

Small IS IN!

by Stephen Breen (from the Leader files)

Not that “small” has ever really been out. In the context addressed in this article, it has always been acceptable because, in Scouting as in living, the focus is on small groups.

In the way humans have lived, worked and played throughout recorded history, the common thread has been the existence of small groups. A family is a small group. The family unit has a common interest and purpose. As it works towards a goal, each member makes his or her contribution. Sometimes it isn't successful as a group but, in most cases, it does succeed in terms of continuance and each member's sense of belonging.

The evolution of human society has always revolved around the operation of small groups. Cave dwellers in the Stone Age lived in small groups whose prime goal was survival. Members of the groups worked together for the good of all in their primitive communities.

Jesus and the disciples, the Canadian Fathers of Confederation and the authors of the American Declaration of Independence are other examples of effective small groups who had an impact on civilization and

society in general. The local recreation board, the school bake sale committee, the group who organizes a family reunion, or the Scottish Country Dancers are other examples of small groups who affect themselves and the world around them.

What does this have to do with Scouting? A great deal. We would not survive if it weren't for the operation of small groups. Council offices, training and service teams, leadership teams, and group committees are part of what we know as Scouting. All have the common purpose of providing quality Scouting experiences for young people. But Scouting's primary small group lies at the program section level. It isn't the colony, pack or troop, but rather the lodge, six or patrol.

In *Scouting for Boys*, B.-P. says about the patrol system: “It is one essential feature in which our training differs from that of all other organizations, and where the system is properly applied, it is absolutely bound to bring success. It cannot help itself.” The same comments hold true for the

six in Cubs and the lodge in Beavers.

Young people do not normally interact in groups of 20 or 30. Most of their activities, projects or simple get-togethers

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B.-P., *Scouting for Boys*

A System of Youth Participation

(taken from World Scouting: Youth Involvement, Youth Empowerment)

“The Patrol (Six) system has a great character-training value if it is used right. It leads each boy (youth) to see that he has some individual responsibility for the good of his Patrol (Six). It leads each Patrol (Six) to see that it has definite responsibility for the good of the Troop (Pack)... Through it, the Scouts (Cubs) themselves gradually learn that they have considerable say in what their Troop (Pack) does. It is the Patrol (Six) system that makes the Troop (Pack), and all Scouting for that matter, a real cooperative effort.”

This quote of the Founder illustrates the primary aim of the team system: it enables young people to really participate in decision-making. In a recent Internet Forum on youth participation, the team system was identified as the primary tool for youth participation in Scouting. One of the participants neatly summarized the main conclusion of this forum as follows:

“Scouting is a youth movement, supported by adults; it is not just a youth movement organized by adults. In effect, Scouting offers

a “learning” community of young people, and adults committed to a partnership of enthusiasm and experience.”

How can this be put into practice in the different age groups? The principal role of the adult leaders is to advise, propose and reassure. They need to offer a space for experience which enables each person to develop new attitudes, skills and knowledge so as to achieve the personal development objectives offered by the framework of Scouting's educational goals. They also need to be attentive to the physical, emotional and moral security of the young people. The team system enables them to do so. This applies to each age group, although how it is achieved will evidently depend on the capacities of the age group. The extent of youth involvement is lower in the younger age ranges. The degree of youth participation in decision-making increases with age. However, from the earliest age, children have a say and take an active part in decision-making. There is a progression from youth participation (Beaver-Cub-Scout) to youth leadership (Venturers and Rovers).

tend to happen in small groups. Even the school dance designed for a large group becomes, in actual fact, a combination of small groups participating in the same activity.

If we accept the fact that most activities happen in small groups, we must realize how important it is to ensure that leader training focuses on working with small groups – the lodges, sixes and patrols. In our training, we have a tendency to talk about section program planning rather than unit program planning, and about the role of the leader with the colony, pack or troop rather than the role of the leader with the lodge, six or patrol.

When Scouters deal with 15 or more young people at a time, the needs of the individual tend to be lost. The absence of that personal touch is one of the reasons young people drop out of Scouting. The most successful program sections are those that have enough leaders to be able to work with small groups rather than the section as a whole.

Let's make sure that all our program activities do not involve the whole section. Section programs do have their place, but they need to be combined with activities at the unit level to allow for maximum participation and flexibility to meet the needs of individuals. The colony, pack and troop are not ends unto themselves, but rather combinations of two or more small groups. The section operation allows you to coordinate activities and make maximum use of resources, but at no time did B.-P. make reference to programming for the whole section. He always focused on working with small groups.

Small is in. Civilization has been based on working, playing and interacting in small groups. The success of Scouting is directly dependent on our abilities to work in and with small groups. Small groups are critical to the survival of Scouting's programs.

Think small. It's good for you, and for Scouting. X
– This past Leader Magazine article (1986) is more rele-

Two Other Small Groups

Sixers' Council – see page 18-10, *The Wolf Cub Leader's Handbook*.

The Council includes sixers, seconds and Scouters. Hold Sixers' Council meetings about once a month after a regular pack meeting or at a special meeting at a leader's or Cub's home (upon parent invitation).

Topics for a Sixers' council include:

- what program interests the Cubs
- six or pack discipline problems
- sixers' and seconds' responsibilities in future meetings
- upcoming programs and outings
- evaluation of past programs
- remembering sick Cubs
- community service.

Court of Honour (Scout Troop) – see page 49, *Scout Leaders Handbook*

Functions:

1. Troop Planning – Patrols are asked for programming ideas which are brought to the Court of Honour, discussed, and a plan is established.
2. Troop Administration – Discipline matters can be resolved by involving peers (Patrol leaders). Scouters can guide discussions and ensure appropriateness of response.
3. Patrol Leader Training – By experiencing the Court of Honour in action, Patrol leaders will learn how to oversee and direct their patrol.
4. Valuable Leader Association – Activity which separates older from younger Scouts; allowing older youth to experience being seen as a leader and providing younger youth with a place to aspire to.

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