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SUMMARY REPORT

Parent Interviews Key insights

Scouts Australia

July 2025

Research objectives

Gain insight into the experience of Scouts parents who are not yet volunteering, their understanding of volunteering in Scouts and their expectations towards getting involved

Understand the key attractors and barriers to volunteering

Explore strategies to increase the likelihood of parental involvement in volunteering

Research methodology

We conducted 15-minute interviews online through Zoom with

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Scouts parents

Executive summary

1. Strong intent but unclear pathways

Many parents are open and even enthusiastic about volunteering, especially when opportunities align with their values and benefit their children. However, many are uncertain about how to get involved due to unclear communication, undefined roles, and inconsistent outreach.

2. Parents are drawn in by purpose

Parents are driven by the desire to contribute, support their child's growth, and participate in a values-driven community. Likelihood to engage increases when the request is clear and manageable.

Executive summary

3. Barriers remain significant

The most common barriers to volunteering are the time involved, a fear of long-term commitment, and unclear expectations about what is involved. Some parents are also concerned about the bureaucracy and have felt excluded from the Scouts community, despite trying to get involved.

4. Flexibility is a promising starting point

Parents commonly face time constraints and show a greater preference for flexible or short-term roles that fit their limited availability. The ability to participate intermittently and feel like this is a valuable contribution can help in increasing involvement.

1 Understanding and openness to volunteering

Parents perceive two main types of volunteering within Scouts:

Becoming a leader and being a parent helper. However, becoming a leader is seen as a big commitment, while parent help can be more ad hoc, such as helping with a sausage sizzle or a fundraiser.

"[Describing those who volunteer] People who have time, and then obviously, the leader role is quite involved. I think a lot of the people that have taken up leader roles are people who have actually experienced Scouts themselves as youth members. That seems to be the case. "

"I guess everything from just being a parent helper, which is what I've agreed to do through to being a group leader to doing admin stuff on like parent committees, and then like being scout leaders."

Familiarity with roles availability grows with involvement

Most parents recognise that volunteering roles are available, but those with longer involvement tend to have a broader and clearer understanding of the options. As parents become more embedded in the community, they gain more visibility of behind-the-scenes, one-off, and support-based opportunities, beyond leadership.

"There's leadership... but also support at events like cooking duty, helping at camps, running activities...it's pretty varied."

"We're very engaged parents... my husband's run activities on camps, and I've helped out behind the scenes... logistics and catering type stuff."

Most parents perceive volunteer roles are filled by those already connected to Scouts

When asked who usually takes on volunteer roles, parents commonly pointed to long-term or previously involved members, such as former Scouts, past leaders, or parents whose children have since graduated. While some recognise that current parents can volunteer, many parents perceive that volunteer roles are mostly filled by those already connected to Scouts.

"It doesn't seem to be parents who take the roles. Mostly, previous Scouts members who graduate seem to take those positions."

"They're all either previous leaders, previous parents of children who have graduated or moved on, or people who have been in scouts themselves that maybe don't have children."

Parents show genuine enthusiasm toward volunteering

Most parents are open to volunteering and express genuine enthusiasm about helping out. While some see it as a big commitment, others view it as flexible and rewarding and want to be part of a values driven community. This sense of shared purpose can be a powerful draw, especially when parents know how their help can make a difference.

"I'd love to be involved at a camp or activity. I'm happy to help out, just not sure where I'd be most useful."

I really love the ethos of Scouts. I love that it's about community, and it's teaching children to care and to give back. I really respect the values and the opportunity that allows the children....I've really felt like it aligned to me and my values personally, and I'd be really happy to help in that environment.

2 Attractors to volunteering

The positive impact on their children is the key motivating factor for parents to volunteer

Volunteering is most attractive when it is personal and purposeful. Parents are often motivated to volunteer when the opportunity aligns with their values and allows them to directly support their child. They value the impact that Scouts has had on their children, making it a worthwhile cause for them to contribute to.

"I think for myself and most parents, when we see something that makes our kid happy and gives them something that they don't get elsewhere, then that's enough. It doesn't really have to be a whole lot more than that."

"My daughter gets a lot out of it... It's good to contribute to that to keep it running...its not well resourced. People's time and effort can make a big difference."

"I would willingly do it [volunteering], because Scouts was so good for my son."

Parents recognise the time invested by current volunteers and want to give back

Parents recognise the time and effort volunteers dedicate to supporting their children. Even when the commitment feels large, many parents are motivated by a sense of appreciation and fairness. They see the value of what others have given and feel a desire to return the favour whether through hands-on help or supporting those already leading.

"I am cognisant that even while we pay fees it doesn't pay for people's time. And so, the people who are running the things for my child are volunteers."

"It's more about helping the good people that have helped my kids as well as leaders. You know supporting them helps them."

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Barriers to volunteering

Parents are uncertain about how to get involved when roles and expectations are not communicated

While many parents are open to volunteering, they often don't know where to start. Some are unclear about what roles exist, what is involved, or how much time is required. Others are not sure who to speak to or how to express interest. Without clear guidance or defined roles, some parents have felt like they are "floating around" rather than being recognised as valuable contributors.

"People don't volunteer because they don't realise they can. They think there's a formality to it. But they're just needed."

"You just float around on the outside with good intentions... without that direction."

"Not knowing what you can do that's most useful is probably not always obvious."

Poor communication disengages parents further

Parents do not receive enough communication about available volunteering opportunities. Often, the communication is last minute, making it difficult for parents to plan their involvement.

"...I had to chase those things. I don't know what that is, but there just seems to be a hesitancy of not wanting to scare away members by sort of making it too difficult at the beginning and going. But we need to know some things...how much is it going to be? What sort of time commitments is it?"

"Sometimes the communications can be quite poor, it's a struggle to even find out what's going on. So while they have the app to tell you about things...Sometimes they turn up like a day or two before an event...Well, I need notice if you want me to help, or you want me to do something."

Fear of long-term commitment can be a key barrier

While there is a common belief that volunteer roles can be filled by parents, some parents often lack clarity about what is involved and how much commitment is required from them. There is a perception that once involved, they will be locked into a commitment that is longer than they are willing to give. This fear leads some parents to hesitate in taking on a volunteer opportunity as they are concerned they don't have the time it will require.

"I am open to volunteering in the medium term while my children are part of Scouts. I wouldn't go as far as my kid's graduation."

"It definitely feels like there's an expectation that once you say yes, you're going to be on the hook forever...I have two kids doing separate activities. There's that feeling of, 'can I actually help out with this thing?'"

The lack of time is a key barrier

Time is a common barrier for most parents. Although parents want to help, they often feel constrained by work, family, or other commitments. Weekend events or ad hoc requests often clash with personal schedules, making it difficult to plan or commit.

"Mainly time constraints. I have just started my own business I'm very busy trying to develop and I have two young children and a husband who has a busy life and work life as well. I just don't have a lot of capacity to be giving, volunteering much more than an hour or two a week."

"I'm fairly time poor, so that becomes an issue. I don't like to commit to things if I don't have the time to put the proper effort in and I don't know enough about the current program."

"I can't commit to be there every session... but as an activity leader or something, yes maybe."

Some parents are put off by compliance and training requirements

Compliance and training requirements for volunteering can be a barrier for some parents. This may be due to the time investment required to achieve these checks or simply a result of unclear communication from Scouts about what the process would involve. Parents are looking for clear communication and support in completing the necessary requirements to volunteer.

"So when I decided to volunteer [at a camp]. The major challenge that I faced was I needed to go through the Working with Children Check certificate so most parents may not be aware of that or they don't know how to proceed with that."

I got an email saying, 'We're going to do a police check on you'... I'm like, 'what?' Is this a scam?"

Feeling excluded from the community can be a significant barrier for some

Some described their Scouts community like a closed network, where opportunities and information circulate among those already “in the loop.” These parents did not feel particularly welcomed or like they belonged in the community. Without clear invitations or ongoing communication, potential volunteers can remain on the outside. Building bridges for new or less connected families is key to broadening involvement.

“I think it's tricky... I feel like there's a critical mass of knowledge and community you need to get to before you’re in reach of the tipping point of being within that. And until then, you're kind of on the outside of that.”

“The people running the camp tend to be extremely cliquey, kind of like, if you don’t know them, you get the bad jobs. It wasn't about skill set...It was very cliquey. It wasn't particularly welcoming.”

"...When I helped with a Christmas carol stand last year, in which nobody spoke to me....I went and volunteered for 3 hours...We vowed and declared never to volunteer again. We were giving our time and were left isolated, and it was actually humiliating."

"It's about a sense of welcome, and belonging as well. When I have been there at a camp or when I went along one evening a random cub night....The whole time I was there the leaders didn't really talk to me."

"Very unwelcoming, not particularly nice to be perfectly honest, and very cliquey. So, If you didn't know them, they didn't really want to know you. Some of them actually weren't particularly nice to me. And I'm a pretty, easy going person."

Internal hierarchies and politics undermine trust

Some parents perceive internal hierarchies and power struggles within Scout groups that make volunteering feel more political than purposeful. Instead of collaboration, they see internal power struggles. This can make parents reluctant to join as they do not want to be involved in a community that is not working towards a common goal.

"The one thing that puts me off...is the politics that happens within the scouting movement. I have enough of that at work...I don't need the sort of thing where two people vying for power over whether the flag should go here or here."

Existing volunteers feel overstretched, and engaging parents is often secondary

Parents often see the same small group of volunteers carrying the load, making the roles look exhausting. When volunteering appears intense or all-consuming, new parents hesitate to step forward. At the same time, many don't feel that volunteers have the time or capacity to engage them, making it harder to feel included or invited in at the outset.

"Our volunteers have a lot to do, its all about the kids, I don't even think they have capacity engage parents...This has never been there...I've seen a lot of leaders come and go, and I would say this is the consistent thing...it's another load on them."

"What I have experienced over the years is this fear among parents: 'if I get involved, I need to be a leader and it's gonna take over my life. I don't have time for that.' But they could come every second week and help out or... [be involved] if there were a smaller, defined role."

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Increasing likelihood to volunteer

Early and frequent conversations help parents understand the process and opportunities

To encourage parent involvement and ease the perceived burden of the process, early and proactive communication makes a difference. Helping parents navigate through the journey could include early conversations and information that helps demystify the process and reduce hesitation. In addition, providing clear and consistent communication can help parents feel more confident and willing to take part.

"I don't know enough about the goals of the group in particular. I don't know what roles they're looking for, you know. I literally have no idea if they are looking for anybody."

"...when somebody turns up new, actually sit down with a new parent and say, 'Hey look, thanks for coming along... let's talk through the process."

Parents are more likely to volunteer when they perceive that there are roles aligned to their strengths

Parents are more likely to get involved when roles align with their interests or strengths whether that is behind-the-scenes support or specific skill set like IT or fundraising. While Scouts may offer a variety of roles, encouraging more leaders to actively uncover parents' skills and suggest suitable opportunities could help increase parent engagement.

"I haven't felt like there is a lot of attention given to the skill set of parents. It's probably because the leaders don't have time...If there's a little bit more of keeping in touch...If the leaders try to understand a few more skills from parents, that might mean they can work smarter."

"Generally, what's been pretty helpful over the years is, I usually get to know the leaders pretty well, then the leaders can usually identify If there's an opportunity, or a gap, or something that might fit my particular skills or experience."

"My husband actually does IT... so, you know, there's a skill set there that might be of use."

A welcoming community would enhance parents' desire to engage

Parents express interest and are more likely to volunteer when they feel a sense of community. Some parents, however, feel disconnected and their experiences and interactions at Scouts are at times limited to pick-ups and drop-offs. Creating regular opportunities for parents to get to know each other and build rapport, such as social gatherings off-site, would increase a sense of belonging and encourage parents to get more involved.

"I would like to see social events for parents in non-scout properties... so we can build a sense of belonging and form a community."

[Parent suggestion]"Once a term, there's an opportunity for parents to come in and...have kind of a parent get-together during a meeting."

Flexibility is a good starting point to engage and recruit more volunteers

Most parents are receptive to the idea of a more flexible volunteering model. Several parents noted however, that even with a more flexible model, their personal capacity to volunteer remains limited. Parents will need more than flexibility to engage them in the long term.

[Supporting the flexibility introduced in the model] “I think the ability to opt in to various things and to do that on a sort of basis that may only cover periods of perhaps a few months might be convenient.”

“I'm happy to commit to helping a group like, say, every Friday night or on a weekend where there's a hike or something like that.”

“I just don’t have a lot of capacity to be giving, volunteering much more than an hour or two a week.”

Key recommendations

1. Increase the visibility and accessibility of volunteering pathways

Parents who have prior experience with Scouts generally understand how to get involved, while newer parents are often unsure about roles, expectations and how to contribute. Clear and proactive communication is essential, especially for new families. While many parents are willing to help, last-minute or unclear requests make it difficult. Regular updates on activities, volunteer needs, and time commitments would make it easier for families to plan and participate more.

In addition to general announcements, personal invitations from leaders or existing volunteers are often the most effective way to prompt involvement. Scouts could also consider introducing a “new parent welcome pack” outlining ways to contribute, typical time commitments, and who to speak to.

2. Build parent relationships through intentional outreach

Encourage leaders and volunteers to connect more directly with parents through informal conversations and welcome chats at events. Since many leaders are busy, appointing a parent engagement liaison could be beneficial. This person would focus on building relationships with families, understanding their skills and interests, and connecting them to relevant opportunities. Additionally, having an aspect of parent engagement included as a part of training may also be beneficial in adding value in the relationships.

Key recommendations

3. Encourage connection over hierarchy

Several parents raised concerns about internal politics, which can be discouraging and create a sense of disconnection. While further investigation may be needed to fully understand some of these dynamics, some contributing factors are clear. Nearly two in three (64%) volunteers believe there is a lack of shared workload, and 59% see bureaucracy as a key challenge.

While 65% feel empowered to make decisions, only 45% feel appropriately recognised and just 44% are motivated by the vision communicated by leadership. This suggests that some volunteers may be feeling stretched or under-supported. Addressing these issues could be a valuable step toward improving internal dynamics, strengthening volunteer engagement, and positively shaping parents' perceptions and willingness to get involved.

4. Preparing leaders to create a welcoming culture new parents

While leaders often focus on delivering great experiences for young people, some parents describe feeling excluded or unwelcome when they first try to help out. To reduce these barriers and build stronger volunteer engagement, specific training on how to proactively include and welcome new parent volunteers could be valuable.

This training could focus on simple, practical actions such as introducing themselves, offering a brief explanation of what's happening (where relevant), inviting input, and expressing appreciation. These small but intentional gestures not only help parents feel more included, but also signal openness and approachability, encouraging parents to engage, ask questions and contribute. Ultimately, they help build a more inclusive and supportive volunteer culture.

5. Embrace flexibility

Time is a major barrier, particularly for full-time workers and those juggling multiple responsibilities. Many parents are willing to contribute, but only if the commitment level is manageable. Clear timelines, advance notice for events, and options for one-off or term-based involvement make volunteering feel more possible. The opportunity to "dip in and out" without long-term commitment could significantly broaden the number of engaged parents.

6. Build community by creating space for parent connection

Many parents spoke longingly of a stronger sense of community, both as a motivator and a missing piece. Scouts could actively foster parent connection through termly social events or informal gatherings during meetings, or parent nights. These touchpoints can build familiarity as well as create a relational foundation that makes parents more likely to engage in volunteering. Feeling known and welcomed makes volunteering feel like a shared effort, rather than an individual task.

7. Improve communication to support planning

Parents often want to help but struggle with poor communication and last-minute requests. Clear, consistent updates about upcoming activities, volunteer needs, and expectations allow parents to plan ahead and fit volunteering around their schedules rather than the other way around.

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