

Cellular Cobweb and Satellite Units



Scouting is very successful in rural areas, particularly in larger settlements where there are sufficient young people to sustain conventional Sections. But what about those smaller settlements where the population is quite small or fluctuates?

The remote rural setting may be affected by:

- low population density;
- geographic and social isolation;
- distance from larger settlements and towns;
- limited cultural and social opportunities;
- poor public transport, poor access to transport or a lack of car ownership;

All of the above may make it difficult for people, with or without transport, to attend centrally located meetings. Transport networks can help those who have access to cars but cost, working commitments and weather conditions can sometimes hamper such arrangements.

The Movement can address these issues, and provide good quality Scouting, for young people living in small or remote rural settlements. The need to overcome isolation has resulted in some imaginative schemes to bring Members together.

In some Districts conventional Sections with very small numbers are established. In many more, provision is not made because the limited number of young people is perceived as "not enough". Working outside the Movement's traditional Sectional structures enables us to better meet the needs of young people and the environment in which they live, and to take a pragmatic view of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Cellular or Cobweb Sections

A 'Cobweb' Section consists of between two to six Lodges/Sixes/Patrols, each with between three and eight young people, in isolated villages or hamlets meeting locally under an Assistant Leader, perhaps with a Helper, weekly in their own 'den'. They then come together for a more traditional Section meeting once a month, either in the most convenient centre or rotating round each village.

Such an arrangement might, alternatively, be based at a centrally located school with Patrols built up on a village basis.

A Venture Scout Unit might also organise itself on a similar basis, with small sub-Units of Venture Scouts coming together as a complete Unit on an occasional or regular basis.

Young people in hamlets and small villages usually know each other and so may naturally come together. Where numbers within Sectional age groupings are too small to form a Lodge/Six/Patrol integrated units (perhaps called dens) may be needed (with the approval of the District Commissioner - see resource material on Integrated Sections & Policy, Organisation and Rules).

Leadership

At first, such a scheme may seem Leader intensive in an environment where there are insufficient adults available anyway. This need not be the case. Imagination is needed!

Leadership roles may be similar to those associated with conventional Sections, but they are carried out differently.

Where there is some reluctance for adults to act as Assistant Leaders, or Scouts to act as Patrol Leaders, talk over and challenge their perceptions of the role.

An adult may be reluctant to take on an Assistant Leader's role in a Section of 18 Members but may be quite happy to do so if asked to work with just six. Similarly, parents may be happy to act as Helpers, especially if they live in the same small village where everyone knows each other, and where the den meeting is to take place.

A Section Leader is responsible for:

- planning weekly meetings (where possible with the Assistant Leaders);
- monitoring Members' progress within the Progressive Training Scheme;
- arranging the monthly Section meetings;
- visiting den Meetings as regularly as possible and helping to arrange transport.

The Assistant Leaders are responsible for:

- running weekly den Meetings (in the case of Lodges and Sixes), perhaps with a Helper;
- working with Members to help them through the Progressive Training Scheme (including the "passing of tests");
- the organisation and general welfare of Members;
- arranging transport to monthly Section meetings;
- attending monthly Section and programme planning meetings;
- maintaining contact with parents;
- being responsible for funds and equipment.

Avoid situations where a lone adult is running den meetings; always have two adults present, even if it is a parent or friend who does not wish to work directly with young people. Ensure they also go through the Association's screening procedures.

Scout Patrols should be able to conduct their weekly programme on their own, perhaps with

the Scout Leader, an Assistant Scout Leader or some other adult providing advice and guidance where needed. By acting as a 'resource person' the adult could usefully assist the Patrol in undertaking the things they want to do.

Occasional visits to meetings will also be important. Some intensive Patrol Leader Training will be needed, particularly at the start. Effectively operated, cobweb Patrols provide real responsibility devolved to Patrol Leaders, individually and collectively.

Meeting Place

Each cellular unit needs a place to meet. This could be in someone's home, barn or farm building, a local pub or parish room. The venue need not be permanent and could change, dependent on the programme or activity. A Patrol might just arrange to meet at the village bus shelter or its favourite tree.

For the monthly Section meeting make use of an existing Scout headquarters, campsite/activity centre or village hall. The meeting could be at a convenient centre of the 'cobweb' or rotate round each village in turn. Alternatively visit a local place of interest or go on a hike and avoid the need to have a hall or headquarters at all!

Equipment

Each Lodge/Six/Patrol will need the relevant handbooks and a small amount of basic equipment and materials; scissors, paper, maps etc. These could be kept in a sturdy portable container for use at den meetings and taken to the monthly Section meeting if required.

Scout Patrols will need some basic outdoor equipment but this can be borrowed or acquired over time. Parents might help to buy or fund raise for some of it.

Programme Planning

Effective co-ordination of the programme is important. In rural areas distance may make it difficult for Leaders to come together for programme planning meetings. Telephone conference calls or 'three way calling' may be a

more effective way of meeting. The Section Leader may take on the majority of the planning, both for the monthly meeting and the weekly den meetings, briefing the Assistant Leaders each month.

Make use of the monthly Section meetings to review the previous three weeks' den meetings and to outline/check on what has to be done during the next month. A monthly theme or project would allow for small group work with the den meetings and a 'climax' activity at the monthly Section Meeting.

Monthly Section meetings could last two to three hours or longer to provide for a range of exciting activities. Involve those parents who bring children. If held on a Saturday in the market town parents may welcome the opportunity to go shopping. Arrange the time and place to suit all concerned. If this is not feasible, hold the monthly meeting in different locations each time.

Satellite Section to the Group in the next village, four miles away, which did not have a Colony.

Creating a New Group

Satellite Sections can also form the basis of a new Scout Group in an adjoining area. The satellite Section will benefit from being part of an established Group - with a Group Scout Leader, other Leaders and a Group Executive Committee to provide support while it establishes itself. It can build up a network of local adults ready to form its own leadership team and Executive Committee. As adults are identified and recruited they can work within the host Group in order to gain experience and 'learn the ropes'.

There is the potential for difficulties over the use and division of funds and equipment. The organisation and support of fund-raising activities can also be a cause for concern. Sensitivity and a clear policy, thought out in advance, should avoid disagreements when it comes to the satellite Section 'being released' on its own.

One District had a deliberate strategy of establishing Satellite Sections/Groups as a means of starting new Groups. Over a ten year period three Satellite Groups successfully established themselves as new Scout Groups in their own right; two closed down and one remained a Satellite Group.

Satellite Lodges/Sixes/Patrols

Where there are a small number of young people living in an isolated hamlet or village, or where regular attendance and travel to where a Section is based is difficult, a satellite Lodge or Six could be established.

Under the leadership of an Assistant Section Leader they could meet for three weeks in their own locality, attending the Section meeting once a month and for special activities. A satellite Patrol, under the direction of a competent Patrol Leader, could operate in a similar way. Much of the advice given above, in relation to Cobweb units, is applicable here.

Where a Scout Group has some older Cub Scouts, but no Scout Troop within their own Group, they could form their own satellite Patrol of a nearby Troop. In due course they might then be able to form their own Troop. An Assistant Cub Scout Leader might also accompany them and become the Scout Leader, both gaining support and experience from the host Troop.

Further Information

Further advice and information on Cellular, Cobweb, Satellite and Integrated Sections is available from the Development Team in the Programme and Development Department at Gilwell Park or your Field Commissioner.

Case studies of successful projects are also available from the Development Team.