

Helping other people

By **DANIELLA TAGLIERI**

It's a basic philosophy of most Groups that no child should miss out on the benefits of Scouting because of cost.

While many families regard Scouting as a relatively cheap activity, because the labour is free, and facilities have been built up by previous generations, that's not the case for all families.

At the Group Leaders conference in February 2019 we explained that the number of Groups seeking fee relief for members had blown out dramatically over the past two years and Scouts Victoria could no longer pick up a non-budgeted amount close to \$100,000.

This year we received a much smaller number of requests for fee relief, and we have responded to all received.

In some cases we suggested that Groups could cover these, and they willingly agreed. Without the youth member being made to feel special. Only the parents or carers, and the Group Leader and Group Chair/Treasurer need to know a family or two is being supported. (There are already many Groups which never seek fee relief; they are proud to discreetly support those who need it. It's what they have always done.)

In some cases, where a Group had a high number of families facing financial difficulties, Scouts Victoria went halves. The Group covered the registration fees of some members, and Scouts Victoria waived the fees of the others.

And in some cases, where families faced catastrophic challenge, there was no argument: their fees were waived and the Group continued to do its bit to support the family through emotional and stressful times.

This is how it has been for decades.

If Scouts Victoria waived the fees of the hundreds of our members in financial hardship, this would simply be passed on to other members.

Seeking external sources of income, at the local level, is better for all.

So how do Groups support families in need, without adding to the burden of other families in the Group?

Some local suggestions are:

1st/8th Blackburn and 1st Tootgarook have previously asked for support from other community groups such as Rotary, Lions Club or Berry Street. They are always ready to help Scouts.

Even an individual - a friend of the Group, a former member - might cover the fees of a youth member. One DC was quick to offer to 'sponsor' one of his youth members when he heard how the child was being raised by his pensioner grandparents; in the end, the Group declined his offer and supported the child.

1st Greenhills actively promote the NEAR and EML funds for youth members to attend activities like Cuboree and Jamboree. They also have a fund-raising policy that means if the family gets directly involved in fundraising, they will receive money to go towards their own program costs like camps and major events.

At a District level, Banyule District has set up a small fund that they use to help those in need. The Group Leader provides a submission that shows how Scouting would be beneficial for the child concerned. If successful, District covers the Scouts Victoria registration fee and waives the District Levy.

1st Gisborne has a fund to support young people with fees, camps and outings. This fund was made possible by some money left to the Group from an estate.

Groups could put money aside in their budget each year into an interest bearing term deposit or take out or top up as required upon the end of the investment time or annually. A single annual sausage sizzle could top up this account each year.

1st Caroline Springs use CentrePay via Centrelink to help families with budgeting and supporting some of the costs.

1st Eaglehawk has a uniform support program to assist families with the other external costs. Lack of uniform does not mean the young person can't participate and they are hoping to start a second hand uniform shop for further support.

These are some of the ways that Groups manage so they are prepared at Census, so that children who need Scouting and can't afford it due to family circumstances don't miss out.

Some have term fees, instead of annual fees.

Some Scout Groups support family with fees in exchange for maintenance or cleaning of the Scout hall.

As one Group Leader said: "It doesn't matter where the money comes from in the end - sausage sizzles, the Monster Raffle, or Christmas trees - helping a few families is just a budget item when we frame up the costs for the year ahead. Doesn't every Group do that?"

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