

Transcript of Webelos to Scout Transition Presentation

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Hi, this is Darin Steindl, Director of Field Service for the Northern Lights Council. Thank you taking a few minutes to learn about our Webelos to Scout Transition Plan.

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We need a plan, because unlike the old days when Webelos seemed to automatically join a troop, that isn't the case in the recent past.

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In fact, our transition rate has been steadily declining for many years. In our council last spring, there were approximately 750 Webelos that were eligible to move on into Boy Scouts. By June less than 25% had transitioned into a troop.

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We need to be pro-active to change this trend.

One thing to consider is how society has changed. When I was growing up, there weren't as many options for participating in an organized program. I played some sports, but the practices and games didn't consume all my free time. Children growing up now have more choices and it's more difficult to decide what they are going to participate in.

Also, children haven't spent as much time outdoors, playing games that they made up themselves. They have grown up in a time when entertainment was at their figure tips – either a smart phone, video game system or video streaming. They often don't know how much fun you can have by getting out of the house.

And most recently, we have heard more and more about children being bullied. We can understand that a Webelos might be intimidated by going to a Scout meeting where there are other Scouts older than them that they don't know.

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As a Scouting movement we need to address these issues.

First, we need to make sure the program we are offering meets the needs and interests of today's youth and parents. It doesn't mean get rid of camping from Scouting, but it does mean that we need to highlight some of the other activities Scouts can do and skills they can learn. That's why the Nova awards and STEM Scouts have been developed. Those programs are about science and technology and catch the interest of today's youth.

We also need to do more education about the older Scout program. Youth that have been in Cub Scouts for four years may be getting tired of that program and think that Boy Scouts – or Scouts BSA beginning in February 2019 – is more of the same. They may not know what activities are in store when they join a troop.

Parents of today's Cub Scouts may not have grown up in Scouting and they aren't very familiar with the older Scout program either.

And just like moving to a new school or community can be stressful, leaving Cub Scouts and joining a troop can also be scary. We need to provide more opportunities for the Webelos, and their parents to become familiar and comfortable with troop they are joining.

Being visible in the community as much as possible can also help. Troops participating in service projects, doing flag ceremonies at community events, and other activities will show the community that Scouts learn citizenship and other valuable lessons and would be a good thing for youth to participate in.

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There are many people that can have an impact on whether a Webelos continues in Scouting or not. Cub Scout leaders, Scouts BSA leaders, commissioners and district volunteers all play a part in the transition.

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Each district has a membership team that helps promote Scouting. We encourage every district to have someone that focuses on the Webelos to Scout Transition.

They can share the plan, like I am doing now, with pack and troop leaders. They can work with the district executive to share the list of eligible Webelos and help commissioners understand how they can support the units they work with.

And they can follow up with those Webelos that haven't joined a troop to make sure that they were invited or to find out why they decided not to join.

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Commissioners assist unit leaders by sharing information and ideas. They help multiple units with the annual charter renewal, so they can also promote communication between pack and troop leaders. Since they usually have vast Scouting experience, they can help educate the youth and parents about the older Scout program.

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Troop leaders need to reach out to new members. Get to know the pack leaders in your area, especially the Webelos leaders. If the troop has Scouts that need a leadership position, talk to them about being a den chief and helping den leaders. That's a great way for the Cub Scouts to become more familiar and comfortable with a Scout from the troop.

Invite Cub Scouts to troop activities and campouts. Don't wait until they are ready to cross over, start earlier and invite them more often.

When it is time for the pack cross over ceremony, make sure the troop leaders and Scouts are available to help with the ceremony and greet the Webelos as they cross over the bridge.

And most importantly, troop leaders need to make sure that program offered by the troop is high-quality and something that would be of interest to the Webelos.

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Pack leaders play an important role in the Webelos to Scouting transition by setting the goal of giving every Webelos the opportunity to continue in Scouting.

Pack leaders should get to know the troops and the leaders in their area and share that information with the Webelos and parents. They can encourage Webelos leaders to visit those troops and participate in activities with them.

And by making sure the pack program is the best it can be, they will be able to retain more youth as they move from Lions to Tigers and up to Webelos. Too often we had 6 or 7 youth join as Tigers, but by the time they get to 5th grade, there are only 2 or 3 left. When issues crop up with dens, the pack leaders can step in and get the den meetings back on track before we lose members.

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The Webelos leader can be the most influential person in the process. Most have a child in the den, so when they decide to transition into a troop, often the other members of the den will follow them.

It's important that they run good den meetings, talk with parents about the older Scout program and have the den visit troops as often as they can.

It's also important that they encourage all Webelos to at least consider joining a troop, even if it isn't the one the den leader has decided to join.

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A youth can join a Scouts BSA troop when they have reached 11 years old, OR have completed the 5th grade, OR when they have earned the Arrow of Light and are at least 10 years old.

Most Webelos will earn the Arrow of Light in February, March or April.

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Let me share the timeline with you. In December we shared the list of eligible Webelos with the troop leaders.

We ask each troop to set a date for an open house in either March or April. Once the date is set, let the district executive or membership team know about your event.

Prior to your open house or special event, personally contact the Webelos and their parents and invite them to attend.

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Depending on the date of your open house, the district executive will work with the schools to visit and talk to students about Scouting and distribute fliers with information about your event.

There are many youth that would be interested in joining Scouting once they hear about what your troop does.

The important thing to remember is that it takes verbal communication to get youth excited about joining. Emails and fliers by themselves aren't as effective anymore.

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By May, we hope that every troop has conducted an open house. The district membership team will follow up with any Webelos that haven't joined a troop.

Scouts that attend summer camp and do the exciting activities they are expecting are more likely to continue in Scouting. So it's important that troop gives every opportunity to the new members to attend camp with them.

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Making a good impression when Webelos visit is also very important. Imagine for a second that you are a parent of a Webelos and you visit a troop – what do you expect?

What would you do if the older Scouts in the troop you visit were misbehaving? Or what if you saw the adult leaders that weren't giving much leadership? Would you join that troop?

Its very important that the troop makes a good impression the first time and every time that prospective members visit.

People will join a group where they feel welcome and the program looks organized.

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If you are a troop leader, here are some do's and don'ts for when you have the open house.

Do make sure you personally invite people to attend. Have your current Scouts invite their friends also!

Make sure everyone is welcomed when they arrive and are told what is going to happen during the meeting.

Hands on activities are always more effective in selling the idea the idea of joining your troop than just talking. Have your older scouts teach the new youth and parents a skill. Maybe how to start a fire or how to cook in a dutch oven.

You can play a video from summer camp that shows Scouts in action. But be careful of doing a slide show – it just doesn't depict the same level of action as a video.

Have snacks or better yet, maybe have the new members and their parents help make something to snack on.

And always follow up after the open house to answer any questions that they forgot to ask while they were there.

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The don'ts are:

– don't be disorganized.

Don't let the Scouts or leaders go off in another area and keep to themselves – that's not very welcoming.

Talking about your troop is ok - but showing them is better. Keep it fast-paced with high energy. If the meeting gets done early, that's ok.

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Life they used to say on Monty Python's Flying Circus – now something completely different!

Let's think outside the box for a while. What if you got to know the Webelos den leader of the local pack really well. And instead of them conducting the den meetings in the church basement with the other Cub Scout dens, you convinced them to do their den meetings in conjunction with your troop meetings. And they start doing that occasionally while they are 4th grade Webelos, but do most of the den meetings with your troop when they are 5th grade Webelos.

They would still participate in pack meetings and other pack activities, but they would be spending a lot of time meeting with your troop.

What do you think would happen?

From experience, I can tell you that Webelos dens that have done that, find that most of their members go on to join the troop that they have been meeting with. They made the transition from Webelos to Scouts seem these of a transition and more like a progression.

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I hope this presentation gives you some new ideas for keeping more youth involved in Scouting.

If you have questions, contact your district executive or membership team. Or feel free to contact me at the Center for Scouting in Fargo.

Thank you for your time you give to Scouting!