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Acts of Kindness

Dear all

It's the final school term of 2020, in a year that most of us will never forget. A year that, while challenging, has helped us recognise what's really important in our lives - family and friends, health and experiencing the wonderful outdoors of our beautiful country.

When the NSW Government introduced tough restrictions on all activities across the State, Scouts NSW made the deliberate decision to stay open and continue offering the Scouting Program by working within those restrictions. We didn't want to close down, switch off and forget about Scouts until the crisis had passed. It's not in our nature.

We prefer to look on the bright side and try to do our best in a difficult situation. We evolved to meet the challenge, and we built [Scouting@Home](#) to support the youth members who wanted to stay connected to their favourite organisation.

And, we heard and saw amazing feedback from Groups across NSW participating in a huge range of online activities, meetings, awards, adventures, giving young people the chance to learn new skills and feel confident about coping with their strange environment.

How are we going so far?

Well, we're not immune. We have faced into some bleak scenarios before, and COVID-19 is amongst one of the most challenging for us.

First, we're impacted by the fall in donations being experienced across the nation. Research by the Charities Aid Foundation found that Australia is the second most generous nation in the world. However charitable giving is dwindling, and there has been a 7 per cent fall in donations this year, according to wealth manager JB Were. Predictions show one in seven Australian charities is at risk of folding by September 2021.

Second, we're impacted by an inability to hold major events of gatherings, which are often the highlight of any Term's activities. The NSW Government has tight restrictions on gatherings and the use of non-residential premises. While the regulations are continuing to be revised, as I write this, the number of people allowed to gather is determined by the 'one person per 4 square metre rule' and people can participate in outdoor public gatherings of 30 people from Friday 23rd October. While this might seem limiting, there are still opportunities for us to continue Scouting whether we're physically together or not.

And we're also being significantly affected by a fall in volunteer numbers. We have seen a decline in membership, as some adults have not been able to return to the Scouting roles they held prior to COVID-19. There is a wide range of reasons for this, but we know some adults are at higher risk of serious illness if infected by the virus, others have lost work, and many are working harder than ever as their business incomes are under pressure.

So what are we doing?

The most important thing we can do at a time like this is focus our efforts on the most important things to keep Scouting alive and available for our members.

We need to address our financial situation and find new avenues of income. We also need to retain and recruit new members, both youth and adults.

We have a small team of very committed State and Region Commissioners who are doing everything they can to support members. They are supported by an even smaller team of staff at our State Office and in our Region Offices across the State.

It's my priority to help these two teams stay focused on our long-term viability, and not get distracted by less critical or less urgent tasks that can be time-consuming and have little impact.

Here are some of the things we've done:

- Sent applications to government, private and corporate grant and funding opportunities to seek additional support to run our Program.
- Submitted an exemption request to the NSW Health Minister for Scouts to be able to hold larger gatherings.
- Identified Groups with waiting lists who urgently need more Leaders, and worked with Region Commissioners on capacity issues and reallocation of active volunteers.
- Changed the new membership enquiry process to ensure every single request is answered and fulfilled.
- Reviewed our marketing and promotional efforts to identify the most impactful activities, and started to run targeted campaigns in social media and broadcast media.
- Invested in our training curriculum to make the training easier to complete online for busy adults.
- Analysed why members leave and introduced exit interviews to build knowledge about actions we can take to mitigate this.
- Removed Leaders who have displayed ongoing behavioural issues or who have deliberately resigned all their Group members without looking for alternative options.

What we need from you

I know, for many of you, your focus has been on keeping in good health, ensuring your family is safe and well, and trying to work around the restrictions in place, as best you can.

I don't want to burden you with requests for help that feel overwhelming or too demanding. As volunteers, our natural instinct is to help, so we're probably already doing more than our share to keep our communities together at this fractious time.

Here are some things you could do to help, many of which involve simply sitting down and writing an email, and all of which are acts of kindness:

- If you have any thoughts on major financial or fund-raising initiatives we could consider, please email me, Belinda Francis or Phil Crutchley. We'd love to hear from you.
- If your employer, or groups within your local community are offering grants and donations, please apply. There's lots of useful support information on the website to help.
- If you have some friends who have time on their hands, send them an email or have a chat to them about Scouting. There are lots of ways they could help.
- If you are involved in your school's P&C, talk to them about Scouts and see if they'd be willing to run a fund-raiser for your local Group.
- Nominate one of the adults you know in Scouting for a Community award. If they win, imagine the publicity you'll generate in your local community.
- Write to your local MP and let them know how much value Scouts contributes to their electorate.
- When you go out – to the shops, to a park, in your community – wear your uniform. Be ready to answer questions about Scouts.

Finally, a very special thank you to each and every volunteer and supporter for your kindness and your commitment in these trying times. Keep doing your best, and together, we'll set up Scouts NSW for a bright future and long-term success.

Yours in Scouting.

Neville Tomkins OAM JP
Chief Commissioner
Scouts Australia (NSW Branch)

Youth Safety in Scouting

Scouts Australia NSW is committed to operating as a youth safe organisation and implementing youth safe policies and practices in accordance with the elements of a child safe institution outlined by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report entitled *Creating Child Safe Institutions*.

Remember

All suspicions, concerns or allegations about criminal matters or child protection matters should be reported directly to the Chief Commissioner, the Deputy Chief Commissioner (Youth Safety, Compliance and Support), the CEO or the Child Protection Officer at the NSW State Office. To make a report use the [online youth protection form](#), call 02 9735 9000 or email youthprotection@nsw.scouts.com.au.

Imminent Danger

If someone is in danger NOW, the matter should be reported directly to NSW Police on 000. Where a report is made to the Police, you must also subsequently notify Scouts NSW State Office.

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