



WINTER 2026

# ABILITIES DIGEST



## Newsletter

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#### Making Advancement Clearer

- Advancement for Venturers & Sea Scouts

#### Awareness Events

- Jamboree 2026!
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#### Eagle Project Spotlight

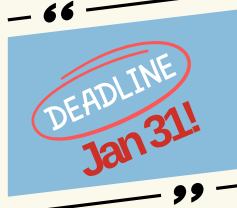
- Body Mapping

#### Resources

- Scouting's New AI Chatbot

#### Recognizing Abilities

- Recognize Torch of Gold recipients
- Deadline for Woods Services Award – “



## NEWS UPDATE

The Scouting America, Serving Scouts With Disabilities website has completed construction and is now LIVE! Take a look at the enhanced site and the improvements made to better serve you.

#### New Features:

- ✓ Membership/ Committee Supports
- ✓ Advancement & Training
- ✓ Commissioner Tools
- ✓ Resource



# SAFETY MOMENT



From Scouting Safely, Safety Moments with comments from Britt Flather, RN



## SIMPLE ROUTINES AND CLEAR EXPECTATIONS HELP ALL SCOUTS FEEL SAFE AND VALUED



Gather 'round: the crackle, the glow, the stories under a skyful of stars — the campfire can be a magical space for connection, calm, and confidence. Be reminded, great nights start with smart choices. Respect the flames and everyone leaves with marshmallows, memories, and no trips to the Camp Health Officer or Health Lodge. Here are some helpful reminders on behavior that can make your next campfire a positive and safe experience.



### Smart Behaviors to Practice

- Use **clear, simple rules**: Post and read 3–5 short rules (e.g., “Stay outside the ring,” “Hands to yourself,” “Ask before you roast”) and repeat throughout the campfire experience.
- **Practice transitions**: Rehearse arriving, sitting, and leaving the fire area during daytime to reduce anxiety at night.
- Keep calm spaces: Offer a quiet spot a short distance away, but within the line of vision, for Scouts who need a break from noise or lights.

### Site and Policy Checks (accessibility & safety)

- Check seating and sightlines: **Arrange seating** so Scouts using mobility aids or who need visual support have clear views and safe space.
- Remove tripping hazards: Keep skewers, cords, and gear out of walkways and **mark changes in terrain** with brightly colored tape or lanterns.

### Ideas to Make Campfire Time Safer & More Enjoyable

- **Predictable schedule**: Post or hand out a simple timeline so Scouts know what to expect (arrival, song, snack, reflection, leave).
- **Low sensory options**: Offer dimmable lights, noise-reducing headphones, or a separate quieter circle with battery lanterns.
- **Social scripts and prompts**: Give Scouts short phrases they can use (e.g., “I need a break,” “Can you pass the marshmallows?”) to support communication.
- **Teach and practice motor skills**: Short pre-camp sessions on safe skewer use or seating posture help build independence.

### Support Options for Leaders

- Use **your handbook**: Include adaptations and behavior supports in program manuals and make them available to volunteers.
- **Pre-camp meetings**: Meet caregivers and Scouts ahead of time to note triggers, calming strategies, mobility needs, and communication preferences.

**Inclusive campfire nights depend on planning, patience, and compassion. When leaders, volunteers, and peers use clear routines and practical supports, Scouts with special needs can join the circle, share stories, and make memories —safely and joyfully.**

### Further Information / Resources

- For tailored strategies, consult your program handbook and connect with local inclusion specialists or park staff to review site access and safety resources before your next campfire.



## CONTACT US

Email your comments and questions to  
[specialneedschair@scouting.org](mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org).

# TOOLBOX SPOTLIGHT

## APPENDIX 1: SPECIAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY LANGUAGE MATTERS



### Why we choose our words — and how you can help

At the Scouting America National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee (NSNDC), we listen. Advocates often ask us to change wording describing disabilities, conditions, or communities — and we understand why. Language shapes respect, identity, and access. This note explains our approach and invites constructive collaboration.

### Our mission, simply put

- **Champion inclusion:** Make traditional Scouting welcoming for youth with different abilities and adults who support them.
- **Equip volunteers:** Provide clear, practical guidance so leaders can make sensible accommodations.
- **Expand volunteer diversity:** Encourage adults with different abilities to serve.
- **Advocate internally:** Ensure inclusive representation and policy that reflect diverse needs.

### How we work

We gather best practices for adapting activities and supporting youth with a range of needs, then translate those practices into plain-language resources, newsletters, and trainings. Our priority is usability: volunteers shouldn't need specialist knowledge to include Scouts safely and respectfully.

### Why choosing words is complicated

The community we serve is diverse. Generations, professions, and regions use different terms. Words that were respectful once can feel outdated later. Medical and educational experts use precise jargon that can confuse volunteers. Regional differences add more variety. We aim for language that is widely understood and practical while staying open to change.

### Person-first vs. identity-first

Some prefer “person with a disability”; others prefer identity-first language like “disabled person.” Both reflect dignity. We honor individual preferences and generally use person-first language for group communication, making exceptions when a subgroup clearly favors identity-first terms.

### An open invitation

We want to get this right. If you disagree with our wording, please contact us and offer:

- **Specific, constructive feedback:** suggest alternatives and explain why.
- **Share the perspectives of the communities you represent.** That collaboration helps us create clearer, kinder, and more effective communications.

### Bottom line

We're committed to continual improvement. With your input, we can make Scouting's messages more inclusive, practical, and welcoming for everyone.



## CONTACT US

Email your comments and questions to [specialneedschair@scouting.org](mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org).



# MAKING ADVANCEMENT CLEARER

## 10.0.0.0 Section 10.

**Sea Scouts and Venturing Leadership: your support can open life-changing opportunities**

### Advancement for Sea Scouts

- Prospective Sea Scouts with disabilities and a parent/guardian should review ship programs with the Skipper and ship committee to ensure activities match abilities; ship leaders can clarify feasibility. With full cooperation of the ship committee and Skipper, some youth may be able to advance—Sea Scout requirements are specific, build rank to rank, and are not interchangeable with merit badges.
- Candidates must meet stated Sea Scout rank requirements exactly. Substitutions are allowed only if explicitly stated in current literature or approved through the formal alternative-requirements process (see “How to Apply for Alternative Requirements,” 10.1.2.5).
- Alternative requirements are considered only for disabilities expected to last more than two years or beyond age 21 and require council advancement committee approval; for Sea Scouts, the committee must include an adult knowledgeable in Sea Scout advancement. Approved alternatives must be completed by the 21st birthday unless an extension to remain registered is granted.

## Summary of Advancement for Venturers and Sea Scouts With Special Needs

Earlier this year, the National Council released an updated version of the Guide to Advancement. The 2025 edition includes several changes and clarifications specifically for Scouts with special needs and disabilities. Most of this information can be found in Section 10, titled “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.”

### Advancement for Venturing (including Scouts BSA advancement)

- Venturers with disabilities and a parent/guardian should review crew programs with the crew Advisor to determine which activities fit the youth’s abilities; crews often offer more flexibility than ships.
- Venturers working on Scouts BSA ranks (Star, Life, Eagle, Eagle Palms) must follow the same requirements and procedures as Scouts BSA.
- For Venturing ranks, candidates must meet stated requirements exactly; no substitutions or alternatives are permitted except as explicitly allowed in current literature or approved via the alternative-requirements process. Requests follow the same qualifications and approval process; alternative requirements are for long-term disabilities and require council advancement committee approval involving someone experienced in Venturing advancement. Approved alternatives must be completed by the Venturer’s 21st birthday unless an extension is granted.



#### GUIDE TO SAFE SCOUTING

[HTTPS://WWW.Scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/](https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/)

### Sea Scouts and Venturing Leadership: Lead with empathy, creativity, and a commitment to safety — your choices can make Scouting accessible

- Invite families to review your crew’s or ship’s program with you and the youth’s parent or guardian so you can jointly identify activities that match the young person’s abilities.
- Have open, practical conversations with crew Advisors or the Skipper to discover reasonable ways to include the youth — and to honestly identify limits.
- Remember that crews often have more flexibility than ships; onboard safety constraints can create genuine, nonnegotiable barriers.
- When inclusion is possible, adapt thoughtfully and document safety plans; when it isn’t, explain clearly and help find meaningful alternatives the youth can pursue.

## AWARENESS EVENTS



BE SURE TO COME SEE US AT JAMBOREE!



# AWARENESS EVENTS



SUMMIT BECHTEL RESERVE  
**JULY 22-31 | 2026**



Join the Disabilities Awareness staff at the 2026 National Jamboree! Lead activities promoting disability awareness, challenge misconceptions, and foster inclusion. **ELEVATE** and contribute to the future of Scouting. Apply now to staff the Disabilities Awareness area.  
<https://jamboree.scouting.org/staff/>.

## ADAPTIVE OUTDOOR CONFERENCE

Supporting & Serving Scouts with  
Disabilities



**DON'T  
MISS OUT!**



### Adaptive Outdoor Special Needs Conference: TO BE ANNOUNCED

Designed for volunteers and professional Scouters to learn how to make every aspect of scouting accessible to individuals. It covers important topics such as:

- Dietary and medication safety
- Program and facilities management
- Latest adaptive programs like horsemanship, COPE, and hiking.

## Zia Trek

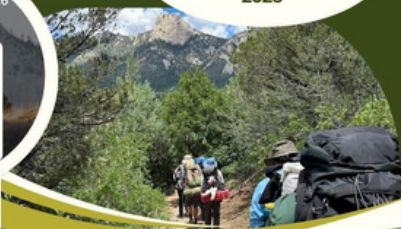
Supported 7 day Philmont Trek for  
Scouts with special needs

<https://forms.office.com/r/ZOHtdCIXCS>



~~June 21-26 & July 12-19,~~  
2025  
June 20-27 & July 11-18,  
2026

Zia Trek 2025 & 2026



### Zia Trek: Two Opportunities June 20-27 & July 11-18

7-day Philmont back-country trek tailored for Scouts with special needs. While many Scouts with special needs may be able to participate in a Philmont trek with their troop or other unit, some special needs can't be met in a typical trek. Scouts in this situation may be eligible to join a Zia trek, together with a support buddy.

# EAGLE PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

## Body Mapping – A look into the lives of those with invisible illnesses

By Sylvia DiRosa Taylor, with comments from Mike Matzinger and Janet Kelly (AD editor)

Troop 219 ([www.troop219g.com](http://www.troop219g.com)) Eagle Scout Candidate, Sylvia DiRosa-Taylor, is making great progress on her Eagle Scout service project, which focuses on raising awareness about invisible illnesses – particularly Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses. Through a series of body mapping workshops across North Carolina, Sylvia is creating space for individuals living with chronic illness to share their stories in a powerful creative way.

### About body mapping

Expressive Arts Body Mapping is a creative process that uses the whole body as a canvas for storytelling, reflection, and healing. It began in the early 2000s, drawing from health education practices in Africa (especially HIV/AIDS awareness) and has since been embraced by art therapists, educators, and community health workers around the world.

The process typically involves tracing the outline of a person's body on large paper and filling it with images, colors, words, and symbols that express personal experiences, emotions, and strengths, though it can also be adapted using smaller body maps or pre-traced outlines to make the process more accessible. Through this, body maps become powerful visual expressions of identity, trauma, resilience, and healing.



**Body mapping is a creative way to explore how chronic illnesses, emotions, and personal stories live in your body.**

### How it can be used in Scouting

When you think about this process of body mapping and the kinds of release it may give to those who participate, there are definitely implications for our Scouts who have visible and invisible disabilities/illnesses. Think about when a particular Cub Scout is restless and anxious. Think about when a member in a patrol is having trouble working alongside others, lagging behind. Body mapping may help to ease frustrations, sort out thoughts, express pain or anxiety, or other issues that may be working within any one particular Scout. A few moments with paper and markers, even clay or squishy slime, may be enough to soothe the rough edges. Enough to allow a Scout to reregulate and rejoin in an activity. Body mapping can be another type of Tranquility Base for those in need of expression through media.

### Project promotion

During Sylvia's Eagle Scout project sessions, workshop participants are developing life-size body maps that visually express both their physical symptoms and emotional experiences. In addition, they are participating in short interviews to further illuminate their journeys with these often misunderstood conditions.

The completed works will be showcased in a public art exhibition at the Green Hill Center for North Carolina Art and will also be compiled into a set of educational empathy cards designed to promote understanding in schools, clinics, and community spaces. All of this is under development and details involving this project will be released at a future date on the link below.

Sylvia's project represents not only a significant step toward earning the Eagle Scout rank but also a meaningful contribution to public health education and advocacy.



**To learn more about Sylvia's project visit:**

<https://eaglescoutbodymapping.wordpress.com/>



# RECOGNIZING ABILITIES



## Awards

Scouting America has several awards specifically designed to recognize adults who dedicate their time and effort to supporting Scouts with special needs and promoting inclusivity within the Scouting program. These awards highlight the importance of ensuring that Scouting is accessible and beneficial for all youth, regardless of their abilities.



### Special Needs Service Knot

This award recognizes registered adult volunteers and professionals who have provided active and outstanding service to Scouts with disabilities or special needs.



### Torch of Gold

The Torch of Gold is a council-level distinguished award to recognize adult Scouters for exceptional service and leadership working with Scouts who have disabilities or special needs.



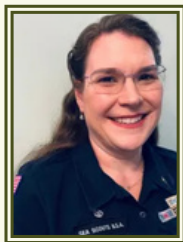
### Woods Service Award

A national-level recognition for volunteer adults who have provided exceptional service and leadership in the field of Special Needs Scouting sponsored by the Woods Services Foundation.

“  
Congratulations to  
2025 Woods Recipients  
Deacon Ken Albers &  
Alyssa Hightower  
”



“  
**DEADLINE**  
**Jan 31!**  
”



## Nominate a Scouter for the Woods Services Award



- Every year since 1978, Scouting America has recognized up to two adult leaders nationwide for their contributions to Scouting with special needs and disabilities with the Woods Services Award. The award is sponsored by the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center of Langhorne, PA.
- Each Scouting America council may nominate a Scouter for the award using the application form 512-258 (<https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf>).
- Nominations must be received by the National SND Committee by **January 31** to be considered for selection that year. Nominations may be emailed to [SpecialNeedsChair@scouting.org](mailto:SpecialNeedsChair@scouting.org).

## Congrats Torch of Gold recipients, Greater Tampa Bay Area Council

- Congrats to volunteers Jim Ronayne and Linda Wenner, both from Greater Tampa Bay Area Council for recently receiving the Torch of Gold Award for their service to Special Needs and Disabilities Scouting.
- During the council's Torch of Gold Brunch, they also raised funds for two new wheelchair accessible mats for two council camp lake fronts.





# RECOGNIZING ABILITIES

## The Silent Ninja Patrol: A concept worth considering?

By Keith Cruickshank with comments from Janet Kelly, AD Editor

*"Scouts file into our weekly Scout meetings in the windowless basement hall. The mood is electrically jazzed. The organized, sometimes loud, sometimes chaotic atmosphere is, for some, a time they look forward to all week."*

We are so fortunate to have so many active Scouts. However, for some, their love of Scouts keeps bringing them back weekly, but their involvement is closer to a bystander than a participant. They could use a calmer setting, one that gives them the opportunity to be more involved. Watching this, the adult leadership wondered about how to support these Scouts in reaching their Scouting potential.

As a result of the ensuing discussion, few years ago, our troop started a patrol that meets on a different night specifically for these Scouts. Labelled the Silent Ninja Patrol (SNP), these Scouts started meeting weekly, loosely following the Troop's agenda. Soon, semiannual campouts started, which made a great steppingstone (especially for newer Scouts) for the trips the Troop took. The patrol of 5 grew to 8 as sibling Scouts realized the rank advancement and extra trips they could get involved with. These Scouts were a welcome addition as they understood the dynamic and purpose of the patrol. We now, occasionally, have Scouts that will join in on a short-term basis as they may have a conflict with the weekly meeting or they need a smaller group to present to.

Again, as long as the Scout understands why SNP exists, they fit in well and bring some new ideas to the patrol and most importantly, help keep the patrol integrated with the troop.

Since its inception, two Scouts from the Silent Ninja Patrol have attained the rank of Eagle; their experience had greatly been enhanced by participating with the SNP. They potentially would not have made it without this type of involvement.

Generally, new Scouts join through a few avenues. First, crossover parents learn about SNP during introductory meetings. Second, Pack/Troop leaders are cognizant as crossovers' pack enthusiasm wanes with the realities of the bigger troop. We are lucky that we have pack leaders who are also involved with the Troop as they have had crossovers with us.

As in all Scouts' endeavors, this becomes a team effort to identify Scouts that could benefit from SNP and invite them to attend a meeting. The concept of creating and implementing the Silent Ninja Patrol has been a great addition to the Troop.

Packs and troops could create their own Silent Ninja dens/patrols and customize their activities to meet the needs of their Scouts. Understanding the reason for the separate den/patrol meetings is critical. Integration during the whole Pack/Troop meetings is even more critical. Attending to the needs of these Scouts and their learning can produce smoother rank advancements and completion of badges and other event activities.



Having Tranquility Bases\* (see link below) set up during whole unit participation would be highly advantageous for those Scouts who need to back off into bystander mode and then reunite as they are able. Consider this idea for your units. Being separated from the main unit structure is something that ebbs and flows with the needs of the den/patrol itself.

Parents and Scout leadership would need to be fully onboard with the process and willing to promote and welcome all Scouts into their units, especially during the planning stages. The Silent Ninja Patrol could be incorporated into units across the nation. Think about how this could work for your units. It is definitely worth the effort.

**Contact Keith Cruickshank at [kjcruickshank@gmail.com](mailto:kjcruickshank@gmail.com) for more information.**

**\*Tranquility Base Information can be found here:**

<https://ablescouts.org/?s=tranquility+Base>

# RESOURCES

## Scouting's New AI Chatbot



## How It Works

When visiting [scouting.org](https://scouting.org) and [beascout.org](https://beascout.org), locate “Scoutly” in the bottom right hand corner of your screen.

“Scoutly” is specifically designed to help with things like:

- ✓ How to join Scouting
- ✓ General Scouting questions
- ✓ Safety information
- ✓ Merit badge requirements

## Support for Special Needs Scouts

Scoutly can provide accessible, tailored guidance to help families and leaders.

- ✓ Suggests reasonable accommodations for meetings, events, and activities.
- ✓ Offers communication tips and sensory-friendly adjustments.
- ✓ Helps leaders find resources and training about inclusive Scouting practices.
- ✓ Points families to local contacts and adaptive programs when available.

## Feedback

Have feedback to share? Email [namtech@Scouting.org](mailto:namtech@Scouting.org)





## RESOURCES & CONTACTS

### Helpful Links

- Scouting with Disabilities landing page: [scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/](https://scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/)
- AbleScouts: [Abilities Digest](https://ablescouts.org) articles posted online: [ablescouts.org](https://ablescouts.org)
- Inclusion Toolbox: <https://ablescouts.org/toolbox/>
- Guide To Advancement 2025: <https://www.scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/>

### Links in Articles

- Safety Moment: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/camp-fire-safety/>
- Philmont Experiences: <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/special-needs/>
- 2026 Jamboree: <https://jamboree.scouting.org/staff/>
- Body Mapping Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In58TziRkmE>



### Social Media

- Facebook Abilities Digest: [www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165)
- Facebook No Scout Left Behind: [www.facebook.com/groups/1967878213431320](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1967878213431320)

## INCLUSION TOOLBOX



<https://ablescouts.org/toolbox/>



<https://ablescouts.org/subscribe/>



Email your comments and questions to  
[specialneedschair@scouting.org](mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org).