

THE SHAPE OF THE FUTURE  
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All around us, every day, the dialogue goes on among the voices that defend the past and its precedents as the best guide for our decisions and actions. There are also the voices that extol the immersion in the here-and-now as the best source of sensitive wisdom, and there are those voices that beckon us to "get with it" and change everything we are doing because the world ahead is all different.

The great challenge for each of us is to make creative use of all three types of voices—to examine reflectively the learnings of past successes and failures, to feel the excitement and joy of full involvement in today, and to share in the challenge of future opportunities to help build a tomorrow that is better than today or yesterday.

Our here-and-now involvement in helping young people grow and develop is so demanding—engrossing—confronting that it is difficult to step back for a more reflective look at where all of our efforts are heading. Each day of our volunteer leadership can be a significant step toward the future if we will pause a moment to examine how our best projections about tomorrow can be helpful in doing a more creative job of girl leadership today.

There are several important sources of ideas and influences to help us set our goals and guide our leadership behaviors. In this brief article we have suggested that you can gain wisdom for your steps-into-the future from (1) the girls; (2) your co-volunteers; (3) other leadership in the community; (4) your professional leadership resources; (5) and from your own basic values and capacities.

All these resources are relevant to some images of the future which students of the future are observing and reporting.

We want to share with you several of these perspectives as we perceive them, and illustrate some of the exciting steps into the future of Girl Scouting that we believe are possible for each of us—Today.

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## OUR GIRL MEMBERS

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### Present—Challenge

Young girls, middle young girls, young adult girls are our members and potential members. These girls have needs, feelings, demands, frustrations, and hopes which they are often expressing clearly. The middle and older ones want "a piece of the action," meaning that they want to be where excitement and action are taking place. They want to help the younger, the poorer, the poor learner, the persons in trouble, the polluted community; in short, they want to help the world in which they find themselves to be a fairer, cleaner, friendlier place in which to live. And they want to help make the decisions that affect them at home, at church, in school, and in the informal groups to which they belong—like the Girl Scouts.

### Future—Shapes

It is clear from studies of the future that girls will be on *all* decision-making bodies (boards, committees, planning groups) on the national, regional, and local levels. Girls will:

- help determine content and goals of program;
- help with the training of adult Girl Scout volunteers;
- have part-time paid jobs in Girl Scouting as aides to professional workers;
- have more responsibility and involvement in helping with younger girls;
- will lead and co-lead troops as volunteers;
- be increasingly mobile within and between communities.

### Issues and Blocks

It is hard to erase resistance to change, but perhaps a look at some of the issues and blocks may help decrease such resistances. Many adults will:

- cling to the past and to traditional ways of doing things;
- feel that girls don't have the necessary experience and background;

- fear the competition of competent girls;
- tend to generalize from poor experiences with one girl to all girls.

Some national and council policies, rules and standards will also be blocks to full girl participation in these kinds of leadership, planning, and decision-making roles.

### Action—Strategy Examples

Opportunities for *progressive leadership* and responsibility experiences will need to be built into program just as progressive camping experiences have been built into Girl Scout program in the past. *Vertical task groups* will need to be formed, made up of persons from every level of the organization (board, committees, staff, leaders, etc.) with girls representing several levels such as board, committee, leader. An example might be an affirmative action task force on the council level.

There will need to be *training* of girls as *Volunteer Trainers*, *Volunteer Recruiters*, and *Third Party Mediators*. The latter are persons who are experts in mediating conflict to produce a creative compromise. They are methodological advocates.

*Cross-age tutoring and helping* (olders tutoring younger) will need to be an integral part of training and program opportunities for girls. There is already a body of literature and knowledge available in this area.

Training for girls in *action research methods*, including needs assessment and evaluation techniques.

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## OTHER GIRL SCOUT VOLUNTEERS —OUR TEAMMATES!

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### Present—Challenge

Girl Scout adults—leaders, neighborhood chairpersons, committee and board members, parents bring their similar and different values, expectations, interests, needs, fears, demands, prejudices, and resources to bear on the situation. There are more *and more* men and women from

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differing backgrounds, life-styles, racial, religious and ethnic groups available as volunteers. This means more ideas on what Girl Scouting should and could be.

## Future—Shapes

Many trends already here in some small ways will accelerate in the future:

- mobility of people;
- more temporary commitment to *one* cause;
- multiple loyalties, including both volunteer and paid jobs;
- mid-life or new career as a motivation;
- expense moneys for volunteers to cover babysitting, transportation, parking, etc.
- partnership teams of younger and older persons as leaders;
- resources committee of seven or eight persons willing and able to give leadership to a troop, but not each week.

## Issues and Blocks

Some of the blocks to new combinations or new utilization of Girl Scout volunteers include:

- reliance on good traditional patterns;
- resistance to experimenting with new patterns;
- lack of skill in real teamwork;
- lack of training in a variety of teamwork patterns.

## Action—Strategy Examples

Examples from several communities are available, including:

1. A neighborhood resource committee of adults and young adults who are available on call to work as consultants with troops all the way from leading to specialized talents such as nature study, discussion leading on the new roles of women, etc.

2. Exchange of practice discussions on all the ways to work with girls—and have fun!

3. Team leadership consisting of an adult, a young adult, and a rotating girl member from the troop.

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## OTHER LEADERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY

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### Present—Challenge

Our efforts to help Girl Scouts grow and develop are interconnected with the activities of many others in the community who interact with children and young people in all sectors of the community—the schools, the churches, business, recreation agencies, the courts, families, etc. These others have beliefs about what young people need, evaluations of what we do, ideas about what ought to be done. Our own goals should be influenced by the interdependence with this variety of other girl-builders. We may disagree vigorously with some of the others; or we may be ignorant of what they are doing, and they may lack information about our efforts.

### Future—Shapes

Students of the future agree that the problems of appropriate educational and social services are becoming, and will become, progressively more complex. It will become increasingly impossible for any one agency or interest group to “go it alone” and to “do their own thing” in helping the next generation to learn and grow.

On the other hand the futurists predict an increase in polarization of many of the subparts of the community—the different ages, sexes, racial, religious and ethnic groups, consumers and producers, and many others. This could mean confrontation and separateness of effort when collaboration is more necessary.

### Issues and Blocks

Some of the greatest blocks to a positive movement toward the future are:

- fear of loss of “turfdom” by agencies and programs;
- competitive distrust and withholding in such areas as program designs, volunteer recruiting, budget, and planning;
- a fear of confrontation (e.g. about

racism, duplication of effort, etc.);

- a fear of loss of identity in merger;
- the widespread assumption that *compromise* is a negative “giving up” process, rather than a creative emergence of new and better ideas.

What are some of the ways we can creatively cope with the issues in order to meet needs and relate to these unfolding social trends?

### Action—Strategy Examples

1. In one community the key policy and administrative leaders related to child and youth programs in all sectors of the community were interviewed in groups of eight to probe their differences and similarities of assumptions about the needs of youth, the desired outcomes of their efforts, and the necessary divisions of labor and collaborations to reach all children and youth effectively. The idea of the Coordinating Council for Child and Youth Services emerged. This is an image of the future where public and private programs and funds will be blended more and more.

2. The patterns of program and project funding which are emerging place emphasis on the funding of cooperative inter-agency program efforts rather than on the funding of single agencies and groups.

3. Inter-agency task forces are working on coordinated recruiting and training of volunteers and skill development programs for the professional workers in all the agencies and institutions.

4. Twice a year those working directly with the young in all types of programs participate in an all-day “Exchange of Successful Practices Institute” where a consultant team helps them identify, share, document the most innovative techniques of child and youth development.

5. An all-day institute for teams from interest groups with different and conflicting approaches and values (racial, ethnic, ideological) is focusing on the bases of difference, the exploration of goals, and the utilization of conflicts and confrontations as a resource for everyone. →

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## OUR PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

### Present—Challenge

Girl Scout executive staff members have important perspectives about girls' needs, what is available and will become available nationally as program resources, and what growth opportunities there are for us as volunteer members of the Girl Scout team. They have ideas about what skills we need to be effective with girls.

### Future—Shapes

Already we can see the shape of the future in the strong trend toward higher quality of service and accountability of program to demonstrate that the goals they program are actually being achieved as outcomes. Professional leaders can no longer be satisfied that they have done their part when they have recruited and trained the volunteer, and volunteers can no longer be satisfied that they have done their part by volunteering. Both professionals and volunteers will be involved more and more in questions of how to improve their performance, how to maintain quality, and how to evaluate the degree to which their efforts are "paying off" in girl growth.

### Issues and Blocks

There are several blocks to the improvement of the quality of our performance and to capitalizing on new developments and practices:

- one unfortunate fact is that there is very little concrete sharing of successful practices, between volunteers, or between professionals;
- there is much misunderstanding about the best kinds of collaboration and partnership between volunteers and professionals, so the resources of the professional are not used;
- insecurity about our own competence leads to hesitation to ask for help or to become involved in the assessment of the effects of our efforts;
- there are very slow and inadequate procedures for identifying high-quality programs and techniques when they are developed, and for spreading this knowledge quickly to others.

### Action—Strategy Examples

1. In one community a monthly seminar-workshop is held for all volunteers and professionals working directly with young people. At each session there is an "exchange of discoveries" period, where successful techniques are exchanged in small groups, with techniques being recorded on a ditto-master by a "documentor" as it is described, and run off on the ditto machine immediately so everyone can have a copy for their folder. Much cross-visiting of each other in action developed from this.

2. A local inter-agency team has been formed in another community to coordinate and conduct basic training for all volunteers from all community programs,

and a monthly "open-house consultation" is held for any volunteer to discuss, with members of the inter-agency team, their problems and puzzles.

3. In another program a new type of volunteer has emerged—the program assessment volunteer. Teams of these volunteers work with the professional consultant to develop tools and procedures for assessing the effectiveness of each program by observation, interviews, and questionnaires. These teams prepare feedback reports to the leaders, and develop presentations to boards and funding sources. As a result all volunteers have become interested and involved in the assessment of what they are doing. This is an exciting growth experience.

## OUR OWN VALUES AND GOAL-IMAGES

### Present—Challenge

The need to be relevant, to be significant as volunteers and as persons, confronts us with the need to clarify our own values and priorities. Our daily preoccupation with the here-and-now of existence is not enough we realize. To be more content with ourselves, and more influential in the lives of others, we must think and plan ahead, and feel the satisfaction of having important goals, and actually behaving consistently with these values.

### Future—Shapes

The students of social trends and social change all agree that there is an increasing concern about basic values. The re-emergence of interest in ethics, morality, religion, philosophy, and style of life is strong and growing.

Also more and more persons and groups have an increased sense of potency that if they really choose to they can make things happen in this community and world. They see evidence that committed people, using effective strategies of action, can and do make a difference.

### Issues and Blocks

- Many of us, in the face of the complexities of life, are tempted to draw back, to find contentment in "doing our own thing" and rejecting the risk-taking and energy-commitment of getting involved as volunteers or citizens;
- looking at our values and confusion about goals leads us to examining the discrepancies between what we believe and what we do, and this is very uncomfortable.

### Action—Strategy Examples

1. In the midst of a serious conflict between youth and elders about the degree of shared power in decision-making, we see them accept the invitation to participate in a value-dialog exercise where the focus is on "selling them my ideas," and on "listening to their ideas." The technique helps each value-dialog group (composed in such a way as to maximize

differences) to look at their own process of communication, to explore new concepts of "creative compromise" and "utilization of conflict as a resource." Exciting new levels of value clarification and motivation to collaborate are achieved.

2. The adults and young people together, at a fall "start-up institute" are using an "image of potentiality" exercise to project themselves a year into the future to make observations of what they are doing and being, that pleases them with their progress. These images are shared, converted into priority goals, and action planning begins on how to immediately move in those directions.\*

3. A group of volunteer leaders, in their monthly "awareness group session" are sharing their personal values about their volunteer roles and are helping each other by identifying and clarifying their assumptions, beliefs, needs, and satisfactions as volunteers.

## SO HOW ABOUT HELPING SHAPE THE FUTURE?

If these images and action-examples feel relevant and challenging to you then we believe, from our experience, that you are able to take some bit of initiative to help shape a more exciting future for yourself as a volunteer, a more exciting future for the girls you work with, and a more exciting future for your Girl Scout council and the other agencies and groups that need to collaborate to help provide growth opportunities and partnership opportunities for the younger ones.

- Will you share your ideas with some other volunteers?
- Will you initiate some requests for teamwork with your professional leadership?
- Will you involve the girls you lead in some joint explorations of their values, their future, their needs for partnership with you? □

\*See second listing in Bibliography.

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