

Boys' Brigade Knowledge Project

Introduction:

Boys' Brigade has been around for over 140 years and, as a result, has had to adapt like by incorporating devotionals and squad times into the program. A current issue with the BB program that requires us to adapt is that of connection and relation between the boys and different communities in and out of BB.

On the whole, BB companies operate independently with little interaction between them apart from State events. Furthermore, some BB sections struggle to build a single cohesive company community.

This is not a healthy state for the program to be in as it shows a lack of organisation, communication and structure. By building these back into the program, we can rebuild a framework in which various relations can be cultivated for the benefit of the boys. These relations include inside the company, with the church and other church programs, with other churches and other church's programs and also with the wider community.

Improving relations will greatly assist the boys and make the BB program more diverse. Reaching out to the community will help the boys to develop their social and leadership skills as well as provide new experiences that will broaden their perception and understanding of the world around them.

Intra-Company Relations:

Some companies have little to do between sections. This makes it seem that the three sections are disjointed, potentially inconsistent and more difficult for the boys to transition between. Allowing the boys to interact between sections can increase the cohesion of the company. It can allow a chance for the older boys to deepen their leadership skills while giving the younger boys someone to look up to. This will also have the effect of making the younger boys more excited for seniors.

Companies like Berwick and Mitcham help sections, particularly Juniors and Seniors to interact through company camps or father and son camps as well as during state events. Boronia has their NCOs assist in running the Junior and Anchor programs. I think that helping to run the Anchors program would be very easy to implement for companies who run their Anchors program before or separately to their Seniors program and it would be a good opportunity for development should the NCOs choose to participate.

On the whole, developing these relations between the sections help to build a sense of solidarity across the whole company, making sure there is one program being run, not three.

Company-to-Church Relations:

At this level, companies do not entirely have control over how it interacts with the host church. As such, the difficulty of orchestrating events increase but it is far from impossible. Unfortunately, many companies are not able to coordinate with other programs and it is a missed opportunity. Collaborating with different groups is an opportunity to begin broadening the boys' awareness. It takes them out of the structured environment of BB while still providing them with enough support

should they need it. It's also an opportunity for them to practice their leadership skills in a different environment and with different people, helping to continue their growth. Working with other groups can also help to stimulate improvements for the company. Additionally, taking a more active role in the church helps to cement the program as an important ministry and improving terms with church members.

Some good examples of how these relations can be developed are in our international cousins in the Cook Islands, Zambia, Malaysia and Singapore who they integrate well with GB. They have combined events such as 'Dance and Cultural Competitions'. Additionally, in Uganda, there are not two programs but one—'The Boys and Girls Brigade of Uganda'.

Meanwhile, the furthest companies usually get is promoting Youth group events, without ever collaborating on them together. Simply running a joint Youth group/BB event would be a great step forward. Or, a combined activity with GB would be another great alternative since it should be even easier to work together. Just about any relaxed, fun night would work for this sort of activity, like a Movie night, board games night, etc.

Company-to-Ministry Relations:

At this level, there are many opportunities for groups, like BB, to participate in a range of events like State Youth Games or Merge. However, companies are largely too inwards focussed and the only time we come together is for state events like Athletics Day or State Camp. While competition can be a good motivator, it becomes dangerous when it is our only interaction with other companies. Particularly through the Anchors and Juniors program, strong competition with other companies can produce a level of hostility to other companies that then has to be broken down later on. If could increase the level of interaction between companies then it would become easier to help each other out. An example of this is that the communication between companies was so poor during the 2020 lockdowns that captains didn't even know if other companies were struggling. I see this as a big warning. For all the leaderships training we do, we seem to be lacking a lot of teamwork.

As mentioned, not only is this level of relations important for the program on a wider level but it is also incredibly beneficial for the boys. By beginning to expose them to more varied groups with more varied values and beliefs, they can begin to learn to manage being with people more unfamiliar people and be respectful of them despite not knowing them. Being able to respect and understand those we do not know is a critical skill in our role as Christians in the world—to love others and spread the good news. By increasing the variety of people interacted with as the boys get older, we can help them develop a potentially difficult set of skills in a more manageable way. All of this builds nicely on the skills learnt from the previous relation. Additionally, while less support is as readily available, it is definitely still there should they need it.

Boronia is a trailblazer in this area. They have done 'excursions' to other companies for a night and during lockdowns, took advantage of technology's capabilities, having speakers come in from other companies nearby as well as interstate and even international. An example of this was for their Citizenship class, they had NCOs from 12th Kuala Lumpur come and do a presentation. Then, in return, some of the Boronia boys did one for their International Relations class. These sort of engagements provide unique insights of completely different cultural backgrounds that will help those boys who participated to have a more diverse cultural understanding and awareness.

There are plenty of opportunities around for companies, or even the state, to participate in. It just requires some thought and preparation. I also don't think companies should rely solely on the state body to organise such cross-ministry events but instead they should take the initiative to organise their own where possible.

BB-to-Public Relations:

Most companies have very little involvement in the local or broader community. As a Christian organisation with plenty of able-bodied boys and men, we should be forerunners in serving our community. There are so many needs in our local communities that would be great opportunities for the boys to grow and learn. So why don't we take advantage of them.

These activities will be the most rewarding for the boys. Being given the opportunity to give back to the community helps to instil the boys with a sense of altruism and fulfilment. It also practically lives out our call as Christians to help others and give back to the community, allowing the boys to gain a broader perspective of other people's needs contrasted with their own. By interacting with all walks of life, it brings life back to the basics and fundamentals. These people can potentially challenge the boys and their beliefs, knowingly or unknowingly, and these challenges will result in far greater growth in character than could be achieved elsewhere.

Ultimately, if BB was as well known for community service as Girl Scouts are for selling cookies, then I think we'd be doing pretty well. Instead, the vast majority of people little idea of what Boys' Brigade is about and I don't think that's right.

As an example of just how many opportunities there are around, look no further than Boronia. They helps out at two nursing homes, 'Tabulam and Templer Homes for the Aged' and 'Sherbrooke Nursing Home'. They also help out at the Boronia RSL for the ANZAC Day Dawn Service and the ANZAC parade at Boronia. Furthermore, they take part in 'City Gaine', an event run by 'Rogaining Victoria'. Berwick participates in the Market Night at Hillcrest Christian College, Mooroolbark helps out at the local school's working bees and also runs Bunnings sausage sizzles.

Overseas, BB in Singapore is heavily involved with caregiving. They have people donate goods and food and then give out hampers to people in need. As a result, BB is well respected in the country. In the Cook Islands, they have a section for 18-25 year olds, simply called 'Search and Rescue' which works alongside the police force in their Search and Rescue work. Meanwhile, 1st Lusaka, Zambia runs a session in an orphanage. The boys from the orphanage are then invited to participate with the company on camps and hikes and, as a result, they learn a variety of life skills otherwise inaccessible to them.

There are so many opportunities around if someone just stopped to take a look.

Conclusion:

Generally speaking, the main issue holding back these relations from being developed is the lack of vision and drive from the seniority in the company. We need people who have the ideas to push the program up and out and we also need others to come and support them in their work. We need to encourage young leaders and NCOs who are passionate to step forward. We need to help them make their ideas a reality and not suffocate them in bureaucracy. This is our current challenge and it needs to be resolved, for the sake of the future of Boys' Brigade.

To kick-start this solution, I believe the first step is listening and letting those people with ideas try them out. It is also important to remember that failure is likely at the beginning of any new project but that's not a reason to give up. Instead, we should learn from these failures so we can continue striving forward. It is the lack of and fear of failure that will cause us to stagnate as an organisation and if we remain stagnate for too long then the entity that is BB will age very quickly, inevitably resulting in its death.

Below are attached some of the ideas myself and others have put forward. Some have been enacted, others only theorised. It is not a comprehensive list but it should give you an idea of the things that are out there.

Appendix:

Events:

State Youth Games <http://stateyouthgames.com/vic/about/>

State Youth Games (SYG) is an annual event run by Churches of Christ Vic/Tas for church groups and youth organisations all over the state. It combines a casual community atmosphere with action packed sporting activities and includes dynamic evening programs and events.

Merge <https://www.facebook.com/events/berwick-church-of-christ-bcoc/merge-combined-youth-event/174379086701572/>

5 youth groups are merging together to celebrate Jesus, build community and have fun!

Market Night <https://www.hillcrest.vic.edu.au/community/special-events>

[information unavailable due to COVID cancellations]

Volunteer groups:

Blaze-aid <https://blazeaid.com.au/>

A volunteer-based organisation that works with families and individuals in rural Australia after natural disasters such as fires and floods. Working alongside the rural families, our volunteers help to rebuild fences and other structures that have been damaged or destroyed.

Sailability <https://www.sailability.org/>

Around the world Sailability operates under different names. Sailability organisations are “not for profit”, volunteer-based, and through the activity of Sailing enriches the lives of people of all abilities – the elderly, the financially and socially disadvantaged as well as people with physical challenges.

RSL <http://www.rslvic.com.au/veteran-support/volunteer/>

The RSL was founded in 1916 to provide comradeship and support to Australia's veterans and their families.

Foodbank <https://www.foodbank.org.au/support-us/hold-a-food-drive/?state=vic>

Foodbank is Australia's largest food relief organisation, operating on a scale that makes it crucial to the work of the front line charities who are feeding vulnerable Australians. Foodbank provides more than 70% of the food rescued for food relief organisations nation-wide.

SES (Mainly Young Adults but it is Youth friendly) <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/volunteer>

VICSES provides emergency assistance to thousands of Victorians every year. In 2019-2020 VICSES

responded to 33,742 emergency incidents across the state, contributing a total of 382,141 hours helping Victorians in need.

Southern Cross Kids Camp <https://sckc.org.au/join-us/>

Southern Cross Kids' Camps is a Christian organisation that interrupts the cycle of abuse and neglect in primary aged kids from hard places.

Other groups:

Tabulam and Templer Homes for the Aged <https://ttha.org.au/about/mission-vision-values/>

Our mission [is] to deliver tailored aged care services to culturally inclusive communities that enrich the health and wellbeing of our elderly.

Menarock Life – Sherbrooke House, Upper Ferntree Gully <http://www.menarocklife.com.au/our-places/upper-ferntree-gully/>

Menarock Life aged care residence Upper Ferntree Gully is a light filled 45 bed residence offering respite care, permanent care and dementia care for individuals and couples.

Rogaining Victoria <https://vra.rogaine.asn.au/>

Rogaining is a sport for 2-99 year olds who enjoy the challenge of being outdoors. Whether you want to run, walk, picnic or simply camp at one of our overnight events we would love to see you.

[Ask Chee Ngui for details on 'City Gaine' if interested]

Air League <https://www.airleague.com.au/what-is-the-air-league/>

The Australian Air League is a youth organisation for boys and girls aged from 8 years which encourages an interest in aviation as a career or as a hobby for the youth of Australia.