

e-Links

Link Guiding on the Net

BY JENNIFER THORNTON, SUSAN THORPE
AND JENNIFER WALKER

Links, who are Guiding Members aged 18 to 30, have a widely varying level of involvement, from those who simply stay in touch with Guiding, to those who actively volunteer as Guiders. Regular communication in Link Guiding has traditionally proved very difficult, but the Internet has changed all this. Now we have e-Links!



Back in the early 1990s, when Jennifer Walker first became involved with Link, communication was only through "snail mail" and phone calls. Neither method is very practical when dealing with women who may be moving regularly and are busy with school, new careers, or other commitments. She had little contact then with other Link Members, and there were few Link activities (or at least few that she heard about).

Now, via e-mail, Link Advisers are able to get information to Link Members much more quickly, so they can feel more included in the mainstream of Guiding. For both Advisers and Links, e-mail offers many benefits:

- It's easier and less time-consuming for a Link Adviser to send a single e-mail to a group of Link Members than it is to call everyone individually.
- E-mail can be sent at any time of the day, regardless of the recipient's time zone or the sender's sleeping habits.
- Link Members can read messages at their own convenience, such as during a break from studying.
- Most women in the Link age group have e-mail addresses, and are active on the Internet through school or work, so this mode of correspondence is second nature to them.

There are now many active Link groups across Canada, and e-mail is used frequently to arrange activities and meetings. Link activities have included sleepovers and camps, trips to other provinces, crafts, sports, canoeing and backpacking. Link groups also give service to Guiding, such as helping with Units, running District camps or volunteering at local Guiding events. Individually, Link Members in Canada have worked at World Centres, attended international events, and participated in Guiding events such as the National Forum – none of which would have been possible if they hadn't received timely information about these opportunities.

Some Link Advisers set up "e-groups" or discussion lists for their Link Members. Susan Thorpe has set up an e-group for Link Members in her Area, and also moderates one for Link Members in Ontario. It saves mail and long distance phone costs, and she gets quicker responses. Jennifer Thornton started an e-group in Nova Scotia, to improve communication between their quarterly newsletters. The N.S. Link group makes good use of the other features available on their Web site, using a calendar feature to post events, automatic reminders of events, and a polling option to get efficient feedback.

Jennifer Walker has been in contact via e-mail with groups similar to Link, such as: Campus Girl Scouts in the U.S.A., the Olave Program in Australia, and LINK-UK in the U.K. Through such contacts, she arranged to attend the 2nd Annual National Campus Girl Scouts conference in Washington, D.C., in June 2001, to share ideas about promoting membership in this age group.

Strengthening the role of Link within Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada directly addresses three of the Five Membership Rs: Retain, Regain, Revolutionize (see *Canadian Guider*, Summer 2001, page 32). Many Link Members currently contribute to Guiding, although perhaps in more non-traditional and flexible ways than we are used to. Many will become active leaders later on, when their lives are more settled. And, because young women today often surf the Web, the Internet is a vital recruitment tool for promoting our organization to the Link age group, both inside and outside of Guiding. ☘

Jennifer Thornton, of Halifax, Nova Scotia, is Provincial Link Adviser. Susan Thorpe, of Guelph, Ontario, is Area Link Adviser. Jennifer Walker, of Edmonton, Alberta, is National and Area Link Adviser.

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