyce to bring Scouting to America. By 1912, the scouting movement had established a program entitled the National Good Turn, which that year was: A Safe and Sane Fourth of July. The next year, the Boy Scouts received national recognition for their service, particularly their assistance with the Ohio and Indiana floods as well as a veteran's reunion commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1917, America entered World War I and the boy scouts pledged themselves to service. During the war, scouts served on the home-front selling Liberty Loan war bonds and war savings stamps. At this time, my grandfather, Sergeant-Major Fred Miller, was scoutmaster of a scout troop in Laredo, Texas. He is the one with the "x" over his head in this picture of his scouts promoting the sale of Liberty



Bonds. The scouts also distributed literature for the government, and collected peach pits for use in gas mask filters. In Nebraska, the scouts were inspired by the slogan, "Every Scout to Feed a Soldier," and like their counter-parts around the country, planted thousands of gardens to help produce food in that time of great need. In recognition of the Boy Scouts service during the war, President Wilson declared the first National Boy Scout Week in 1918.

During the Second World War, Boy Scouts were again involved in a number of national service projects. The Boy Scouts distributed posters for the Office of War Information urging

people to recycle scraps of metal, rubber, and rags to be used in military supplies. Scouts also operated a messenger service for the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD), and collected



aluminum, scrap metal, and books, planted trees, and did whatever jobs local officials could identify, as can be seen in this 1943 picture of Scouts in Lincoln, Nebraska collecting scrap materials.

In 1950-51, the Boy Scouts collected two million pounds of clothing for overseas relief. In 1958, National Safety Good Turns were conducted. In 1970, BSA initiated Project SOAR (Save Our American Resources). It's estimated that during that first year alone, 60,000 BSA units took part in SOAR-related conservation projects. In 1986, Boy Scouts distributed 14 million brochures to families informing them of the need for donated human organs and tissue and urging them to make a commitment to donate. In 1988, the largest National Good Turn ever conceived, *Scouting for Food*, which from its beginnings and to this day is a major service activity of the Boy Scouts. From 1998 – 2000 as a part of the Service to America program, the Boy Scouts performed over 200



million hours of community service. In 2008, the BSA implemented the largest Boy Scout national service project since World War II. This project, named ArrowCorps5 involved over 5000 young men in restoring, repairing, rebuilding, reclaiming and refurbishing miles of trails, acres and glens in the nation's forests.

While our long-standing commitment to public service has continued to distinguish the American Boy Scout program in comparison to many other youth programs, it is less visible in our communities today than it was in earlier times. Our declining numbers during the past decade



suggest that when parents think of boy scouts, they may focus on some of the controversies surrounding the program including allegations of discrimination, cases of child abuse, and questions about the relevancy of the program to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, rather than our continuing public service to our communities and the nation.

Part of my purpose in this dissertation is to suggest ways in which the scouts can become re-invigorated in making important and truly valuable contributions to our communities and country. To make a real difference, Scouts will need to be involved in addressing the critical issues facing our world today. While there are many lists of the most critical challenges facing the world, this one by Rene Penning de Vries (2009) captures most of what we think of when we make such a list.

*Table 1. Top Ten Challenges Facing the World*

1. Energy	6. Terrorism and war
2. Water	7. Disease
3. Food	8. Education
4. Environment	9. Democracy
5. Poverty	10. Population

### **Energy**

From the beginning of scouting, conservation has been an integral part of the BSA program. The introduction to the Energy merit badge reads as follows: “Saving, producing, and using energy wisely will be critical to America's future. If we are to leave future generations with a world in which they can live as well or better than we have, Scouts and other potential leaders of tomorrow must begin the hard work of understanding energy and the vital role it will play in the future” (BSA Energy Merit Badge). The Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) within the U. S. Department of Energy invests in clean energy technologies that strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and reduce dependence on foreign oil. Their

website ([www.eere.energy.gov](http://www.eere.energy.gov)) provides a wealth information that can be used to create service projects that can improve energy efficiency in homes, schools, vehicles and other places used by scouts. One such idea is to conduct an energy audit to determine areas where greater efficiency can be obtained. The calculator for the energy audit is also available on their website.

### Water

While the population of our world tripled in the 20th century, the use of renewable water resources grew six-fold. Within the next five decades, the world population will increase by another 40 to 50%. This population growth - coupled with industrialization and urbanization - will create an ever-increasing demand for water (World Water Council, 2011). To cope with this demand, we must (1) conserve water and (2) clean up rivers and streams so that there is more useable water. Both of these endeavors are ones that scouts can address.

For example, Australian Scouts are currently involved in identifying ways to reduce water consumption in their Scout halls or around the home (World Scout Organization – Environment Projects, 2011). They are working with project managers from *Storm Water Preservation* to



facilitate building upgrades with a local contractor who supplies and installs water tanks. In Japan, the Scouts conduct a water survey for the government on the nearest Sunday to World Environment Day. They take samples of local water, checking the quality and measuring any degradation that has occurred.

### Food

Every day nearly one billion people face problems finding adequate, nutritious food for themselves and their families. There are a number of organizations that are working to end world hunger. One such organization is Feeding America (<http://feedingamerica.org/>). This national organization, that helps feed 25 million low-income people in the United States each year, provides resources for getting involved locally in effective food assistance programs. Another organization that is doing something about hunger is Kids Can Make a Difference ([www.kidscanmakeadifference.org](http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org)). They provide facts about hunger, and give updates on what young people across America are doing to fight hunger and poverty at home. This a good source

of service project ideas for Scout units, e.g., working with local agencies to serve food to the needy.

### **Environmental Initiatives**

Scouts around the world are engaged with their local communities in caring for the environment in a variety of ways. For example, Mexican Scouts are making the world's largest Scout fleur-de-leis from cans in an effort to educate the community on the values of recycling. Scouts from Canada have partnered with Southern African Scouts in learning to reduce their impact on carbon emissions and increase their understanding of climate change. Scouts in Singapore are involved in a major waterway clean-up program and Scouts in France are engaged in protecting the forests from wildfire.

In the Maldives, Scouts have undertaken to work to revive the growth of flowering plants, many of which are rare. Scouts all over the world from Turkey to Kenya to Malaysia and the United States are planting trees and undertaking clean up campaigns to improve their local environments and contribute to the overall health of our shared environment (Environment Projects, 2011). In Malta, the Scouts created an annual “Clean Up the World” project in which they collect the bulky refuse that litters the countryside in order to create greater awareness of the need to take care of the environment.



To contribute to this worldwide effort to preserve our environment, there are a number of ways in which Boy Scouts could contribute, including:

Plant shrubs to provide food and cover for wildlife.
Conduct stream improvement projects to prevent erosion.
Plant grasses and legumes to provide ground cover in schoolyards, public parks, and recreation areas.
Plant tree seedlings as part of a managed forestry plan.
Help thin and prune woodlands in a managed tree improvement project.
With a local forester, take part in or conduct a forest fire prevention program.
Make an exhibit on conservation for a county or state fair.
Assist a local forester in a tree insect- and disease-control or public education project.
Assist a local agency with a trout stream restoration project.
Participate in a wildlife or wildfowl count.
Conduct a rodent-control & public health education program under the guidance of the local health department.



## Poverty

According to a 2005 report from the World Bank, 1.4 billion people (one in four) live on less than \$1.25 a day. To find out what your unit can do to address poverty, contact CARE ([www.care.org/getinvolved](http://www.care.org/getinvolved)) in order to get articles, videos, and action ideas to end world poverty. In collaboration with CARE, a Scout unit could partner with units in under-developed countries to provide resources otherwise unavailable to them. Global Citizens Corps (an initiative of Mercy Corps): [www.globalcitizencorps.org](http://www.globalcitizencorps.org) also provides resources to help young leaders take action on important global issues. For educational resources for youth and adults about fighting poverty in the United States and abroad, see [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org). Some projects that scouts could undertake include working with Habitat for Humanity; hosting a screening of a movie that addresses poverty and afterwards, discussing how poverty affected the characters and ways to take action to resolve the problems; and joining UNICEF's Voices of Youth ([www.unicef.org/voy](http://www.unicef.org/voy)) to share their thoughts with other young people around the world on what can be done to address global poverty.

## Terrorism and War

Libyan Boy Scouts, of which there are around 3,500 in the town of Benghazi, have stepped up to assist in providing social and other basic services during the current turmoil. Boy Scouts are working in the bloody mayhem of a hospital, directing traffic because no one trusts anyone in a government uniform, and in many cases sorting out the international medical aid that has flooded into Libya. These boys and young men, who wear uniforms that are recognizable around the world, are no longer just a youth organization. They are helping to keep order, a job perhaps well beyond their tender years but a dramatic illustration of what boys





can do when asked (Ittner, 2011). With American men and women engaged in combat on two fronts, the Scouts may want to think about ways that they can reach out and make a difference for the children whose parent or parents are serving overseas. This could be done in cooperation with Veterans organizations and military support groups in our communities. Another service project would be for a scout unit to partner with a military unit to provide the troops with another connection to the world back home.

### **Disease**

From the very beginning the Scout program has promoted physical fitness and health. Three years ago, the World Scout Organization developed materials to help educate youth on HIV/AIDS. Many National Scout Organizations continue to run health education programs on reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases.

Another health topic that Scouts have addressed is drug abuse. For Example, Scouts in Pakistan have undertaken a major initiative to provide drug education by distributing pamphlets that provide information on the effects of drugs.



To create service projects in this area, Scouts could work with local community health providers, hospitals, and clinics as well as organizations such as the American Red Cross. For some possible service projects that Scouts could do, see Table 2.

*Table 2. Medical Service Projects*

Assist in packaging medical supplies for developing countries.	Assist with a blood drive.
Collect books for a VA medical center.	Distribute organ donor cards.
Distribute healthy living and drug abuse awareness literature.	Provide a first-aid station at a public event.
Set up a bicycle safety workshop to help children make safety kits.	Make “welcome home” hygiene kits for disaster victims.
Make bandanas and pillows for cancer patients.	Collect and donate toys for children’s hospital.

## Education

Scouting is an educational organization that provides nonformal educational experiences in three key settings: camp-outs, troop meetings, and service projects (Kleinfeld & Schinkwin, 1983). Because the scouting program provides for family interaction, it promotes family cohesion and acts as an effective tool for socialization. While all of that is to the good, it is also true that many of the educational opportunities afforded to scouts could also be valuable to the broader community. For example, BSA offers over one-hundred merit badges that cover a wide-range of topics. The knowledge gained in these programs could be offered by senior Scouts to others in need of the information. This could be done in cooperation with local community colleges, elderhostel programs, and community outreach programs.

## Democracy

In 1925, the BSA's National Good Turn was a "get out the vote" campaign and for many years the Boy Scouts were involved in this activity. For example, in 1956, the Chief Scout Executive published the following in Boy's Life:



"Recognizing the importance of free elections, nearly four million members of the Boy Scouts of America will participate in a non-partisan Get-Out-The-Vote campaign. Scouts will demonstrate that they are participating citizens by doing their best to instill in adults a determination and responsibility to exercise their rights as free people taking an active part in our government."

The scouts distributed over a million "Register and Vote" posters and over thirty-five million doorknob hangers reminding everyone of the need to register to vote. At this time, with less than 50% of eligible voters voting, it may be time again for the Scouts to promote participating citizenship. To do this, they could partner with non-partisan organizations like the League of

Women Voters to provide information about candidates to the electorate so that voters can be informed about the positions taken by various candidates.

### **Population**

The problem of overpopulation isn't just population density (amount of people per landmass). More importantly, overpopulation means that the number of people in an area exceed the resources and the carrying capacity of the environment necessary to sustain them (Hopkins, 2011). Thus, overpopulation occurs when the number of people cannot be maintained without depleting resources and degrading the environment. Since we are rapidly using up resources around the world, virtually all nations can be seen as overpopulated. Several of the ideas described in the sections on Environmental Initiatives, Food, Energy and Poverty are relevant to solving this problem. To the extent that Scouts can promote conservation, environmental protection and resource cleanup and enhancement, they will be making a contribution to alleviating the overpopulation problem.

### **The Role of the Commissioner**

Scoutmasters and other front-line leaders are often caught up in the weekly and monthly activities of their troop – meetings, campouts, hikes, popcorn sales, PLCs, etc. Thus, they may be unaware of some of the service opportunities available for their scouts. Commissioners are in an excellent position to review service opportunities and provide suggestions to their units. To do this, they can consult a variety of sources, some of which I list below.

#### ***The World Organization for Scouting***

The World Scout Organization promotes an Environment Program that offers tools, resources and initiatives to help Scouts all around the world work together for the good of the local and global environment. On their website ([http://scout.org/en/about\\_scouting](http://scout.org/en/about_scouting)



/the\_youth\_programme /environment/environment\_programme) the Commissioner will find a framework for environment education, various factsheets about the components of the program, activity resources that will help leaders organize, and other helpful information.

### ***Save our American Resources***

Project SOAR (Save our American Resources) began as a special Boy Scouts of America conservation emphasis in 1971 and projects tended to address issues such as soil erosion, pollution of rivers and lakes, feeding stations, and solutions to littering. The November, 1970 issue of *Boys Life* provides a wealth of suggestions for troop projects that can promote re-cycling, city, town and waterway cleanup and several other conservation projects. Another excellent source of ideas related to conservation is the Soil and Water Conservation merit badge pamphlet (BSA #34765). The BSA's Conservation Good Turn Award provides a useful list (see below) of governmental and non-governmental agencies that units can contact to create valuable service projects.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	U.S. Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management	National Park Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
local City Works department	Audubon Society
Trout Unlimited	Natural Resource & Conservations Service

### ***William T. Hornaday Awards***

The purpose of the Hornaday Awards program is to encourage Scouts to learn about conservation and to increase public awareness about natural resource conservation. The award recognizes that “understanding and practicing sound stewardship of natural resources and environmental protection strengthens Scouting's emphasis on respecting the outdoors” (William T. Hornaday Awards, 2011). On the BSA website, a number of projects that can be used to earn

this award are listed. The types of conservation activities that Scouts could undertake include the following:

Energy conservation	Soil and water conservation
Fish and wildlife management	Forestry and range management
Air and water pollution control	Resource recovery (recycling)
Hazardous material disposal and management	Invasive species control

### *Journey to Excellence*

Scouting's "Journey to Excellence" is the BSA's new council performance recognition program designed to encourage and reward success and measure the performance of our units, districts, and councils. Within this program, there is a service component that provides guidelines and suggestions for unit and council level service projects. The criteria for excellence in this program are that the service activities should have the characteristics shown below.

**Be significant.** The project should be something important. When it's done, everyone should be able to look back with satisfaction on an effort that has made a difference in your community.

**Be democratic.** Scouts are more likely to buy into the project if they have taken an active part in selecting, planning, and organizing it.

**Be clearly defined.** A project must have definite beginning and end points, with logical steps in between. A clear goal allows everyone to measure the progress along the way, and increases everyone's sense of participation and pride in a job well done.

**Be well-prepared.** This begins long before the project starts. Ask these questions: What is the project's purpose? Who should be contacted as resources? How many Scouts must be involved to complete the work in the allotted time? What tools or resources are needed? What safety issues must be addressed?

**Be promoted.** Promote your project within your community. This will not only provide additional workers, but will increase the visibility of Scouting and the impact it has on your community. Create a yard sign that says "Pack/Troop/Team /Post/Group No. \_\_\_\_ Service Project" or "Scouting Supports Our Community."

### ***National Good Turn***

Service to America became Good Turn for America in 2004 and expanded to address a variety of social problems including hunger, homelessness, and inadequate housing and poor health. Many of the projects undertaken by the scouts were done in conjunction with the Salvation Army, the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, and other organizations. While this program has now been merged into the new Journey to Excellence, there are still several good ideas for service projects available on the “Good Turn” websites (See <http://www.usscouts.org/servicetoamerica.asp>).

### **Call to Action**

My purpose in this dissertation was to suggest ways that Commissioner’s can reinvigorate Scouts’ commitment to service and bettering the lives of others. Do a Good Turn Daily is the Scout Slogan. It is a call to action for Scouts to look for extra opportunities to help others, quietly and without boasting. As defined in the Scout Handbook, a Good Turn is an act of kindness, not just something Scouts do because it is good manners. Good Turns can be done for family, friends, adults, children, and especially for those that are not able to do the task themselves. In this dissertation, I have tried to suggest ways that Scouts can select “good turns” that will make a significant difference to their communities, the nation and the world.

Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier in professional baseball once said: Our lives are unimportant, except for the influence we have on others. As Scouts and Scouters, we need to be prepared to live our lives in a way that makes a difference to those around us. Each day, each week, each year, we must make a commitment to public service and generosity. The challenge for Commissioners is to assist Scouts in understanding what it takes to live a worthy life, to



understand what injustice is and work to correct it. That when a scout see those less fortunate, they assist them; that they reach out to others in need, even when they themselves are struggling; and that they give generously of themselves and their talents

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