

## Scout boom as cash-strapped parents shun costly kids' clubs

The recession has driven a boom in membership, with the Scouts growing by almost 10 per cent since 2008, from 467,351 to 508,570.

Meanwhile the number of Girl Guides has risen from 528,000 in 2007 to around 530,000 now.



*Affordable fun: Scout and Girl Guide numbers are up as parents shun more expensive Kids' clubs*

It is thought that the growing popularity has largely been driven by the low cost of joining. Scouts typically charge £70 to £90 a year, while Girlguiding UK's termly

subscriptions cost as little as £15.

In comparison, an eight-week block of swimming lessons can set parents back over £100 for just ten half-hour sessions.

### ***GLOBAL FAMILY OF 28M***

- *All but one of the astronauts who walked on the Moon had been scouts*
- *The number of volunteers working for the Scout Association (90,000) is bigger than the workforces of both the BBC (24,000) and McDonald's in the UK (85,000). The volunteers contribute more than 364million hours each year*
- *The Scout Association was founded on August 1, 1907 by Robert Baden-Powell*
- *Worldwide scouting has 28million members, male and female, and operates in nearly every country*
- *Celebrity former Girl Guides include Cat Deely, Zoe Ball, Emma Thompson, Carol Vorderman and Cherie Blair*

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A spokesman for the Scout Association said its activities were far cheaper because staff are all volunteers and the sessions are run for 25 to 30 young people at a time.

He said: ‘We find that when times are tough, scouting is an area that continues to

grow because when parents are faced with choices for spending money, it's usually the big items that go.

'The value we offer members means that we are low on that list.

'It's not just about cost but also the number of activities we offer such as sailing, canoeing, climbing and orienteering that you don't get with other organisations.'

For one group of Beaver Scouts, the latest expedition planned is to the Downing Street garden, for a charity sleepover tonight.

The 15 six to eight-year-olds, from Wandsworth, South West London, will tour No 10 before pitching their tents to raise money for the Sparks children's charity.

The spokesman added: 'Parents see us as an organisation that provides adventurous activities at very good value. They're getting the activities they want at a price they can afford.'

Demand for places in the Girl Guides is so high that some 44,000 girls and young women are waiting to join and around 900 new groups opened across the country last year.



Dib Dib: Former Girl Guides Carol Vorderman, Cat Deeley and Cherie Blair

Chief Guide Gill Slocombe said: ‘We want every girl to benefit from the guiding experience and so we ensure that cost is not a barrier in preventing girls from taking part.’

Keeping subscriptions low and subsidising activities in areas of need through fundraising and grants ensures that guiding is certainly one of the best value for money activities that girls and young women can do.’

Christian organisation The Girls’ Brigade England & Wales, which has 600 groups

charging an average of 75 pence a week, has also seen rising numbers in some areas.

National director Ruth Gilson said: 'The current financial climate is hitting families all over the country in different ways.'

Sarah Harris - Mail Online