

**“No Child Left Inside – Reconnecting Kids with the Outdoors”**  
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Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to discuss one of the most challenging issues that we face in the healthy development of our children. The picture isn't pretty – our youth have retreated indoors, to a life that revolves around electronic games, television, and the internet. The result we see is also not a pretty one – youth obesity rates are reaching epidemic proportions; the impacts of this will be felt for years to come.

Regardless of where we grew up, most of us remember a much different childhood than the youth of today. Unstructured outdoor play was a significant part of our early childhood. For us suburban and urban kids Mom's rule to “come home when the street lights come on” was the time boundary we had. Vacant lots became the frontier. Forts and tree houses were built in open spaces. Games – stickball, softball, dodge ball, football, capture the flag, kick the can, tag – you name it – were the order of the day. The games had no adult supervision and were put together by group of kids playing. Members needed to be recruited, the rules were set and off we went. We played and played – forgetting the pressures of the day, learning to resolve our conflicts, and in most cases – coming home slightly after the street lights went on.

Somewhere along the way, we have forgotten the importance of unstructured play in the healthy development of our children's lives. The incredible discoveries that are found in a stream or an open field are being replaced by surfing the web. The healthy competitions found in the games of my childhood are being replaced by the individual competition found in the gaming world – play stations, Xboxes, et cetera. Play has become organized and structured – everything has a time and a place, a need for sign ups, mom or dad's help, and transportation. “Come home when the street light come on” has been replaced by a schedule of activities to participate in – much like school or by the words “entertain yourself” – which to today's youth means something electronic. The result is a loss of imagination and the skyrocketing health issues associated obesity and behavior. Was the energy that we burned playing each day a result of ADD or ADHD or did play provide the therapy for the restless, active youth of my day? I'll point you at an excellent resource for these issues – a book titled “*The Last Child in the Woods*” by Richard Louv which discusses the impacts of the nature deficit and some great solutions.

The Boy Scouts of America has been an outlet for the energies of boys for almost 100 years. Established by Congressional Charter, our mission is to instill values in young people helping them to achieve their fullest potential. The classroom we use for character development is the outdoors. The founder of Scouting Lord Robert Baden-Powell observed the youth of London using military training manuals as part of their play. He felt that if these youth, usually poor inner city youth without structure at home, were excited by what they read in these manuals he could design a program that focused them on outdoor skills, fitness, and fun. In the process they also learned a code to live by, to be responsible and disciplined, and the importance of being self reliant. American Naturalists Dan Beard and Ernest Thompson Seton saw the possibilities of combining a love of the outdoors with Baden Powel's plan and helped design the core of programs we use today.

The results are impressive. Since 1910, over 100 million youth have experienced the fun and adventure of Scouting in America. Almost all of them participate in the core outdoor programs – camping, hiking, conservation, and learning the skills to protect and enhance the natural environment around us. In 2006, more than 1 million youth experienced long term outdoor camping programs – we operated 404 Scout summer camps across America – and many millions more participated in short term weekend camping and hiking programs throughout the year.

Recently, the BSA commissioned the folks at Louis Harris & Associates to look at the outcomes of Boy Scout Summer Camp. They found through their survey of youth and parents some interesting benefits beyond the obvious connections to the outdoors and fitness requirements.

Scouts indicate that summer camp is more than just a place to have fun. It also offers Scouts the opportunity to participate in physically and intellectually challenging activities, introduces them to new and rewarding experiences, and provides them with supportive and caring relationships.

This study infers that positive outcomes of Scout summer camp occur because the environment and activities at camp incorporate all of the elements of healthy youth development.

*Strong Personal Values and Character.* Reflective and thought-provoking activities are one avenue through which summer camp helps build strong values and character.

*Positive Sense of Self-Worth and Usefulness.* Summer camp helps to instill a positive sense of self-worth and usefulness in young people by providing them with service opportunities, as well as positive peer-to-peer and intergenerational communications. In addition, summer camp helps to build young people's leadership skills, confidence, and self-esteem.

*Caring and Nurturing Relationships with Parents, Other Adults, and Peers.* Summer camp builds caring and nurturing relationships by engaging young people in group activities with both peers and adults. And for a majority of Scouts, strong bonds of friendship are developed at summer camp.

*A Desire to Learn.* Summer camp inspires young people to think about nature and consider the environment.

*Productive and Creative Use of Time.* Summer camp provides young people with productive and creative uses for their time by offering a valuable mix of both physical and intellectual activities.

*Social Adeptness.* Summer camp helps young people to become more socially adept by offering them opportunities to participate in and contribute to team-building activities.

Overall, parents speak highly of and appear very impressed with Scout summer camps. Nationally, 93 percent of parents say their son's summer camp experience met or exceeded their expectations. Almost all (96 percent) say they would recommend Scout summer camp to others.

Leaders enjoy and appreciate their time spent at Scout summer camps. Nationally, 94 percent of leaders say they met all or some of their goals, and 53 percent say their experience was better than they thought it would be.

Leaders who attend Boy Scout summer camp overwhelmingly agree that the camp offers them the following benefits:

- Played a role in helping young people succeed/grow
- Helped youth realize their own abilities
- Was with people I respect
- Built friendships with youth

### Findings from Scout Journals

#### *Strong Personal Values and Character*

A strong sense of character is evident when a person chooses to do what is right, even when no one else is around. A person's character is built from the inside out. It starts and ends within the individual. To build this critical trait, young men need opportunities that challenge them personally to consider their beliefs and to reflect on the things that are important to their growth.

Summer camp supports the building of character and values by engaging young men in things like "decision making" (80 percent) and "flag ceremonies" (68 percent). Additionally, boys at camp participate in religious services/devotions/prayers (67 percent).

As important, Scouts in a fast-paced society are given time to reflect on their personal relationship with God (69 percent) and personal principles and values (56 percent) at camp.

#### *Positive Sense of Self-Worth and Usefulness*

Young men have a need to feel useful, capable, and valued. These are the components that build self-confidence. Among boys who are entering their teen-age years (the average Scout camper is 12.8 years old), perhaps no other time in their life is more important for building self-esteem.

Positive communication between boys and their peers and between youth and adults leads to feelings of self-worth. At summer camp, the majority of Scouts are complimented by adults (76 percent) and peers (72 percent).

Additionally, Scouts feel that their opinions are valuable and heard. More than six of 10 Scouts (63 percent) are asked to give their opinion while at camp. This seemingly simple gesture results in feelings of personal value. Three-quarters or more indicate that they are listened to by other Scouts (80 percent) or adult leaders (74 percent).

Boy Scouts at summer camp attain growth through serving others. Such activities result in a sense of being valuable and useful. Majorities of boys serve their peers at camp through helping clean up campsites (89 percent), helping clean up after meals (87 percent), and serving food (76 percent).

Service also comes through personally helping someone who may have received an injury (39 percent).

When boys take leadership responsibility they gain self-esteem. At summer camp, one-half (50 percent) of the boys are given an opportunity to lead others in an activity or service.

## *Caring and Nurturing Relationships with Parents, Other Adults, and Peers*

Children crave strong relationships with people they can trust. Having someone to connect with is critical to positive, healthy development. These relationships allow for the sharing of interests, struggles, and successes. It is through these relationships with parents, role models, and friends that young people learn to effectively handle the difficulties and challenges of life.

At Scout summer camp, boys commonly listen to (84 percent) and compliment (75 percent) other Scouts. Also, they make a new friend or become better friends with someone (80 percent). Friendships are an outcome of summer camp that can impact lives well beyond the camp experience.

Mentoring requires working together, and this happens at Scout summer camp in two key ways: adult leaders who teach boys (76 percent) and Scouts who learn new skills from other Scouts (72 percent).

The fact that many boys talk with an adult leader for advice (60 percent) while at camp suggests that a level of trust and respect is established in the relationship.

### *A Desire to Learn*

Life is about learning and using what is learned to improve things for oneself and others. Youth who are not given opportunities to test and explore new things may never live up to their full potential.

Summer camp is, in effect, an outdoor classroom for learning experiences. The majority of boys “try something they have never tried before” (86 percent), “test a new skill” (81 percent), “see something they have not seen before” (75 percent), or “learn about the environment” (65 percent) while at camp.

Other important learning-related factors found at camp are that Scouts feel challenged (69 percent) and test their mental/thinking abilities (71 percent).

A natural extension of the desire to learn, fostered at camp, is to put it into action through experiential learning. This type of learning is the best kind because it means a boy learns by doing!

The opportunity to earn more than 31 merit badges while at camp amply meets this need. Merit badges are discussed more specifically in the next section of this report.

### *Productive and Creative Use of Time*

Because so many lead full-scheduled lives, young people understand the value of time, and they consider it important to use their time efficiently and productively. While redundancy is important for reinforcing positive values, young people desire activities and opportunities that they perceive as new and relevant to their growth. For this reason, various merit badge options are an important aspect of camp.

Time spent achieving goals is a common positive aspect of Scout summer camp. Almost all Scouts “complete a merit badge” (83 percent) or “work with others on a badge or task” (88 percent) while at camp. Also, significant percentages of Scouts “work on a camp-improvement project” (60 percent) or “learn/practice first aid” (49 percent).

Majorities of Scouts felt prepared (80 percent), that they accomplished something worthwhile during camp (78 percent), and useful (64 percent). Productive use of time matches with good feelings of contribution (57 percent).

### *Social Adeptness*

Positive and healthy relationships are essential for successful youth development. By being placed in social settings, young people learn such social skills as the art of conversation, how to contribute to team goals, and how to resolve interpersonal conflicts in a healthy way.

Camps are structured to encourage boys to spend time working and playing together in ways that seldom happen outside of the camp environment. In the outdoors, boys are removed from independent activities, such as playing video games and watching television, and are encouraged instead to socially interact with peers. At summer camp, almost every boy meets new people (94 percent). Additionally, majorities of Scouts collaborate with other youth on accomplishments (73 percent), participate in group decision making and activities (64 percent), and even help resolve interpersonal conflicts (53 percent). These social growth experiences are outcomes of the design of summer camps.

### *Other Important Findings*

Other important findings from the research include the high proportion of boys who participate in fitness-building activities and events. Perhaps not surprising, swimming (85 percent) and hiking (70 percent) are among the most common fitness activities experienced.

These experiences are frequently tied to goal achievement. Many boys set personal goals for things they want to accomplish while at camp. Among these, 70 percent indicate they met those goals during camp.

Perhaps the best indication of the “satisfaction” that boys have at camp is the finding that more than three-of-four boys (78 percent) who attend camp would recommend camp to others.

### **Findings from Parents of Scouts**

To fully understand whether or not Scout summer camp is making a difference in the lives of boys, Harris Interactive included a survey among parents of boys who attended summer camp. This section of the report provides responses received from parents of boys who attended summer camp.

For decades, parents have given anecdotal evidence to BSA camp directors and staff members that the camp experience changed their sons. One commonly communicated sentiment has been “You took my boy and he came home more like a young man.” More than 80 percent of parents (81 percent) indicate that summer camp resulted in a positive change in their sons.

When asked to describe the reasons they believe a positive change took place, parents mention growth in self-esteem, new skills learned, and increased levels of personal responsibility.

Overall, parents are very satisfied with their son’s experience at Scout camp. More than nine of 10 parents (93 percent) indicate their son’s summer camp experience met or exceeded their expectations. In addition, almost all parents (96 percent) say they would recommend to other parents that their sons attend Scout summer camp.

Since its inception, the Scouting program has been designed to encourage interaction between parents and their children. Scout summer camp follows this design, and the fact that almost every parent (98 percent) discusses the summer camp experience with their son validates that the design works.

## Findings from Scout Leaders

The outcomes of Boy Scout summer camp are not exclusively beneficial to Scouts. By surveying adult leaders who attended summer camp, it was determined that Scoutmasters and other adult leaders also grow and learn while at camp.

Summer camp meets (35 percent) or exceeds (56 percent) the expectations of adult leaders. This is a significant finding since a majority have been to summer camp three or more times as an adult.

Most leaders set personal goals for camp (79 percent), and almost all achieve at least some of those goals (94 percent).

Adult leaders understand the focus of summer camp is on supporting the growth of youth. Notably, more than nine of 10 adults (96 percent) agree that they “played a role in helping young people succeed/grow” during the camp experience. A similar percentage agree that they “helped youth realize their own abilities” (92 percent). At a time when many youth experts are concerned that boys are becoming socially independent at younger ages, Scout camp helps bring people of all ages together. Adult leaders who attend camp clearly agree that they “built friendships with youth in the unit” (92 percent). This finding is coupled with the fact that 82 percent of adult leaders agree that they increased their understanding of today’s youth while at camp.

Personal growth benefits for leaders are another outcome of Scout summer camp. The majority of adult leaders agree that they were with people they respect (92 percent), they had fun (91 percent), they felt close to nature (84 percent), they built friendships with other leaders (81 percent), they learned from other leaders (71 percent), and they reduced their stress (65 percent).

I represent the National Capital Area Council which serves the youth and families of 16 counties in Maryland and Virginia and the District of Columbia. In that territory, we serve over 85,000 youth in our programs. The core of our strategy is to implement the mission of Scouting through the outdoors. We’ve taken this responsibility seriously. In 1996, our Council acquired the property that Disney had targeted to become a Northern Virginia theme park. Located less than 50 miles west of the Capitol near Haymarket Virginia, this property was perfect for our mission. After a period of planning and development, and an investment of almost \$18 million dollars we opened this property for full programming last year.

When fully operational, Camp William B Snyder it will allow us to expose thousands of youth to the fun and adventure of the outdoors. Young boys and girls from at risk communities within a short distance from this building have already experienced the thrill of spending time outdoors. Thanks to the tenacity of our Board of Directors, the vision of my predecessor, Ron Carroll, and the generosity and commitment of Bill and Sally Snyder we will be uniquely positioned to provide outdoor experiences for our areas youth.

We also operate Goshen Scout Reservation – a 3,500 acre traditional Scout Camp located near Lexington Virginia. Since 1966, Goshen has been a place where thousands of youth have learned to camp, cook their first meal, participated in a conservation project, and had fun. Beside the periods of instruction, everything that happens at camp is aimed at “fun with a purpose”.

Couple our local efforts with the resources of our National Office – facilities like Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, the Florida Sea Base located in the Florida Keys, and the Northern Minnesota Canoe Base in the Boundary Waters area the Boy Scouts of America have committed to using the outdoors as a platform to help develop healthy children. But the story doesn't stop there. All across America, Scouts use public lands as part of their program. From local community parks to our nation's largest forests Scouts connect their inside learning with outside applications. Fun with a purpose has practical, educational meaning. The impact on fitness is also huge – prepare for a 25 mile hike at 10,000 feet in the mountains of New Mexico carrying a 40 pound backpack – you learn the definition of fitness real quick.

So why is this important? Why should we be discussing some fun childhood memories here in Congress? Interestingly, our success in connecting youth with nature has direct impact on many of the issues we wrestle with today. Let me offer a few examples.

First, the issue of youth fitness is the most obvious and most pressing related to the health care debate. The ramifications of unfit young people and the health problems they will face in the future will certainly strain an already stressed system. Think sports programs are the answer? From 1981 to 1997, youth participation in organized sports increased by 27 percent across America. It is ironic that the childhood obesity issue has coincided with this increase. One wonders if the strict schedules and the lack of unsupervised play time are more the issue. Access to parks, public lands, and outdoor programs are certainly part of the solution.

Next, consider the issue of the availability of individuals interested in science, technology, and math for our future workforce. As we continue to structure our children's lives we take away the most potent tool in our tool box – fostering their imagination, innovation, and dreams. Connecting with nature and allowing unstructured play time provide a tremendous and proven method for sparking an interest in a lifelong pursuit. Examples from the America experience are countless – the impact of the Badlands on Teddy Roosevelt which helped create and protect our vast national forests, children learning about the stars have yearned to explore and become astronauts, and no doubt learning about nature at an early age will help us all be better stewards of our resources in the future. Technology is at play everywhere – I learned to use a map and compass as a Scout – today's youth learn how to use a GPS. Scouts used to learn Morse Code – which was the Instant Messenger of that day. The outdoors provide a great place to put technology to use in practical ways that kids can connect with. More important – they learn to say “What if...” Americans have always had the ability to dream great dreams – I believe the outdoors is a perfect place to teach our youth to dream.

Last, I believe the outdoors provide us with a platform for great partnerships between government, business, educators, and parents. There are few places that can effectively bring this large group together. Whether for social or educational purposes our outdoor resources are places that people gather. Look at the Mall – within our view people running and playing, learning about nature here in the city, greeting each other, and relaxing. Business is done. The tranquility of the environment makes it attractive to most. And dreams are made. As a young man of 17, I made the decision to dedicate my life's efforts to working with young people while standing at the Lincoln Memorial working with the BSA and the National Parks Service. Strategic partnerships can be created to link schools with parks and camps to teach science or math in the outdoors - presenting these subjects in a totally different light. Fun with a purpose!

Almost 100 years ago, when asked what makes a good Scout leader Robert Baden Powell thought a moment and said – a good leader of youth is someone who can find adventure in a mud puddle. As we debate the issues that confront us, let us always be mindful that our children need places to play, to dream the dreams that will take us to new places, and learn to be good stewards of the open spaces entrusted to us. Our future rest with unlocking the potential of the children we serve. Help us use the outdoors as a tool to ignite the possibilities and future capabilities of these youth. The Boy Scouts of America stands ready to help and to combine our resources with those of our government and community to address the difficult issues that face us. America's youth will respond!

Thank you.