



# BUILDING EVIDENCE IN SCOUTING TOGETHER

## BSA BEST STUDY

## FINDINGS

February 7, 2020

### Retention of Scouts

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## Tenure and Retention in Scouts BSA

Survey data from 3,495 Scouts and 103 adult Wave 2 interviews were analyzed to understand how tenure in Scouting affects youth outcomes, and the challenges adult leaders see in retaining Scouts in the Scouts BSA program.

### Retention findings from Scout Surveys

Quantitative survey data were analyzed from 3,495 Scouts to understand the relationship between years in Scouting and youth outcomes, controlling for youth age. All youth outcomes were regressed on age and years in Scouting (so any effect of years in Scouting is net of developmental age of Scout) with a sample of 3,495 Scouts.

Many outcomes were (predictably) related to age, however two outcomes were related to years in Scouting: Commitment to Doing One's Duty as a Citizen and Leading at a Higher Level. The size of the effect was small, but significant, and indicates that **youth who have more years in Scouting score higher on Commitment to Doing One's Duty as a Citizen and Leading at a Higher level.**

One finding related to age, and which may be important for retention, is that **younger Scouts report more joy/fun in Scouting than older Scouts.**

### Retention Findings in Adult Leader Interviews

A team of experienced coders read all 103 Wave 2 adult leader interviews (Wave 2 interviews were chosen because there is a question which focuses directly on retention, though retention themes were often found in the rest of the interview text as well).

Across all of the interviews, it was clear that the adult leaders hope to keep youth involved in Scouting. **Adult leaders strongly believe in the value of the Scouts BSA program, and know youth will only benefit from it if they keep attending**—they are therefore very concerned about Scout retention and motivated to find ways to recruit and retain Scouts in the troop.

The retention issues noted by adult leaders mainly fall into several broad areas:

#### *Scout-specific factors*

- Competing youth activities (55%)
- Loss of interest in Scouting (20%)
- Academics (16%)
- Youth employment (8%)

#### *Goodness of fit*

- Scout/family switched troop (10%)
- Issues in troop (10%)
- Scout asked to leave troop (6%)

#### *Family factors*

- Money/cost (20%)
- Relocation (11%)
- Family commitments (7%)

*"Yeah, so lot of it has to do with school events and sports. A lot of overlapping of the schedules so that as well. I mean, just the overall busy-ness of the kids these days is just ... getting busier and busier."*

*"There's always going to be Scouts who are like, "Well, this isn't for me," after they cross over a couple of years into Scouting, "this just isn't for me anymore.""*

*"If you look at the time of the cost of rechartering Summer Camp, going to camp out, merit badges and then buying a couple of personal gears, things every year, it can get quite pricey in a hurry. And that's not even trying to be expensive at it."*

*"Obviously if the dues just go to something completely unaffordable, we can't provide Scouting to anybody, so that's a big concern."*

### Recruitment and troop lifespan challenges

**24% of adult leaders noted problems with recruitment**

- No crossover pack (6%)
- Drop-off in Scouting after Cub Scouts (7%)

**3% of adult leaders noted not having enough adult volunteers**

### Program elements beneficial to recruitment/retention

**18% of adult leaders noted program elements that were beneficial to recruitment and/or retention**

- Camping and other outdoor activities (11%)
- Leadership opportunities (9%)
- High adventure experiences (9%)

*“I know as far as retaining Scouts, it's extremely important to have an activity, at least every month. Camp-outs and outings and stuff.”*

*“As they get older you have to keep them engaged with activities that are age appropriate, that are exciting, that are more high adventure than things that they've done as younger Scouts.”*

### Troop-specific Recruitment and retention strategies

**25% of adult leaders brought up retention and recruitment strategies that they use within their own troops. Flexibility around attendance and uniforms (23%), offsetting issues of cost (19%), and working with ‘challenging’ Scouts (15%) were the most common of these troop-specific strategies to recruit or retain Scouts.**

### Other key findings

#### Negative public perception of BSA as an organization

Leaders lamented the negative perception of BSA as a problem for recruitment and retention, especially because they believe so strongly in the value of the program.

#### Marketing the Scouts BSA program

Leaders would like BSA to market the program more.

#### Adult leadership transitions are a time of vulnerability for retention

Changes in adult leaders or adult leadership style arose repeatedly as a reason for Scouts to leave the troop.

*“I know that there's a lot of negative, but mostly I think it is affecting some of our recruitment, especially at the Cub Scout level. But at the same time, I still think that there's no better program that we can offer to youth, that's out there today.”*

*“I think there's a lot of misconceptions about what's happening within Scouting and I wish the BSA were maybe more aggressive or more proactive in telling the story of Scouting and helping try to curb some of those misconceptions about issues that have happened in the past, legal issues that are being overcome.”*

### Girls joining Scouts BSA and Scout Retention

Some leaders noted that some Scouts or families have left Scouts BSA as a result of girls joining the program, while others commented that girls joining has helped their troops with recruitment and retention of boys as well.

Adult leaders expressed concern about recruitment and retention for girls' troops as well. Several leaders reported that their linked girls' troop does not have enough Scouts, and some speculate that the separation between girls' and boys' troops may result in recruitment/retention issues for both.

*“And the girls that have joined are... it's worth noting that the girls that are in BSA right now are there because they want to be there, right? [...] You can leverage that tremendous enthusiasm. And it feeds back to the boys, right?”*