

JANUARY – THE SCIENCE OF CHARACTER BUILDING

Music Full then Under

PAT: Happy New Year, and welcome to Cubcast 2015. I'm Pat Wellen, Director of the Design and Development Center at the BSA National Service Center and your new CubCast host. Joining me is...

AARON: Aaron Derr, Senior writer for Boys' Life magazine. Hello everyone and thanks for tuning in. We're starting the CubCast year by exploring the concept of Character Building.

PAT: Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts is conducting study on how the Cub Scout program instills kids with positive characteristics that may differ from other youth programs.

AARON: This brings to mind something I once read in the Think-n-Grin section of Boys' Life magazine: Hey Pat, Why was the pomegranate asked to leave the party?

PAT: I don't know.

AARON: Because he looked like a seedy character.

PAT: (Chuckle) OK – that’s one way to begin. But how about I just go ahead and introduce our guest?

Music Fades

PAT: Dan Warren is a doctoral student of Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University, as well as the Recruitment Manager for the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development. Dan is currently working with the BSA in two ways. The first is as Recruitment and Sample Manager for the Character and Merit Project. This study is seeking to understand the impact that Scouting has on the development of character in the Cradle of Liberty Council in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The second role with the BSA is as an intern to the National Council. His focus is finding ways to teach parents and leaders about how positive youth development can be beneficial to Scouting. Welcome to CubCast, Dan.

DAN: Thanks, Pat, it's great to be here.

PAT: So, Dan, what exactly do we mean by character?

DAN: In general, it's related to some virtue, something that we think is good, or honorable; there's some skills that kind of go along with those virtues that allow you to adapt successfully to your environment. Character doesn't come from one place - it's this combination of forces, the biological, the psychological, and the social that are all coming together that are building on each other. Right now when we're talking about character, we tend to throw it into two different buckets. Moral character is going to focus on those internal assets like integrity, and justice, and caring, and respect,

The second bucket people are calling it performance character like perseverance, self-discipline, it's the things that you do that are aspects of your character. When we asked Scout leaders what they meant by character because we wanted to understand what their definition was, and a very popular answer was, "It's what you do when no one's looking."

AARON: Dan, tell us a little bit more about that study; when was that conducted and what was its overall goal?

DAN: We're still in the midst of that study through a grant from the John Templeton Foundation we are trying to look at a couple of different things in the Cradle of Liberty. One thing that we're trying to look at it is how character develops in youth, specifically of the Cub Scout age. So we collected data from about 4,000 kids, in the Greater Philadelphia area. It involved packs from all over the council and also schools so we could get the kids who were not in Scouts and look at them as well. The goal of this research was to test a theory of change. One of the theories of change is that Cub Scouting increases the character of kids.

AARON: Dan, in your opinion, does the Cub Scout Program meet the criteria of an exemplary character development program?

DAN: There's three characteristics of a program that make it a positive youth development program. I think that you're listeners will like this as something to judge other programs by. The big three are these. Number one, you need sustained, positive adult youth relations with caring and supporting adults. The suggestion is that this takes at least a year of

connection in order to really benefit from this. Scouting accomplishes this by leadership positions and extends over a year of time in a variety of settings, so Cub Scouting checks that box really well.

The second is that it promotes the development of life skills through program activities and specifically program activities that are meaningful to these kids. Scouting is full of skills that can be directly applied to the life of a growing boy from everything from cooking to crafting skills. Also, life skills like communication are all aspects of Scouting. That checks that box.

The last is that it provides opportunities to contribute to and to assume a leadership role. I mean, if there's one giant thing that Scouting produces, it's leaders. As the Scouts progress in the program, they're allowed to take on more and more responsibility. We see that big jump between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts for leadership in the unit. The great part is that until then they'll learn through the modeling from those boys who are learning to lead in front of them, as well as the trained adult leaders. Scouting, in general, hits this right on the money and, therefore an exemplary program.

PAT: Dan, I get this question a lot whenever I do research - don't boys who naturally have good character select Cub Scouting? So isn't there some kind of selection bias or boys that just come to us because they already have high character?

DAN: This is not the case. It's like talking about why Harvard students they do well. Well, your selection standards were incredibly high so (chuckles) of course you're going to do well. When we look at the kids who are coming into the program and their characteristics, especially when you start

looking at the younger years where they haven't been in the program for a long period of time or they're just new Scouts, we're not seeing a big difference here. You cannot identify them from other kids. In a really neat way, you have an average group of kids that come to Scouts.

AARON: Dan, you mentioned one of the keys to character development is developing life skills. I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit more and maybe how it is that Cub Scout packs help promote character development by developing life skills. What do you mean by "life skills"?

DAN: Building is something that occurs all the time and you say, "Okay, well, here's what we're trying to do here. Here is the measurements, here's how you're trying to put this birdhouse together." So the kid gets done and he looks at it and he goes, "Oh, something's off there. That birdhouse just does not look right. What is it?" And they say, "Well, this piece here seems to be too long." Okay, what you're doing at that point is you are allowing them to not just think in the abstract. And that's key to building these life skills.

PAT: We received an e-mail from a listener who says that most of the parents of his Scouts think that sports is a key to getting into college and being successful, and if there's a choice between a game and a Cub Scout activity, the game always wins. Dan, based on what you've found through this study, what would you tell these parents and leaders for encouraging these decisions?

DAN: Very few kids are in only one program and if they are in one program, it's going to be sports. 80% of American youth either are currently participating in or have participated in sports in the United States. It is by far the most popular out-of-school, organized activity. So people want to know how does it compare to other things. Well, some studies will say that sports are doing good things for kids like improving grades, they feel better about themselves, they're showing leadership. There's other research that said that sports programs are not so great because they can increase aggressive behavior, they reduce your ability to see right and wrong, they increase your chances for risk behaviors, so these are two different findings.

What we found was that if kids are participating in sports and nothing else, things didn't seem to go well. If they were participating in some type of youth development program like a Boy Scout, when you add sports onto that, there is this amazing result. It catapulted. It's incredibly positive because it seems to be that it's built on top of some type of character program that meets the big three that goes all year, has places where they're developing relationships with adults that are not family members. It has opportunities for them to lead, to get to know a group of kids. The results are then really great, but with sports alone, you don't seem to get that. I think if the leaders of these organizations are going to not see this as a competition, start reaching a hand over there and saying "How can we work together to make sure our games and our camporees can work at the same time because we're benefitting each other. That's really important.

AARON: I'd be curious if there's anything you learned from your research that a Cub Scout leader could use to help retain kids in the program?

DAN: Retention's a great indicator of whether you have a good program or not. In research that we've done we've identified the five C's of positive youth development - competence, confidence, connection, caring, character, and then eventually there's a sixth C that emerges then which is contribution. If leaders started looking at am I fostering competence, creating a positive view of one's abilities, am I increasing skills and knowledge? Am I increasing confidence, increasing their internal sense of self-worth and effectiveness? Am I increasing connection, creating good relationships with people? Am I increasing caring, is there a sense of sympathy and empathy for each other? Am I creating respect for cultural norms as well and a sense of right or wrong, and then giving them the skills to do these things? Is my program hitting all of those areas? And if it's not - if you're just focused on Scout skill, then you're missing something really, really big here. You also want to make this holistic program that is making opportunities for this kid to develop.

AARON: Dan, this is great stuff. We really appreciate you joining us. Is there anything else about character building from this study that we haven't discussed that you think people might be interested in knowing?

DAN: This was a finding from the 4-H study of positive youth development. The one takeaway I would give to people is if you sat down and ate dinner with your kids, it was the biggest predictor that we could find to make a difference in the lives of kids.

AARON: I'm a Cub Scout leader, and we have a meeting tonight and one of the things we're talking about is having the boys sit down with their families

and tell stories to each other about what happened that day. So it's interesting to hear that something so simple - sit down and eat dinner with your kids is an integral part of the Cub Scout program.

DAN: Absolutely, it's building on the C's: it's building on connection and caring which is great.

PAT: Dan, we always say that Scouting builds character so it's so great that y'all are doing this study and proving that Scouting does build character. Thanks so much for coming on CubCast and helping us to assist leaders and parents in reinforcing that message.

DAN: It was great, thank you.

AARON: We'll be back with Reminders and Tips right after we find out how ScoutCast is starting their year.

ScoutCast – Getting Permission to Handle Awkward Situations

AARON: I think CubCast listeners would get a lot out of that as well, but now on to Reminders and Tips. Pat, lead the way.

PAT: You should be finalizing plans for your Blue and Gold Banquet. Many packs have it during Scouting Anniversary Week, which begins this year on February 8th with Scout Sunday and ends on the 14th with Scout Sabbath.

The Blue and Gold Banquet is discussed in great detail in the December 2012 CubCast. So check it out if you haven't already because careful planning is necessary to make it a fun and successful pack event.

AARON: Family Friends of Scouting is an annual council-wide presentation conducted in every pack, troop, crew, team, ship, and post between the months of November and March. The Family Friends of Scouting Campaign asks parents and families to consider financially supporting the Scouting program in an effort to offset the costs of providing Scouting to their children.

PAT: So if you haven't already done so, contact your District FOS chair for more details. Your support and participation in the Family FOS Program in your unit is critical for its success.

AARON: And believe it or not, your opinion is also critical for the success of Scouting. In order to provide the best youth program, the testing and evaluation team surveys scouting members to learn their opinions on a variety of topics related to the Scouting programs.

PAT: That's right, listeners, and that's part of my department. We serve a youth members that are 14 years of age and older, volunteers, Cub Scout parents and Boy Scout parents before we make any changes to or develop any new programs. You're invited to join our research panel and don't worry about getting bombarded with our surveys. There will be no more than three surveys per year. Just go to scouting.org, scroll to the bottom of the page, and click on "About" and then you'll see the research panel

portion. If you'd like your voice to be heard, be sure and become part of our panel.

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PAT: So that's it for the January 2015 CubCast. Thanks again to our guest, Dan Warren, for joining us.

AARON: And thank you for listening. Be sure to come back next month as we explore the task of how to bring the boys together for a productive meeting. As a new Cub Leader myself, that discussion can't get here soon enough.

PAT: If there's something we can do to make CubCast a better resource for you, be sure to let us know. Just send us an e-mail to cubcast@scouting.org or tweet it @cubcast. With that, I'm Pat Wellen --

AARON: And I'm Aaron Derr. Start your 2015 with a story in *Boy's Life Magazine* about a Cub Scout pack in North Carolina that makes physical fitness an important part of their year round program, building muscles as well as character.

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