

A Leader's Guide to Building Troop Family Support



While Preventing Burn Out & Making Life Easier



Originally developed by Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas

Section 1: Who benefits?

Going For The Win / Win / Win



You got into this for all the right reasons. You love your daughter and want to provide her with as much opportunity as possible to gain confidence, strength, and character from her Girl Scout experience. You want the same for her friends.

You're excited; you're full of optimism and hope. You want to be a *great* GS Troop leader. You want to deliver on the promise of transforming the girl of today into the leader of tomorrow --not just for her, but also for yourself -- because inside -- you are also that girl. **You got into this for all the right reasons.**

We love you for that.

Let's face it though; managing a Girl Scout troop *can be* a lot of work for the leader. Organizing materials and running meetings, providing activity information for parents, and distributing resources takes time and effort. You're human, you've got a life, and you can't do it all.

Of course, we all want our daughter to have a "good" leader, especially when that leader is US. No matter how dedicated and hardworking a leader is, she **MUST HAVE PARENT SUPPORT** in order to be successful. A GS Troop Leader cannot and should not have to stand alone.

In most cases, parents understand the value that Girl Scouting provides and they want to help in a limited way, but they are super busy and they don't know how they fit in. Often times we're not sure when to use them either, so we don't ask.



That's a lose/lose and it leads to burn out.

Leaders have reported lack of parent support as the number one reason for quitting. They have spouses, as well as other children that are involved in soccer, gymnastics, dance, etc. They attend and volunteer at church and at school. Some are students, some are single parents, and some have full-time jobs - in other words, they are busy people just like you. They enjoyed working with and being with the girls, they simply needed more support and burned out. However, in the beginning, *they* tried to find time in their busy schedule to provide a fun, educational experience for their daughter – just like you.



We love you for that, but we're worried for your health. We'd like you to be around for a while.

Before you flatline, we want to share some aspects of building a strong troop family support network that will keep you in tip top shape. In fact, the secret to building strong family support lies in following the model of **CPR**.

C stands for Communicate

P stands for Provide Options to Participate *(It also stands for Promise!)*

R stands for Recognize

C - You are going to **communicate** information to your families on a regular basis. We are going to show and tell some options that you can use.
See section 2.

P - You are going to invite families to **participate** by **providing** them with a wide variety of **options** and tasks to choose from, all of which are clear and time specific. You are going to ask them to **promise 4 hours per family per year**.
See Section 3.

R - You are going to publicly **recognize** the girl and her family when they fulfill that promise.
See Section 4.

Use these talking points when communicating with families about the value of supporting the troop... It's the "What's in it for Me" for parents through the "What's in it for Her" for girls.

By HELPING YOU they will witness their daughter benefit through leadership opportunities and skills developed in Girl Scouting. These skills will serve their daughter well in all current extracurricular activities and relationships, as well as many future aspects of her life. In a strongly supported and well run troop she will learn skills such as:

- Coordinating, motivating and delegating tasks among project teams
- Promoting cooperation and resolving conflicts
- Becoming resourceful problem-solvers
- Expanding creativity and developing positive ways in which to express herself
- Gaining practical and healthy life skills
- Setting goals and learning to plan for the future

The result of a strong troop support structure is that she will:

- Be mentored by positive adult role models
- Enjoy a sense of independence
- Learn to appreciate diversity in a multicultural world
- Feel connected to her communities – locally, regionally, nationally, and globally
- Develop a strong sense of self
- Be open to new experiences and ideas

If that is not enough, let your parents know that Girl Scouting is recognized by colleges and universities nationwide as an exceptional extracurricular activity for young women which will look good on her college and scholarship applications.

Section 2: How do we get there?

Communication is Key

Communication is an *essential ingredient* in getting parental involvement and you can never communicate too much! The more information you provide about opportunities and experiences that encourage their daughter's growth and personal development, the more invested they will become in making sure she takes advantage of it.

Keep in mind that good communication has 3 important aspects. Make sure it's relevant, it's timely, and it's two way.

Initial steps to setting up good communication:



- Hold a parent/guardian meeting for that initial face to face contact. This sets up your relationship. Be prepared and make your first impression a good one.
- Collect email addresses and telephone contact numbers for BOTH the parents *and* the girls to put into your email distribution and phone tree lists. Add to the Volunteer Toolkit if not already listed there.
- Decide which troop communication method works best for you. Communication methods can be low tech and take the form of a printed troop newsletter and the occasional phone call. *Or* they can be high tech using email, a troop web page, or social networking group site or the best way is through the Volunteer Toolkit.

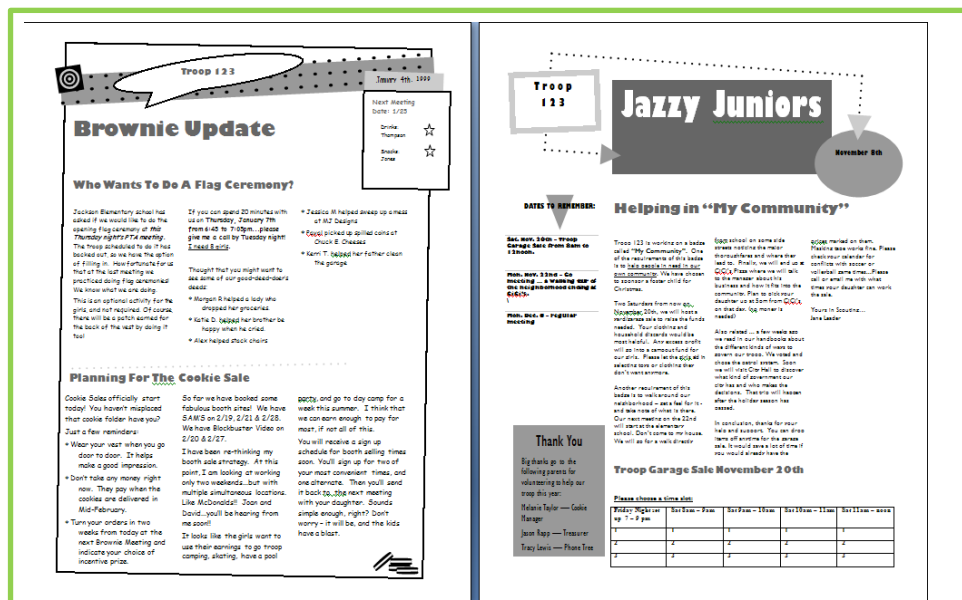
Here are some thoughts and ideas to consider:

Low tech: Printed Newsletter

Using Microsoft Word or some other desktop publishing software, create a one page template for a troop newsletter that includes details of activities, a monthly calendar of upcoming meetings, snack assignments, and events. Pre-designed templates are available for your use. Pick one you like.

Send the newsletter home with the girl after each meeting describing the purpose of the meeting you just had, and any information or instructions you'd like the parents to act upon for what's coming ahead. Reuse the template each time and change out just the information.

To take advantage of pre-made newsletter templates in Microsoft Word go to File —> New.



Search for Newsletter and choose a template. Columns and text boxes will already be set up for you to type in. With some practice you will learn how to customize your document. Microsoft Publisher does the same thing. If you prefer to create your own design, that is okay too. It doesn't have to be fancy... it just has to be a vehicle used to communicate on a regular basis.

Low tech: Telephone Calls

While some information is too detailed and time consuming to pass along to each family individually over the phone, don't rule this out as a method to encourage deeper parental involvement in your troop. Call parents for *good* reasons too-- just to tell them their daughter did something well, that they have a polite and considerate child, that their daughter is improving in some way. Some parents will really appreciate the validation when you say 'I'm just calling to say how great she is.' Don't underestimate the value and returns of delivering positive feedback by phone.



Mid tech: Create an email list

Although certainly not all parents have access to an email account, email is the most common use of the Internet by adults today. If you and the parents are comfortable using email, the choice of sending announcements and reminders via email is a viable one. When using email, keep in mind that whatever you send is a permanent record so keep it short, positive, and well written.

Did you know the Volunteer Toolkit has a built in email system?

Here is one idea for using email to make your communication two-way:

After your initial parent/guardian meeting, send an email through the Volunteer Toolkit or group email stating how nice it was to meet them and thank parents for coming. Provide your email and phone contact numbers again should they wish to reach you. Next paragraph, invite parents to help you know the personality of their girl better by completing a writing assignment: ***"In one million words or less, tell me about your child."*** Hilarious, touching, informative, and crucial information might be shared that you might not know any other way. Perhaps also ask each girl during a troop meeting to tell you about themselves and compare their view of themselves with those of their parents. It definitely will give you a starting place for knowing & working with each girl on an individual basis.

High tech: Create a group page on a social networking site

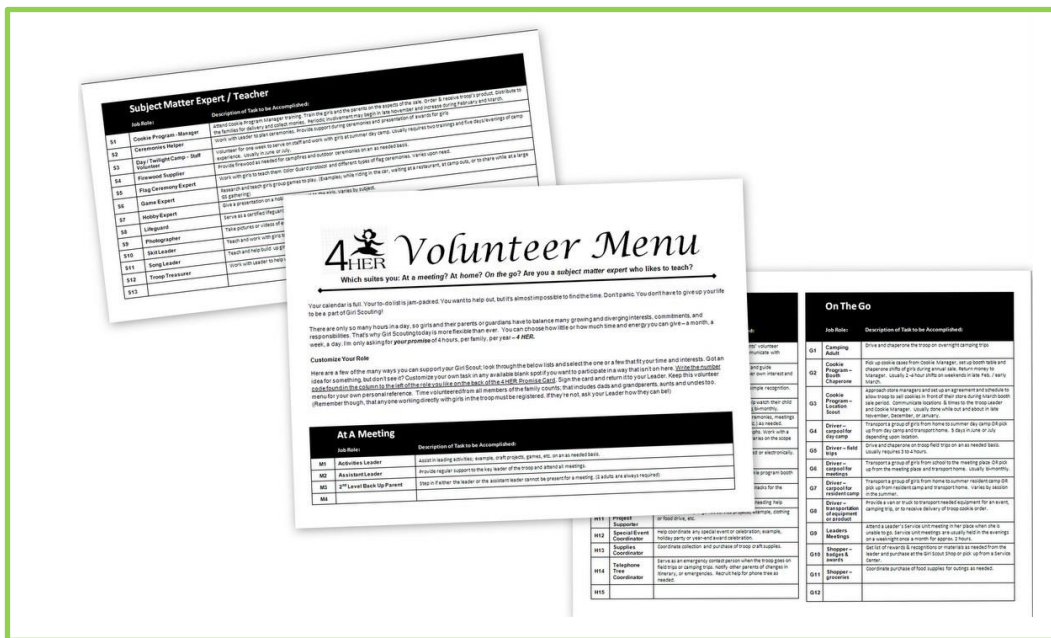
Online social networking sites such as Facebook are **free**, relatively easy to create, and can be set for **'members only'** to ensure privacy. Be sure to read the sites instructions and security settings very carefully. Social networking sites usually offer the ability to upload photos and have bulletin board discussions. As with all social media, monitor the site carefully. Even if your troop site is a private group, postings can be seen by others in the group. Be professional in your postings.

NOTE: The use of a page of this type is intended for communication with the Troop Adults, not the girls.

Section 3: If you ask – in a clearly defined way - they will help

GIVING PARENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE AND CONTRIBUTE

National studies show that the more you clearly define the ways that parents can help ...the more likely they are to step in. All you have to do is offer options and ask them to make the commitment – **for her**. They will select something that interests them, at the same time helping you. If done correctly, you will build a solid support base, strengthen the girl's chances of longevity with your troop, and potentially even increase participation from your dads. Successfully building a family wide troop support network has three key ingredients:





Offer parents a **variety of options** with **clearly defined responsibilities** and **time commitment factors**. (Download the 4HER menu.)

- Ask parents to **promise** a minimum of 4 hours per family – for her.
- Publicly **recognize** a parent/family when they hit 4 hours of given time. (This is why you need to establish a regular communication channel.)

It's that simple: Offer Options to Participate/Seek a Promise/Recognize!

At your parents meeting, or soon thereafter through your newsletter, ask each one of your parents to sign a "4 Her" promise card – ***committing to give 4 hours per family a year minimum to support their daughter's Girl Scout troop.***

Give parents a list of volunteer tasks at the same time. The options to choose from may include leading activities done at a meeting, tasks that could be done from home, or things done 'on the go', such as driving for a field trip. Parents could even become a subject matter expert in something and teach the girls. (For example: Color Guard calls and flag ceremony protocol, Girl Scout songs, etc.)

 	I promise to contribute to the success of my child's Girl Scout troop this school year by volunteering 4 hours of my time.
	Parent name: _____
	Girl's name: _____
	Phone #: _____
	Email: _____

**Keep in mind though that anyone who works directly with the girls will need to register as a member and pass a background check.

Collect the responses and ask one parent to be a volunteer in charge of matching parents up with the opportunities and tracking their hours. This role can be done from home. 4 hours a year per family sounds reasonable in exchange for the value gained by their daughter, right?

Win/Win/Win

What can a 4-hour promise really do?

When parents sign a promise card to volunteer four hours, you just gave them a reason to ask to do things to support the troop.

- You *open the door* to participation for the first time for many parents and family members.
- Parents become more in tune to the needs of the troop.
- Male involvement increases. Four hours *per family* lends a new perception of “getting involved,” therefore more dads, stepdads, grandfathers, and big brothers can join in.
- Parents keep coming back to help beyond the 4 hours because they witness the positive effect their participation has on the troop and their daughter.
- Your volunteer pool becomes more organized; you’ll know how to better communicate your needs for assistance, calling upon new people to do specific tasks and matching assignments with parents’ availability.
- The leader’s load is lightened when more parents help. (Example: cutting out shapes, shopping for badges or supplies, teaching a skill, or attending a community meeting, etc.)
- Communication between leader and family significantly increases when leaders use the 4 Her Promise and follow the CPR model.
- You build future volunteers as children witness firsthand, parent volunteerism. They will surely imitate the good example.

What counts?

This will probably be the most common question you are asked. What to count and should you count things done *just with their daughter* at home or only for the benefit of the whole troop? Well, here's what we think: Yes, count parent involvement just with their own child. Whether a parent is doing something for the whole troop or helping only their child earn a badge on her own, simply count it! Why only encourage volunteerism IN the troop? The kids will surely benefit and your troop likely will, also. The point of parent involvement is to help improve the Girl Scout experience of the child, while connecting the parent with the troop.

What is included in the 4 HER toolkit?

- The Volunteer Menu— with additional places for the leader to customize volunteer tasks and write in their own—three pages to print and copy.
- 4 HER Promise cards—these should be printed on cardstock paper and cut.
- An excel spreadsheet for tracking parents reported hours, if you choose to.
- A 4 HER Logo .jpeg for use in your newsletter or website.
- A 4 HER logo to use in your publications when you recognize contributions.

National studies have shown that initiatives similar to this one have increased volunteer hours substantially – nearly doubling – the first year.

Section 4: How to keep them coming back.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR VOLUNTEERS; APPLAUDING TOO!

The third ingredient of the CPR model is crucial; do not neglect it. **Recognize.** It is most important to connect with parent volunteers each time they help out or appear at your troop meeting. If they are working from home, give them a phone call or send an email to ask how it's going. If they have come to a meeting, before the parent is ready to leave for the day make certain to take time to talk with him or her:

- Ask about their satisfaction with the project or task and about how the girls behaved or engaged.
- Ask if they would like to volunteer again for the same type of project, or if they might prefer something different.
- Ask if they have any suggestions that might improve their, or another volunteer's, experience.
- Finally, have the entire troop clap and say "Thank you" as a way of showing respect for the parent volunteer.

As soon as a parent hits the 4 hour mark **recognize them** (together with their daughter). **Building a 4 HER recognition/thank you section into your newsletter or Facebook group is a viable option.** Think for a moment how happy the girl will feel to see her parent publicly recognized in print. This positive moment can only reinforce the Girl Scouting ideal of service to others and lay the groundwork for her own future volunteerism. If the type of service offered truly calls for it, you may consider sending a private thank you note also.

Use the 4 Her logo whenever you need to communicate with the parents about help for the troop. They'll become conditioned to look for it. At the end of the year, you can always thank all of your volunteers with a certificate and copy a book full of thank-you notes and pictures from the children. It is just a small gesture, but is always appreciated.

MORE IDEAS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

If and when you ever feel like taking a *further step* in building interpersonal relationships to strengthen the support base for your troop, you can include *entire families* in events or badge completion celebrations. As a starting point, here are 5 ideas and suggestions to get you thinking creatively about what will work best for your own Girl Scout families when you want to build troop involvement and family wide relationships. Activities will vary depending upon the nature of your group, of course.

1) Welcome Wall Celebrate your troop's diversity with a family collage display. Provide the poster board and invite all families to illustrate some aspect of their heritage. (The daughter will have to ask the parent for assistance with a cultural recipe or pictures, etc.) Hang the posters for everyone to see when they come for their daughter's investiture or some other ceremony.

2) Game Night - Organize a round robin board game night for families to play in teams or as individuals. (Participants rotate to different tables after a set time period) This can help your parents get to know each other in a fun low risk setting. Have your girls take turns serving light refreshments.

3) Career and Job Show & Tell - Introduce Girl Scouts to a variety of career and job opportunities. Ask a select group of parents to talk in detail about what they do. Foster small group discussions and show-and-tell by rotating patrols of girls through parent centers.

4) Family Sports Event - On a weekend, organize a game of softball, kickball, volleyball, or basketball, and perhaps have a potluck barbeque. Have parents, girls, and leaders compete against each other, or mix up the teams.

5) Saturday Success Academy - Ask if a parent is interested in offering a limited number of tutoring sessions in special interest areas such as study skills, math, science, language, art, or music for girl members of the troop who are interested and committed to getting ahead in school.

Section 5: Recap & Wrap Up

The Big Picture

The **CPR formula** to increase family support and prevent burnout is:

C – Communicate

Establish some kind of regular communication channel.

P – Promote and Provide a wide variety of clearly defined **options** to Participate
The 4 HER approach is available for your use. Ask for a **Promise** of 4 hours of their time.

R – Recognize

Use that communication channel to give thanks and recognition when family members hit the 4 hour threshold. Both the adults and the girls will feel good and will probably continue to give more.

Tools We Are Providing:

A **Volunteer Menu** to download with a wide variety of clearly defined, time specific options sorted by the ability to perform at a meeting, at home, on the go, or becoming a subject matter expert and teaching a skill.

A **4 HER Promise Card** for the parents to sign and return with their selection of support tasks that interest them and fit their lifestyle. This template can be downloaded and printed on cardstock – 8 cards to a page to cut apart.

A **4 HER hour tracking mechanism**. This is an excel spreadsheet that allows you to input volunteer names and tabulates the hours.

4 HER logo. A graphic to use in your newsletter or other publications.

Benefit to the GS Troop Leader of building strong family support:

Your volunteer pool becomes more organized; you'll know how to better communicate your needs for assistance, calling upon new people to do specific tasks and matching assignments with parents' availability.

Benefit to the parent who participates:

When the Leader's work is well balanced, the chances of their daughter having a high quality Girl Scout experience significantly improves. Girls and parents come back.

They also witness, first hand, the benefit to the girl.

The benefit to the girl whose parent/guardian participates:

Through participation in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, girls will progressively:

- Become resourceful problem solvers and learn how to collaborate with others on a common goal.
- Gain practical and healthy life skills
- Learn how to set goals and plan for the future

Ultimately, that's what it's all about.

Win / Win / Win

Shared work means more time to spend working with the girls...

Less time spent away from home, away from the family.

You become the GS Troop Leader you want to be.

You stay around for a while.

We love you for that.

What are you waiting for? Decide on your communication methods, and then use the following documents to get started:

- **Volunteer Menu**
- **4 HER Promise Card**
- **Logo**
- **Hours Tracking Spreadsheet** - Download this excel file off the GSNIM website.

How You
Your calendar



4 HER Volunteer Menu

Which suits you: *At a meeting? At home? On the go? Are you a subject matter expert who likes to teach?*

There are only so many hours in a day, so girls and their parents or guardians have to balance many growing and diverging interests, commitments, and responsibilities. That's why Girl Scouting today is more flexible than ever. You can choose how little or how much time and energy you can give – a month, a week, a day...a few hours. I'm only asking for *your promise* of 4 hours, per family, per year – **4 HER**.

Customize Your Role

Here are a few of the many ways you can support your Girl Scout; look through the below lists and select the one or a few that fit your time and interests. **Write the number code found in the column left of the role you like on the back of the 4 HER Promise Card.** Sign the card and return it to your Leader. Keep this volunteer menu for your own personal reference. Time volunteered from all members of the family counts; that includes dads and grandparents, aunts and uncles too. Got an idea for something, but don't see it? Customize your own task if you want to participate in a way that isn't on here by writing it on a piece of paper and stapling it to the Promise Card. (Remember though, that anyone working directly with girls in the troop (other than their own child) must be registered and pass a background check. If they're not, ask your Leader how they can be!)

At A Meeting

On The Go

M2	Co- Leader	Registration, training, and background check required. Provide <u>support</u> to the leader of the troop and attend all meetings.
M3	Troop Committee	Registration and background check required. Step in if either the leader or the assistant leader cannot be present for a meeting. (2 adults are always required)
M4		

Job Role:		Description of Task to be Accomplished:
G1	Camping Adult	Registration, training, and background check required. Drive and chaperone the troop on overnight camping trips
G2	Cookie Program – Booth Chaperone	Registration and background check required. Pick up cookie cases from Cookie Manager, set up booth table and chaperone shifts of girls during annual sale. Return money to Manager. Usually 2 -4 hour shifts on weekends in Jan. through mid-March.
G3	Cookie Program – Location Scout	Approach store managers at <u>non-council arranged locations</u> and set up an agreement & schedule to allow troop to sell cookies in front of their store during booth sale period. Communicate locations & times to the troop Leader and Cookie Manager. Usually done while out and about in late November, through February.
All Drivers must be registered members w/ background check, 18+, licensed & insured.		
G4	Driver – carpool for day camp	Transport a group of girls from home to summer day camp OR pick up from day camp and transport home. 5 days in June or July depending upon location.
G5	Driver – field trips	Drive and chaperone on troop field trips on an as needed basis. Usually requires 3 to 4 hours.
G6	Driver – carpool for meetings	Transport a group of girls from school to the meeting place OR pick up from the meeting place and transport home. Usually weekly - bi-monthly.
G7	Driver – carpool for resident camp	Transport a group of girls from home to summer resident camp OR pick up from resident camp and transport home. Varies by session in the summer.
G8	Driver – transportation of equipment or product	Provide a van or truck to transport needed equipment for an event, camping trip, or delivery of troop fall product/cookie orders.
G9	Leaders Meetings	Attend a Leader’s community meeting in her place when she is unable to go. Community meetings are usually held in the evening on a weeknight once a month for approx. 2 hours.
G10	Shopper – badges & awards	Get list of rewards & recognitions or materials as needed from the leader and purchase at the Girl Scout Shop or pick up from a Service Center.
G11	Shopper – groceries	Coordinate purchase of food supplies for meetings/outings as needed.
G12		

At Home

Job Role:

Description of Task to be Accomplished:

H1	4 Her Coordinator	Manage the Promise Cards and match parents' volunteer interests up to the needs of the troop. Communicate with leader, make phone calls or send emails.
H2	Badge Counselor	Work one on one with your girl to help plan and guide accomplishment of badge requirements of her own interest and choosing separately from the troop.
H3	Birthday Coordinator	Keep track of birthdays & assist leader with simple recognition.
H4	Child Sitter	If leader has a younger child, volunteer to help watch their child during the meeting. Usually a couple of hours per month.
H5	Decorations	Provide support in making decorations for ceremonies, meetings & events. (Cut out patterns, make stencils, etc.) As needed.
H6	Historian	Keep track of events, mementos, & photographs. Work with girls to keep a scrapbook. Time commitment varies on the scope of the project.
H7	Newsletter Editor for Troop	Coordinate the troop newsletter, either printed or electronically. Usually several hours bi-monthly.
H8	Poster Maker	Make posters to promote sales for use at cookie program booth sales, or other activities.
H9	Refreshment Coordinator	Set up the schedule of girls/parents bringing snacks for the meetings & reminders.
H10	Seamstress	Help sew uniform patches & badges for those needing help.
H11	Service Project Supporter	Research and help organize service projects; example, clothing or food drive, etc.
H12	Special Event Coordinator	Help coordinate any special events or celebrations; example, holiday party or year-end award celebration.
H13	Supplies Coordinator	Coordinate collection and purchase of troop craft supplies.
H14	Telephone Tree Coordinator	Serve as an emergency contact person when the troop goes on field trips or camping trips. Notify other parents of changes in itinerary, or emergencies. Recruit help for phone tree as needed.
H15		

Subject Matter Expert / Teacher

Job Role:

Description of Task to be Accomplished:

S1	Ceremonies Helper	Work with Leader to plan ceremonies. Provide support during ceremonies and presentation of awards for girls
S2	Day Camp – Unit Volunteer	Registration, training, and background check required. Volunteer for one week to serve on staff and work with girls at summer day camp. Usually requires additional training. Usually in June or July.
S3	Firewood Supplier	Provide firewood as needed for campfires and outdoor ceremonies on an as needed basis.

S4	Flag Ceremony Expert	Work with girls to teach them Color Guard protocol and different types of flag ceremonies. Varies upon need.
S5	Game Expert	Research and teach girls group games to play. (Examples; during troop time, while traveling, waiting at a restaurant, at camp outs, or to share while at a large GS gathering)
S6	Hobby Expert	Give a presentation on a hobby of interest to the girls. Varies by subject.
S7	Lifeguard	Registration, training, and background check required. Serve as a certified lifeguard for aquatic activities. Must provide proof of certification.
S8	Photographer	Take pictures or videos of events. Share with Historian or show at meetings. Varies by needs.
S9	Skit Leader	Teach and work with girls to practice and prepare skits for a GS event. Usually 6 to 8 hours over a few practice sessions.
S10	Song Leader	Teach and help build up girl's library of song knowledge. Usually 6 to 8 hours over a few practice sessions.
S11	Troop Cookie Manager	Registration, training, and background check required. Attend Cookie Program Manager training. Train the girls and the parents on the aspects of the sale. Order & receive troop's product. Distribute to the families for delivery and collect monies. Periodic involvement may begin in late November and increase during Jan. through March.
S12	Troop Treasurer	Registration and background check required. Work with Leader to help with budgeting, collection, deposits and payment of troop funds. Yearlong commitment.
S13	Ceremonies Helper	Work with Leader to plan ceremonies. Provide support during ceremonies and presentation of awards for girls
S14		

Q: Does working just with my own daughter at home on her uniform or badge work count? Yes! Everything you do to support your daughter's experience both inside and outside of the troop setting makes a positive difference.

Q: Should I track and report my volunteer hours to the leader? Possibly yes; your leader or 4 HER coordinator may wish to recognize family service to the troop in their newsletter. You will be setting an example of volunteerism for your child, and think about how proud your child will feel when her family is recognized!



I promise to contribute to the success of my child's Girl Scout troop this school year by volunteering 4 hours of my time.

Parent name: _____

Girl's name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____



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I am interested in supporting the troop in the following ways:

Using the 'How You Can Support Your Girl Scout' list, select the tasks that fit your interests, time and talent. Customize your involvement by writing the task numbers from the Volunteer Menu below under the proper heading and return this card to your Girl Scout Leader.

At a Meeting task #:	At Home: task #:	On the Go: task #:	Subject Matter Expert / Teacher: task #:

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