

# A DISTRICT ESSENTIAL

**Melanie Palmer** explains why every District needs an Explorer Scout Administrator and offers advice on choosing the right person for this important role

Across the country, structures for Explorer Scouts are being put in place, key roles filled, exciting programmes devised and launches held. One of the new roles seems to be causing a few headaches for District Explorer Scout Commissioners (DESC) – that of the mysterious District Explorer Scout Administrator (DESA). This article looks at the role of the DESA in more detail and takes you step-by-step through finding the right person for this role and then supporting this crucial member of your team.

## WHAT DOES A DESA DO?

The DESA has a vital role within the District Explorer Scout team. They ensure that the young people know about the activities and options available to them, that their records are kept up to date so that they are credited for the things they take part in and achieve, and that links are maintained with the other Sections to support the Moving In and Moving On process.

The sample job description given below (taken from the support material from the 14–25 National Workshop held in Manchester in 2001) gives a skeleton outline of the tasks carried out by the DESA and can be adapted to fit the needs of your District and the person you have in mind.

## DISTRICT EXPLORER SCOUT ADMINISTRATOR

**Responsible to**  
District Explorer Scout Commissioner

### Main contacts

District Explorer Scout Commissioner  
District Secretary  
Group Scout Leaders  
Unit Leaders  
County/Area Scout Network Administrator  
Scout Leaders

### Job summary

To keep up to date the administration for the District Explorer Scouts.

### Main tasks

- Maintain and keep up-to-date records of all members of Explorer Scouts by liaising with Unit Leaders.
- Maintain records of potential members of the Scout Section over the age of 13.
- Pass on records of members aged 17 to the County/Area Scout Network Administrator.
- Maintain records of any other process delegated by the District Explorer Scout Commissioner.
- Pass data relating to the Census to the District Secretary.
- Maintain records of Partnership Agreements.
- Ensure that the District Explorer Scout records comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### Member of the following committees

District Unit Leaders committee  
District Explorer Scout committee

### Skills

Looking at the tasks in the job description, you can see that to be a



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DESA you don't need a massive computer system and a brain that resembles the local telephone directory. What you do need are:

- Organisational skills: to keep records on potential and present members of Explorer Scouts, including their contact details, details of awards and records of Partnership Agreements. These records do not have to be kept on a computer database – you can devise a method that suits you and your District best. Record cards are available and I am reliably informed that by spring 2003 a new ScoutCount record-keeping system will be available and that it will be excellent.
- Communication skills: to keep potential members informed of the

warranted Leader. Of course, if you have a warranted Leader who would like to take on the role, they can do, but the role does not require a warrant, so the search can broaden immediately.

Think realistically about the role. Remember, the DESA does not have to be a high-powered administrator with years of experience in keeping records, using computers and managing finances.

With those two points in mind, you can target the local Scout Network, members of the Scout Fellowship, ask Leaders if their parents or spouses would like to do it, or ask Explorer Scouts if they know somebody suitable.

## HELPING THE DESA SETTLE INTO THEIR NEW ROLE

Hopefully you've chosen somebody with whom you can communicate, with enthusiasm for the new Section and who is keen to know more. The following steps should help to ease your new best friend into their role.

- Go through the different aspects of the job description together.
- Compile a list of the DESA's contacts, including Scout Leaders, Group Scout Leaders, Explorer Scout Leaders, you, the DESA, the Scout Network Administrator and the District Secretary.
- Give the DESA background information on the Explorer Scout Section (a copy of *Unit essentials* is ideal here) so that they can see how they fit into the overall scheme of things.
- Make sure they get the chance to meet all these people – it is a lot easier to form a working relationship if you have at least met the person you are working with.
- Counties/Areas or Regions could consider running a day for DESAs to get together. The programme for the day would depend very much on the needs of the people involved, but at the very least it would be a chance for the DESA to share ideas with others undertaking the same role.
- Regularly review the role. Is the DESA happy with the level of communication and support they have from other members of the Explorer Scout team? Do they have any training needs? ■

## WHERE DO YOU FIND A DESA?

The DESA does not need to be a

### Case study

The newly appointed DESC in District X couldn't find anybody to take on the role of DESA. The need for a DESA to co-ordinate all the records, to link with the other Sections and to keep young people informed of activities, quickly became apparent after the launch. When he looked again at the role, the DESC realised that he had been looking in the wrong place. He didn't need a warranted Leader who happened to be a high-powered administrator. He needed somebody with common sense and good organisational skills. He put a note on the District newsletter, asked the Fellowships in the District and sent an email to the local Scout Network members. He was amazed by the response. Eventually he chose his administrator – Ed. Ed had no administrative experience, but he felt he was organised enough to keep records, knew enough about the internet to enable him to get information out quickly, and felt he had the communication skills to work with others.

The DESC and Ed sat down and worked out the job description, made a list of the contact details he would need and discussed the record keeping. Ed was given a copy of *Unit essentials* and attended a DESA course.

Ed quickly got to work gathering in all the initial records and sorting them in a useful system. He attended the Explorer Scouts committee meeting where he was given details of the programmes being run by each Unit and of activities being run jointly with other Sections. He got to work compiling these into one document that could be emailed to all the young people and posted to those without internet access. He arranged that he would be given the contact details of all young people approaching their 13th birthdays at the District Leaders' meeting on a term-by-term basis, so that he could begin to contact them. At all the District Explorer Scout meetings the Explorer Scout Leaders would pass him a list of young people who had achieved a badge or part of an award, as well as any other information.

By the end of his third month, Ed had been extremely busy. The initial set up and establishment had involved hard work and perseverance, but as with any system, once the initial set up was in place properly, the work went much more smoothly.



# DIGGERS & DECISIONS

Tom Ovenstone reports on the North East regional meeting

Diggerland was the first event on the agenda at the North East regional meeting a couple of weeks ago, and after sitting through the introductory video, all the six Explorer Scouts involved were dying to get out there and get on with it! After all, who wouldn't want to play with a JCB? Certainly, the Scouts and Explorer Scouts who featured in the video looked as if they had a great time.

However, 24 hours later it was difficult not to feel sorry for them, metaphorically caged in Middlesborough's TAD conference centre. These six Explorer Scouts from all over the north east had made their way to the TAD centre, drawn by the prospect of interacting with their peers, sharing good practice and having an input into the running of the Explorer Scout Section at a regional level. Not quite the same as a day at Diggerland, but very worthwhile!

## Getting down to the serious stuff

While the chairperson circulated the agenda for the meeting, the Explorer Scouts told the meeting what they hoped to achieve by being there. They also had the chance to table items of other business. The Explorer Scouts were keen to see some more information on the Young Leaders' Scheme, an understandable interest given that two of their number would be involved in this new aspect of the Explorer Scout Programme.

The young people decided that they would rather take a copy of the agenda away and feed this information back into the Assistant County Commissioners' meeting in the afternoon. So they left us, moving into their own meeting next door. Those escaping from the adult meeting left us in no doubt as to the earnestness with which the task was being tackled next door, at least if the muted hum issuing from under the door

was anything to go by. Although at one point, it has to be said, the thump of bodies bouncing off a partition wall interrupted the musings of the assembled adult Leaders. Well, screwed up copies of agendas make good footballs don't they?

## Working it out

In fact, the amount of work taking place in the young people's meeting room must have been considerable. As they presented their 'take' on the agenda to us, it became clear just how valuable the whole exercise had been. There would be no paying lip-service to their ideas at this meeting – they brought us well-argued, strongly held opinions.

They had had the chance to look at a copy of *Young Leaders' essentials* and it seemed as if they had paid particular attention to the factsheets designed for young people included in the pack. They appeared really enthusiastic and it will certainly challenge their Explorer Scout Leaders to keep pace with their eagerness!

What soon became clear was that the Explorer Scouts were very keen on the idea of meeting other young people from Districts besides their own. They wanted to become more involved in the organisation and decision-making for Explorer Scouting across the Region. To this end, everyone at the meeting agreed that there should be some kind of regional event for Explorer Scouts in the early part of 2004. The young people themselves pointed out that it might be an idea to involve some of the older Scouts in the Region, if they were to eventually become Explorer Scouts.

It was agreed that the regional Assistant County Commissioners would come together again early in the new year, along with the young people, to form a steering group that will take the organisation and planning of the 2004 event forward.



## Valuable feedback

So there you have it. It seems that youth involvement in decision-making in the North East Region is alive and kicking! The six young people who attended the meeting gave us valuable feedback on the issues that were affecting them as Explorer Scouts. Moreover, they had given valuable guidance to the establishment of the 2004 event and had agreed to become involved with this as a long-term project. I am sure that with their guidance, the event will be a resounding success.

The most impressive thing was that the young people maintained their enthusiasm throughout a long day, spent in a series of meetings and plenary sessions – something that can often test the resolve of even the most enthusiastic adult. Talking to the young people after the meeting, it became obvious that this was due in no small part to the format of their weekend – fun first in the form of Diggerland, then the work of the meeting the next day.

Remember, just because the Explorer Scout Section is 'Leader-led' doesn't mean the views of young people aren't taken into account. Make sure that they have a regular chance to put their views over, be it in the form of mentoring, one-to-one meetings, the Unit forum or the District Explorer Scout meeting and committee. ■

With thanks to the Explorer Scouts and Explorer Scout Leaders of the North East Region.



# PROGRAMMES ON A PLATE

THIS MONTH'S THEME IS ASPIRATIONS, WRITTEN BY TOM OVENSTONE

TIME	ACTIVITY	ZONE	METHOD	INSTRUCTIONS
10 mins	Image is everything!	Values, Skills	Working together	Look at the images in the sports pages of newspapers. What stereotypes do they portray?
10 mins	Image is nothing!	Values, Skills	Working together	Find a range of male and female magazines. Compare the two sorts of magazines. Look at the content, the messages and the images. Do you feel that they portray stereotypes or equality?
20 mins	Lottery Grant	Values, Skills, Personal development	Working together	Working in groups, Explorer Scouts are given the task of distributing £3 million of Lottery money. Set the following limits on their distribution policies: 1) Some of the money must be spent to help other people. 2) You must use some of the money to address equality. 3) You must use some of the money to achieve a personal goal. How would the groups spend the money?
10 mins	Coffee	N/A	N/A	Refreshments and a chance to continue the discussion.
10 mins	Outlines	Values, Relationships	Fun	Get a male and female member of the Unit to lie down on some paper and draw round them. Then use the outlines for people to write their answers to questions such as 'what are the advantages and disadvantages of being a female/male?'
10 mins	Profiles	Values, Skills	Fun	Each Explorer Scout pulls the name of a job out of a hat. They have to draw or write a person specification for the ideal job candidate.
5 mins	Discussion	Values, Relationships	Getting on with others	What stereotypes, if any, have emerged from the activities above?
5 mins	Closing Ceremony and notices	Values	Keeping the promise	Always use the end of the meeting for notices. They are more likely to be remembered if they are fresh in the mind at the end of the night!