

Improving the Volunteering Experience at Scouts – a Research Project with the University of Western Australia



Scouts Branches across Australia have partnered up with a University of Western Australia research team to find ways to attract and retain more adult volunteers to deliver Scouts youth programs.

As Scouts organisations across the country would know, developing effective recruitment, training and retention strategies is essential for non-profit organisations to deliver quality youth programs. Non-profit organisations such as Scouts often struggle to attract and retain a sufficient number of volunteers, resulting in wait lists of youth who would like to become Scouts.

Prof Marylène Gagné, Dr Patrick Dunlop, Dr Christine Soo, and Dr Djurre Holtrop from the UWA Business School and the School of Psychology, along with Prof John Cordery from Curtin University, will provide their expertise to improve recruitment and retention at Scouts for the next four years. Together with Scouts WA, Scouts SA, Scouts VIC and Scouts TAS, they have been awarded an impressive Australian Research Council Linkage Project Grant to try new state-of-the-art recruitment, training and communications strategies to improve the engagement and retention of Scouts volunteers.

Drs Dunlop and Holtrop, who are experts in the understanding of why people start volunteering and in the recruitment and selection of job candidates, will develop tailored recruitment strategies aimed at attracting volunteers who share Scouts' values and who would be likely to enjoy this type of volunteer work.

Prof Gagné, an expert in volunteer and work motivation, will revamp the training and onboarding experiences of new volunteer recruits to ensure they feel well-equipped to deliver the youth programs and have a strong sense of belonging to the Scouts family.

Dr Soo and Prof Cordery, who have expertise in work design and strategic human resource management, will develop communities of practice that will enhance socialisation and knowledge sharing across Scout groups. Bringing the three strategies together, it is hoped that volunteers will feel more competent and empowered and that they will feel a strong sense of belonging to the Scouts movement.

To achieve these goals, the research team will be calling on all Scout volunteers to participate in surveys and interviews from this year onward. They will also be consulting heavily with Scouts Branches to develop the recruitment strategies, the training and socialisation strategies and the communities of practice, which will be tested in 2017 and 2018 across different Branches.

The key to success for this ambitious project is a high level of participation of current volunteers, which will ensure that the research team has all the information it needs to produce strategies that will deliver on their promise. It is our hope that you will actively participate in these activities, which are likely to pave the way to better practices to create and manage a volunteer workforce across Australia's Scouts Branches. These new practices are likely to benefit not only Scouts, but any other non-profit organisation that relies on volunteers to deliver their services.

You can meet the research team, get updates on the project and learn more about your personalised results at www.uwascoutsresearch.com. You can also contact the research team directly via scoutsresearch-psy@uwa.edu.au.