



## REPORT ON WONDERFORUM 6:

### "NETWORKING "

21 – 31 JANUARY '02

The sixth WONDERforum was organised from 21 – 31 January 2002. This forum had an adult resources' perspective and the aim was to explore and share ideas and good practice on networking across regions and associations. This is particularly important as it is envisaged that networking between Scout associations will be one of the methods used to support the implementation of the strategy to be adopted by the World Scout Conference in Thessaloniki in July 2002. For further information on the strategy, please visit <http://www.scout.org/strathome.html>

For this WONDER forum the background documentation included papers written by:-

1. David Bull, member of the European Scout Committee and International Commissioner for The Scout Association (UK). ***'Tents not Palaces'***
2. Radu Stinghe, Director, Youth Programme for the European Scout Region, ***'Networks – Working Methods'***.
3. Craig Turpie, Network Co-ordinator of the Polish Network, The Scout Association (UK), ***'Setting up and maintaining a Network'***
4. David McKee, International Manager, The Scout Association (UK), ***'The Outcomes and Benefits of the North:South Network'***.

The forum was facilitated by Anne Whiteford, Deputy Director, Strategy and Adult Resources.

The forum involved 22 participants from the following regions and countries:

#### **Asia-Pacific Region**

Australia: 3

Haiti: 1

Pakistan: 1

#### **European Region**

Austria: 1

Denmark: 3

France: 1

Ireland: 1

Germany: 1

Portugal: 1

United Kingdom: 3

#### **Interamerican Region**

Argentina: 1

Canada: 2

#### **WSB**

Geneva Office: 3

The report is a compilation of the background papers and the results of the email discussions on this topic. It is hoped that this information will encourage people to consider networking, which has the potential to help people to achieve their tasks by communicating with other people who are interested in the specific topic.

## **WHAT ARE NETWORKS?**

A network can be defined as *'an informal and ad-hoc group of people, who act together to achieve a common task'*. The two important aspects of networks therefore are the 'people' and the 'tasks'.

### **The People**

The key element of a network is the people involved. People join a network because they are interested in a topic, or they want to achieve something or they have something to learn and/or something to contribute. Networking can release people's energy and motivation. In networks there is generally little or no hierarchy so people are involved on an equal basis, contributing to the decision-making and the direction of the network.

### **The Tasks**

The other key characteristic of a network is the achievement of specific tasks. In his background paper David Bull suggests that this is a key characteristic of a network – members of the network *'getting important work done'*. A network is not about personal development, although through membership many individuals will achieve this.

## **HOW DO NETWORKS WORK?**

### **People**

Networks rely on networking which in turn relies on the commitment and enthusiasm of the people involved. It is suggested in the background paperwork that networking is not for the fainthearted. It is not an easy option to manage as it requires vision, time and commitment from the people involved. People also have to take on personal responsibility – not only to communicate with others in the network but to share information more widely when appropriate. A key requirement of networking is for people not to see information as power but to acquire and pass on information that is useful and needed. In the forum Maiken Wildt suggested that networking is as much an *'attitude of mind'* as a *'technical possibility'*.

### **Technology**

Networking relies on efficient and effective communication between members of the network. Many networks use the internet as their main form of communication, however care should be taken on relying too much on this as limited access to the internet may limit the membership. The need for members of the network to meet face to face with others was highlighted in the forum as being very important. Teleconferences can also be used and an example was provided of 20 people being involved in a tele-conference in Australia and Canada using three phone lines.

It was mentioned a couple of times in the forum that public access to the internet should be promoted to extend the access more widely. Perhaps this is a challenge which can be addressed in the programme for the older Scouts and in the training of adults.

### **Structures and Systems**

Networks are informal systems of communication and they have probably existed in one form or another whenever groups of people interact. They will exist within neighbourhoods, extended families, social groupings etc.

The challenge in networking however is to create a way of exchanging information between individuals which meets their needs, helps them to achieve the goals that they have set and is accessible in terms of time, technology and cost. This is not an easy challenge and it is also important to resist the temptation for the network to become institutionalised by establishing channels of communication that are too formal.

With advances in technology and people's ability to communicate much more easily and cheaply, networking can be a way of achieving more with less. This is particularly important in voluntary organisations where resources are often scarce.

Networks however in Scouting do not exist in limbo. Their purpose is to help their members achieve tasks which will ultimately contribute to the mission of Scouting. It is important therefore that networks link in some way to the formal decision-making processes so that there is some accountability for the work and functioning of the network.

Networks require a different mind-set. Craig Turpie suggests in the forum that networks *'can help to work around the challenges associated with structures and systems that have developed over time. Networks should not be about creating a hierarchy and control, but should work fast, be task focussed, accountable and deliver real results based on the personal enthusiasm and commitment of those who are involved.'*

It has also been said that developing a network is like trying to cultivate wild flowers – you don't plant them and hover over them. You permit or create an environment where they can come out and grow.

## **STARTING A NETWORK**

A network can be created from a number of different starting points, but it is normally created by a group of people who have a shared experience which has created a sense of 'vision' or 'mission'.

In his paper Radu Stinghe describes a number of different ways that networks can be started and managed in Scouting. He suggests that the initiative to create a network may come from the organisation – with a view to involving people to take a specific topic forward and achieve the organisation's agenda. This can be described as a formal network.

A network can also be created by a small number of individuals with interest and expertise in a topic, with the intention of the interest and number of people involved in the work expanding. This can be described as an informal network, recognising that the direction and outcomes will adapt to the people involved. Informal networks may have a wider remit than formal networks and the ways of working and the outcomes are less pre-determined and will develop over time.

Both formal and informal networks can benefit from support from an organisation. Informal networks may develop their own structures and methods of working to support their members and to ensure that new members are recruited.

It is important however that a network has an aim, that the aim is agreed by those starting the network, shared with those who wish to join the network and reviewed regularly.

## **MAINTAINING A NETWORK**

In the background documentation, Craig Turpie provided some information on the role that he undertakes as Network Co-ordinator for the Poland Network for The Scout Association, which involves the following functions:-

- Setting out a role for a network co-ordinator
- Producing a network newsletter
- Setting up and maintaining a network website
- Describing a target membership, both for the organisation and the geographic area.

In addition to relying on the energy and enthusiasm of volunteers, it is important that a network is co-ordinated either by an individual or by a small group who volunteer for the task. Like all roles in Scouting, roles relating to a network should be in line with the World Adult Resources Policy, i.e. the task should be set out, suitable people should be recruited, they should be provided with the necessary training and support and the role should be time limited, with a review at the end of the allocated time.

During the forum, Karim Asraf describes the network set up in his District in Karachi, Pakistan. The network was set up in the District and is co-ordinated by the District Commissioner. Karim is involved in maintaining the database of members. Some interesting and innovative projects have been set up such as, organising a campaign on substance/drug misuse which reached seven different communities, fulfilling emergency blood demands through establishing a 'blood donor database' in the local community. The backbone of the network is the electronic mailing list but as no Scout Groups have internet access in their headquarters the network must also rely on more conventional forms of communication.

Another example of a network operating within Scouting was provided by Carol Dodd from Scouts Australia. Carol is the co-ordinator of a network which has been formed to run a state wide event for the northern territory in Australia. Her nearest Scout Group is 500 km away. Carol and her network rely on both internet technology and the telephone. There is some formality in the meetings but there is also a lot of informal communication using the phone and internet to share ideas, thoughts and concerns.

Examples of problems which can occur in networking were raised in the forum. Communicating by email can be fast and efficient but care also needs to be taken in the messages that are sent and who is to receive the messages. There is also the problem of information overload – i.e. too much information is provided and people cannot distil the important information in the messages received.

## **THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF NETWORKING**

### **Benefits**

Networks are often the points of innovation and growth in an organisation. New ideas can be shared and implemented easily, by consensus without having to go through the formal decision-making channels.

Many people still see access to information as power although networking and the use of the internet generally have challenged this perception. Networking offers people the means to obtain the information that they need to get the job done.

### **Challenges**

One of the difficulties which may arise in networking if there is an emphasis on the use of email and the internet is that it is only possible to join the network if an individual has regular and easy access to that form of communication. This may be a physical barrier but it can also be a psychological barrier, particularly if people do not see the need and the benefits of using modern technology in Scouting.

Another challenge arises in the use of the written word to communicate and the difference between this and face to face communication. It is possible that people can misread or misinterpret messages so care should be taken when communicating electronically, particularly with the use of signs and symbols.

Another challenge is mentioned by David McKee in his paper on the North/South network of the European Region. This network relies heavily on meetings between the representatives of the Scout Associations in Europe who have or wish to develop partnerships with their counterparts in Africa. Because of the cost of meetings around Europe, associations are increasingly

being asked for identifiable results. This challenges the informal interchange as the individuals become more accountable to their associations.

The challenges can also be demonstrated in this forum – which is a network of people who are aware of WONDERforums and interested in the topic. With 22 participants and only three of the WOSM Regions out of six this does not reflect the membership and probably does not reflect the interest in the topic. How can people be informed of this network (the WONDERforum) and of the topics for discussion so that the information can be shared more widely, ensuring that people who are interested have the opportunity to contribute.

## **THE FUTURE OF NETWORKS**

It does seem that networks have a future. If, as described in the background paper and the forum, networking can release the energy and enthusiasm of volunteers and achieve more with less then it seems to be a way forward that we cannot ignore. There may be different understandings of networking and some people may require a clear definition of the concept and a well defined method of setting up and supporting a network while others may welcome the informality and the lack of structure. It seems however that perhaps we can learn most from examples of networking that **do** work and we should have the courage to try it out. We should also remember that networks will adapt to the needs of their membership.

There are well established networks in many Scout Associations and in Regions which contribute greatly to the work and the exchange of information. At the World Scout Conference in Thessaloniki in July 2002, it is anticipated that the delegates will adopt a strategy for Scouting. Some of the areas of the strategy will be new to some associations and some will have already started work in the areas. It is envisaged that networking will be developed to help associations to share ideas and good practice in areas of the strategy.

Some of the promising practices in associations and regions will be featured in the strategy pages on the website <http://www.scout.org/strathome>

## **THE REVIEW OF THE WONDERFORUM**

From the replies received it seems that the participants found the background documents very helpful and were very interested in the contribution from the other participants. They were happy with how the forum was facilitated but some had difficulty managing their time during the on-line discussions.