

Traditional values are secret of our success, say Scouts as membership soars

Ditching traditional values to be 'cool' would be like cringeworthy 'Dad dancing', says Scouts chief as membership tops 550,000



Scouts gather in St Peter's Square on April 26, 2014 in Vatican City, Vatican Photo: GETTY IMAGES

Holding on to traditional values – including keeping God in its promise – has helped the Scouts see a dramatic increase in members, the organisation's chief commissioner has insisted.

New figures show that the number of Scouts in the UK has jumped by almost a quarter in the last decade and membership is now at its highest level for a generation.

Wayne Bulpitt, the chief commissioner, said part of the secret of the organisation's success was the fact that young people still crave "adventure" in an era of health and safety rules.

But he added that a crucial ingredient had been deliberate decision to modernise its image but preserving the principles it has taught for more than a century.

He said organisations which tried too hard to be "cool" often ended up "Dad dancing" – conjuring up the image of a middle-aged man who embarrasses his children with awkward dance moves at a family wedding in an attempt to pretend he is younger than he is.

The most recent Scout “census” shows that the number of members in the UK passed 550,000 last year. It has grown by almost a quarter – or more than 100,000 – in the last decade.

Although girls have been accepted at all levels of the Scouts since 1990, the number of female members almost doubled in the last decade to more than 128,000.

Mr Bulpitt said it had been clear around 20 years ago, when numbers were falling that the Scouts were not considered “cool”.

But he said that although it had subtly modernised its image by moves such as updating its uniform or appointing the television survival star Bear Grylls as Chief Scout, suggestions of a more sweeping rebranding had been rejected.

“There was a conscious decision to stick with what we know we are good at, a confidence in what we do but a realisation that we had to look different in the 21st Century to be appealing to young people and adult volunteer,” Mr Bulpitt explained.

He said the decision to retain the traditional Scout promise, which specifically mentions God, while offering an alternative for atheists, was an example of how it had adapted without dropping its core principles.

Mr Bulpitt said: “We could have just dropped being a values based organisation and become a climbing club or a water activities club – that’s not Scouting.

“While we offer adventure to young people what we still give them is a balanced programme of non-formal learning.

“We resisted the temptation to go for gold by just recruiting people to activities.

“The values that underpin Scouting – we talk about integrity, respect, understanding other people and faith and belief – are at the core.

“So we’ve become ‘cool’ but we’ve not gone over the top.

“We have avoided the embarrassment of ‘Dad dancing’ by keeping hold of our values.”

The Scouts’ decision to retain its main pledge was in marked contrast to that of the Girl Guides, which last year replaced its traditional promise with a single version without references to God.

The decision led to protests and the Guiding movement eventually compromised, allowing groups to add a line to the start of the new promise specifically mentioning God.

John Bingham - The Telegraph