

## Inspirations

We created our Scout Programs to serve all of America's youth. We developed fully nondiscriminatory, fully inclusive, co-ed Scout Programs with modern, FUN activities which the Scouts choose themselves.

We have been inspired by real-life youth. Their stories inspire us everyday to give our best and remind us of just how important our efforts are.

Molly (name has been changed) was stricken with cerebral palsy when her brain did not get enough oxygen while fighting meningitis at 20 days old



She uses a wheelchair and is verbally impaired. Molly recently graduated from high school. She was a cheerleader despite using a wheelchair and has above average cognitive skills. Molly is a functional person who has made life work for her.

Molly first joined one of several American Scout Programs or Scout Organizations other than ours at the age of seven. She was a member for five years and says discriminatory behavior began during her fourth year. Her troop refused to find a handicapped-accessible campground, took a trip to an indoor amusement park with her where there were no activities for her, and scheduled meetings in a leader's home which was not handicapped accessible.

Molly's mother then wanted to transfer her to another troop, but the leader refused. When Molly's mother met with a new potential troop leader, the leader said she would be uncomfortable having a "disabled" child in her troop.

The troop leader told Molly that she was not welcome. Upset, Molly tried harder to make her desires known. Again, Molly was told she could not join.

In tears, Molly desperately tried to communicate that all her friends were members, came there after school, and she too just wanted to belong. She signed to her mother, "Please Mommy, tell her I'll be good. Tell her I'll be quiet. Please Mommy, friends. Please Mommy, Scouts." A third time, Molly and her mother were refused and told to leave.

The purpose of the Scout Movement is to help all youth grow and develop into functional adults and good citizens. The Scout Movement is for all: not just those with high athletic ability, not just those with high grades, not just those with lots of outdoor skills, not just for perfect people. We found it difficult to understand how anyone could refuse the participation of an obviously highly functioning girl who wanted to be a Scout.

At the Scout Programs of Adventure Scouts USA, our philosophy is very simple. We make it work. We

go up, over, under, or around, but we make it work. We are not perfect either and we do not say there is a simple solution for Scouts with challenges. Sometimes changes need to be made, sometimes a Team Counselor or Counselor will need to step up and take some additional responsibility, maybe even take a class on a certain challenge. But take them they will. Sometimes parents are included, sometimes extra equipment needs to be sought. Clearly, including Scouts with challenges requires effort.

But what happens if we do not make that effort? Getting the opportunity to be just another kid for a change, getting the opportunity socialize and make friends means the world to these kids. And as for the other Scouts? We believe one of best gifts we can give all our Scouts is social tolerance.

They too improve from knowing Scouts with challenges and understanding everyone is not the same. Just because people have differences does

not mean they cannot be friends. Our Scouts have the opportunity to become better people by participating with others who differ from themselves. Making the effort to include Scouts like Molly means Molly wins, the other Scouts win, and we as a society win. Inclusion is not just a word. Molly could be anyone's child. She could be your child.