

Multi-cultural Scouting

Include New Cultural Groups: Try Our Idea!

by the 69th Knights of Kensington

The Diversity Pilot Project

In August 2003, the 69th Knights of Kensington Scout Group was founded, committed to "creating a better world through the encouragement of diversity, cooperation, and respect". During the one-and-a-half years of the 69th Scout Group's existence, we have recognized that cultural diversity is not limited to ethnic origin, but includes factors such as gender and its role, religion, and even financial backgrounds. By acknowledging these factors, we are able to better move towards

removing barriers to membership in Scouts Canada and creating a strong foundation of Canadian youth who embrace the mosaic in which they live. As a result, our program does not teach tolerance, but instead promotes acknowledgement, acceptance, and awareness through a child's natural inclination to be curious and learn. Our innovative approach is that we take advantage of diversity to unite the community and build character, instead of letting it segregate and divide one whole into many small parts.

Through Scouting Principles, we aim to prevent closed-mindedness about the existing cultures comprising Canadian culture. Indeed, since many of our members come from families with little or no experience in speaking English, we are able to provide these youth with an informal environment to interact and strive towards common Scouting goals, while at the same time learning from each other.

Since the formation of our Scout Group in August 2003, we have used the Scouting program to implement our plans by organizing and participating in numerous hikes, camps, and community events. Through these trips and our weekly regular meetings, the Scouts have an opportunity to interact with each other in an atmosphere where they are not limited by formal school learning objectives. Instead, they are encouraged to work with one another to earn badges, create crafts, and tell stories in their small peer groups of five to six Scouts, each supervised by a different leader. It is this small-group interaction and attention by a single leader that allows each individual to succeed and crave to learn more. In fact, Ms. Gwynne Thompson, a local elementary school teacher of many of our Scouts, has noticed a rapid change in the learning ability of the children, especially those who were previously very quiet or had difficulties in speaking English.

Within every community, there is a need for the education of children. While the Vancouver School Board strives to meet this need through formal education, the 69th Scout Group aims to provide a complementary education that is able to teach children the skills they need that do not neces-



sarily pertain to academia. As a result, our Scouts do not measure their achievements through grades and report cards, but rather find success through trying their best, making new friends, and learning through participation. Since a central part of our Scouting program is its focus on learning in small groups, each child has the opportunity to receive special attention from his or her leader. Additionally, our Cub Pack and Scout Troop consist of children of different ages, so the older children are given extra responsibilities when they are formally

appointed as peer leaders for their small group. Thus, it is small-group learning, peer leadership, and special attention that have enabled our program to be successful in developing the character of young people.

To expose our Cubs and Scouts to different cultures within the Lower

Mainland community, our group has taken part in many large-scale Scouting events at which they have had a chance to meet other youth and expand their understanding of Canadian culture. A major event organized by Scouts Canada, Girl Guides of Canada, and their American counterparts is the annual *Hands Across the Border*, in which we took part last year at Peace Arch Park. This event showed our members the vast numbers of Scouts and allowed them to meet the above-named Scouting affiliates, while symbolizing the long-lasting peace between two nations. Other events in which

we have participated include Area-wide camps, hikes, homemade model car ("Kub Kar") races, bottle drives, volunteering at the Pacific National Exhibition, and trips to interesting destinations, where Scouts get to meet many new friends. Through our focus on outdoor activities and service, our leadership team aims to succeed by instilling upon the Cubs the values that are important in this world today.

Barriers

Scouts Canada has traditionally been relying on parents to act as vol-

Photo: Peter Ng

unteer leaders. We have found that it is not feasible for new immigrant parents to take on this role because of: language barriers; unstable careers; lack of integration into the Canadian mainstream; and unfamiliarity with volunteerism.

We recognize that these are factors attributed to many new immigrant youths choosing not to join Scouting. Instead, they spend most of their after-school hours watching TV at home, thus segregating themselves from others. The Scouting program is a solution to help these youths integrate into their communities.

The New Concept

Instead of following the tradition of asking parents to act as leaders, we plan to recruit university students and high school (grade 11-12) students who are preparing themselves to be teachers or social workers.

The new leaders will be able to:

- ☞ gain hands on experience in working with youth;
- ☞ acquire leadership;
- ☞ learn new skills; and
- ☞ earn school credits.

The youth members will be able to:

- ☞ participate in the Scouting program;
- ☞ integrate into the community with the help of young adults to which they can easily relate;
- ☞ adapt to the English-speaking Canadian lifestyle through an alternative program that is fun and promotes informal (non-academic) learning.

Our Goal

We are planning to run this project for five years. In this time, we will:

- ☞ recruit eighty young adults to be trained as leaders; and within schools and community centres around their neighbourhood, start new Scout Groups that are tailored to ESL (English as a Second Language) students' needs.

Local School Board Involvement

This concept cannot be achieved without the local school board. We need their assistance in:

- ☞ giving us access to ESL schools to introduce the Scouting program;
- ☞ assisting us to find suitable meeting locations, either in school gyms or community centres;
- ☞ endorsing our proposal so that we may apply for grants from various charity organizations to fund our recruitment campaigns and leadership training courses;
- ☞ encouraging young adults to volunteer their time by giving out school credits when they have completed their leadership training and services.

Recruitment and Training of Young Adults

An integral objective of the program is to get older youth into leadership roles. Young adults would be recruited from high schools and university to help organize and facilitate activities for the scouting groups. Scouts Canada trainers, with the skills and knowledge necessary to be a Scouting leader, would equip them. Their role as leaders gives the children role models they can relate to. It also helps to train youth leaders with very important life skills. In exchange for their services, young adults would receive reward in the form of tuition credits or accredited services

hours. The relationship between young adults and youth would be mutually beneficial. Advantages can be broken down into both benefits to children and to young adults.

Recruitment

Young adults would be recruited through the incorporation of the Scouting program as a viable alternative or option for fulfilling the CAPP (Career Advanced Placement Program). Young recruiters would travel to schools and explain the details of the program. Interested candidates would be given more information on how to get started with the scouting program. Students would be interviewed and if deemed fit, placed in an operating group and scheduled for training modules.

Recruiting sessions would also be held at local universities. High school and University students would more likely be interested in joining if the Scouting program could be credited towards their coursework credits or tuition credits.

Training

Training would consist of several modular training sessions that have specific goals and topics for leaders to learn. These would be spread over a few weekends or even integrated into session blocks of classes (e.g. components of FOCUS (Scouts Canada's Youth Leadership Training Modules). Important topics such as inclusion, access barriers, and risk management might be covered. A well-thought out plan would minimize overlap and ensure that both trainers and potential leaders' time would be used wisely.

Benefits For Kids

Often, keeping the interest and attention of youth is one of the biggest challenges. This is where young adults would help greatly. Children identify more readily with young adults, as they associate them more as being role models. Often adults are seen more as authoritative figures. Kids would be inclined to listen and to want to emulate the actions of the young leaders. Accessing untapped student resources would help to ensure that the program would have enough leaders to sustain many groups.

Benefits to Young Adults

In secondary education, students are required to perform service hours in activities that will aid in their career and personal development. Often due to poorly executed, meagerly supported programs, students do not gain much value from their service hours. Youth leadership would give a new and fresh option to students. Similar to other successful leadership programs in schools, becoming a Scout leader would provide students a well-defined and structured program in which to develop their abilities, while at the same time servicing the community. They would learn vital leadership, communication and planning skills essential to being successful in the real world.

Post-secondary students (in education or otherwise) would be able to take advantage of the program to fulfill required teaching experience in an interesting and rewarding program.

Our group has grown vastly over the past year, and the high demand from the community for more membership spots is proof of our success. We hope that by establishing a partnership with the Vancouver School Board, we will be able to strive to meet our common goals together and create a sound future for the children whom we serve today. \

– the 69th Knights of Kensington are a Scout group in Vancouver, BC.