

# Very gifted children : Encouraging Scouting youth with disabilities

by Michael Burdo

**F**or the past thirty-five years I have been an active leader with Scouts Canada in various section levels. I have been privileged to work with many youth with disabilities and I continue to learn much from these very gifted children. The Scouts Canada policy regarding members is one of full inclusion of all registered youth. Disabled youth enjoy the same opportunities for fun, challenge, and adventure in the activities whether indoors or outdoors to the degree of their abilities. In some legitimate instances, program adjustment allowances are creative methods of ensuring all youth may be able to participate. I thought I would share with you some basic ideas that have worked well with challenged members.



Photo: Cecil Keeping

When I was a Cub leader last season, we had several Cubs who demonstrated an overabundance of energy and were identified as having Attention Deficit Disorder. It became apparent at times that a youth would be asked to sit out an activity for a couple of moments as their restlessness was disruptive to the other children. They often experienced great difficulty remaining focused. Rather than have the child feel that he/she was being treated in a punitive man-

ner, it was important to give the message that it may be an idea to do another small activity in a separate part of the meeting hall. A leader would then hand the child a simple, short crossword puzzle game that they could fill out on their own and bring back to a leader when it was completed. It had a Cub type theme and was very brief in required completion time.

A lot of the Cubs found this redirection opportunity interesting. It

**SUPPORTING SCOUTS**




**WE BEAT ANY PRICE BY 10%**



**b&s emblem limited**  
 140 Engelhard Dr.  
 Aurora, Ontario  
 (Toronto) Canada L4G 3G8  
 Telephone: (905) 841-1213 Fax: (905) 773-7745  
 1-800-387-5708  
 Email: info@bsemblem.com



**The Crest People**

Embroidered event emblems  
 District & Provincial emblems  
 Camp badges & Uniform crests

**Highest in quality - Lowest in prices**  
 Best service from coast to coast  
 2-4 week delivery (seasonal)

Our Product  
**100% Canadian**

gave the child a chance to slow down the pace, with the end result seeing him/her rejoin the others in a very short period of time. If a crossword puzzle was not of interest, an opportunity to draw and colour in a Cub type colouring comic was given. Often the best activity for the "timed-out" individual was to have another leader sit quietly with him/her (separate in the meeting room) and inquire as to how their day had been at school, if they had any pets at home, and how many siblings did they have. Often a youth would direct the quiet dialogue exchange to a topic of their keen interest. In no time the youth would then be asked by the leader if they were now feeling ready to rejoin the group. In most instances this technique will see success.

I vividly recall a recent incident with a Scout troop where a young autistic lad was off to the side in his own world, tossing a rubber ball up into the ceiling ductwork. Another well-intentioned leader approached the Scout and encouragingly suggested that this was not a good idea and the exchange ended here. After a brief moment, another leader went into the Scout storage room, removed a cardboard box, folded the flaps inside it and placed the box against a wall out of the way of the group of Scouts. The leader then called the autistic boy over, asked to borrow the ball from the lad and shot it into the box from a few yards away. He then asked if the Scout could do this task. The child took up the challenge and continued to play with the ball in this way. The technique of positive redirection was a complete success and the Scout was able to see immediate gratification each time the ball landed in the box.

### Dealing with homesickness

Some children also experience occasional emotional difficulties. Sometimes at Cub camps, I found that a youth who fully enjoyed the pace of the camping experience would become homesick when all of a sudden he was lying in his bunk and the fun-filled activities of the day had come to a halt. The ideal technique that I have repeated successfully when dealing with a homesick child is to have a leader spend five to ten minutes with the child on a one on one basis while another leader quietly observes off to the sideline. The leader should begin a quiet, calm dialogue with the Cub asking him if he has any pets at home and which one is his favorite one. Talk about this pet with the child. Or you can ask him how many brothers and sisters he has. You may want to ask what mom and dad do in the way of work and if he has ever been to his parents' work place.

You could interact with the Cub regarding the "bed friend" that he has brought along to camp and has next to him. Usually, the friend is a stuffed bear/animal and you can find out why the child likes this friend the best. By far, a popular notion regarding homesick children is to avoid any mention of home to the child whatsoever! This is in-

deed a fallacy in my repeated experiences. Remember to keep the time brief, to remind the child about the neat and fun things that are going to take place tomorrow and that on Sunday early afternoon, he will be returning home to be with his family.

My experience with youth over numerous years has seen me involved not only as a Scouter with Scouts Canada but as Camp Director with disadvantaged children for a period of four years. These simple ideas that I have shared with you do work in most instances. Do not be afraid to take the plunge and try intuitive and creative ways that you may have in mind when working within your group. There are no steadfast guidelines that work for everyone in this regard. But do

demonstrate an optimistic and encouraging mannerism when you are met with a challenge to find a new way of interacting with youth who may not all act the same. Remember that each youth brings unique gifts to us for us to grow together with them.m

- Michael H. Burdo is a youth and family counsellor, and Troop Scouter for the 72<sup>nd</sup> St. Mark's Scout troop in Ottawa, Ontario.

## Do not be afraid to take the plunge and try intuitive and creative ways that you may have in mind when working within your group.



Personalized Iron-On Fabric Name Tags

Get the affordable solution to lost clothing. With **Free shipping** and a cost of only nine cents per label, why not avoid those trips to the school lost and found pile! Call **1-866-535-6556** to order today.

Three Different Styles to Choose From:

Regular

All Caps

Two Lines

50 for only \$4.49 or 100 for only \$7.49

Be prepared Order yours today!

**FREE SHIPPING!**

**1-866-535-6556**

Visit us online at [www.scouts.ca/or](http://www.scouts.ca/or) call 1-866-535-6556 to order from your nearest Scout Shop.