

THE UNIT IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY



The unit is the basic element of the Auxiliary. Every member must join a unit, and through her unit membership she is a part of the Department and the National Organization. The 'Unit' is that entity through which the programs of the Department and National Organizations are carried out. The primary purpose of the unit is to assist the Legion post, whose name and number it carries in accomplishing its purpose.

The general tenure of the programs of the Auxiliary is set by the Legion. While the programs of the Auxiliary are on-going from year-to-year, the National President sets the theme for her administrative year. Each national chairman, working with that theme, sets the program emphasis and action for the ensuing year. This information is transmitted to the units through the department officers and chairmen.

It is the actions of the unit members that bring the programs to fruition. These actions are reported to the National Organization through the Departments, and this information is passed on to the general membership.

AMERICANISM

Americanism, a program in its own right, is the overriding principle in every program of the Auxiliary. Love for and understanding of the ideals and principles of democracy, upon which this great nation was founded, are the most powerful weapons for safeguarding the national security of this country.

Every citizen should have a thorough understanding of the Constitution of the United States. Lack of this knowledge can cause even the most dedicated person to be misled. Basic Americanism is essential in the home, youth and adult groups, the unit and the community.

The development of deep-seated personal patriotism within the home is the responsibility of every adult. Expression of patriotism, by word and action, inspires youngsters in the development of high ideals and character, and a true appreciation of our heritage. It is also important to believe in and practice tolerance for others. Careful study of candidates and issues and intelligent voting are not only privileges but are also obligations.

Under the leadership of the Americanism chairman, the unit should have a program to study the Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, and the Flag Code on a regular basis. Special patriotic programs should be planned for the unit, and all patriotic holidays should be observed.

Strong Americanism programs, as well as oratorical and essay contests, should be sponsored in youth groups and in schools. Democracy can be taught in elementary schools by the formation of student councils. Sponsorship of Boy and Girl Scout troops is also an important unit program.

Sponsoring citizenship classes and providing the American Creed, Flag Codes, and small flags to the new citizens are other important facets of the Americanism program. Flag study courses enhance the education of the adult foreign born.

Public forums presenting both sides of a question or political campaign are a good way to keep citizens abreast of the issues and views of political candidates. Units should sponsor activities that help the community observe patriotic holidays and events. Unit members can serve as watchdogs in the community to work against subversive activities. Unit members should become involved in community affairs by attending or serving on city councils, school boards, county boards, and by working side-by-side with the Legion in their Americanism programs.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The purpose of the Children and Youth program is two-fold: (1) to assure care and protection for children of veterans of the past seven wars (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf), and (2) to improve conditions for all children. The accomplishment of these purposes is guided by three deep-seated principles:

1. To preserve the integrity of the family home.
2. To maintain a “whole” child program that ministers to all needs of children (physical, emotional, financial, intellectual, social and family).
3. To cooperate with and strengthen other sound organizations and agencies which operate for the benefit of children to avoid competition and duplication of services.

These programs are accomplished in three ways:

1. Direct aid.
2. Educating the membership and the public on the needs of children, and by recommending ways of meeting their needs.
3. Supporting needed legislation for children through convention resolutions of the Legion and Auxiliary on national, department and local levels.

When called upon for direct aid, a unit is never expected or even encouraged to take over the support of a needy family. Direct assistance can be given while efforts are being made to secure assistance through local, state and federal government agencies that were established for this purpose (i.e., the Veterans Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services and Social Security). The unit and post should work together to ensure that all appropriate agencies are contacted. There are often delays in processing applications for assistance, and this should be kept in mind. Sometimes no aid is available, and in such instances the units can help by providing temporary assistance.

There is a great deal of information about this subject on the Legion’s website under “Children and Youth” programs. If no unit or post funds are available, requests for Temporary Financial Assistance can be submitted to the department and to national.

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is another section of the Children and Youth division. Founded in 1954, it was created to provide funds for research, special projects, public education, etc., which benefit children and youth and are carried out over and above the regular program.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Improvement of the conditions of life in the community has been a prime concern of the Auxiliary unit since 1926. Under the direction of the Community Service committee, many community projects have been completed throughout the United States. The watchwords of the Community Service program are and always have been “initiate, cooperate, but never duplicate.”

Every unit of the Auxiliary is expected to work on at least one Community Service project each year. This project may be in any of the following categories: health, recreation, safety, beautification, libraries, community councils, etc. Cooperation with other organizations in any worthwhile community project is encouraged.

EDUCATION

Once entitled "Education and Scholarships Committee," the Education program is primarily concerned with assuring the availability of advanced education to any student having the desire and ability to pursue higher education; encouraging the membership of both the Legion and Auxiliary to take an active role in the development and maintenance of top-grade school systems, and encouraging students to pursue careers in areas where personnel shortages exist. These concerns and goals are accomplished by a close working relationship between national, department and local levels of our organization. Among the activities carried out by the Education Committee to accomplish these goals are the following:

1. Initiating and supporting state and national legislation establishing scholarship opportunities.
2. Publicizing "Need A Lift?" on state and local levels, particularly at the local high schools.
3. Keeping the membership informed of the goals of the education committee.
4. Encouraging students to plan for college and apply early for scholarships.
5. Helping students to be aware of career opportunities that are available.
6. Keeping the National Education committee informed as to state law changes and new scholarships that are available.

GIRLS STATE

Girls State began as a part of the Americanism program in 1937 by action of the National Convention. It was established as a separate committee at the 1946 national convention. It is a non-partisan, non-political attempt to teach and instill by the learning-by-doing process in which the delegates live together as self-governing citizens, learning the duties, privileges and obligations that good citizenship entails. Girls State is administered by the individual departments under the guidance of the national chairman.

Each unit has the final decision in the selection of a representative to Girls State. Although the Auxiliary has complete control in directing the Girls State program, we do welcome contributors from other organizations and businesses to enhance the program. When unit funds are limited, many community organizations are called upon to contribute to the sponsorship of one or more delegates. This is an excellent way for the community to learn about one of the important programs of the Auxiliary. After each annual session, every delegate is expected to report to her school, her sponsoring unit, and her contributing sponsor (should there be one), on her activities and impressions of Girls State.

Girls Nation is a permanent extension of Girls State, with two delegates from each Girls State going to Washington, DC for a week-long session on national government. They are privileged to meet with many high government officials, as well as United States Senators and Representatives. In most cases, they also meet with the President of the United States. Girls Nation is under the direction of the National Girls State chairman.

JUNIOR MEMBERS

Juniors are members of the Auxiliary and are grouped separately by age so that they may receive training consistent with their age. Under the guidance of a senior advisor (chairman), they are taught Americanism, and work in areas of Children and Youth, Community Service, and Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation. When junior members elect officers, their titles are of honorary nature and they have no executive power.

The Foreign Relations country study and doll-dressing contests were activities for many years. Although they have been discontinued on the national level, the department may continue these programs if they so desire.

As junior members are the future of the organization, it is essential that these young girls be taught a love for and understanding of the aims and purposes of the Auxiliary.

Programs and methods of training are contained in the Junior Activities Handbook and the Junior Leadership Correspondence course which is available from each department headquarters or on the national website.

LEGISLATIVE

The legislative activities are carried out on national, department and local levels, with direction from the Legion. A full-time staff in the Legion Legislative Division works in Washington, DC, keeping abreast of current legislation, usually relating to veterans' benefits, children and youth, and national security, and opposing such legislation that could undermine these benefits.

In all matters of legislation, the Auxiliary follows the action of the Legion, never endorsing any measure until the Legion has first endorsed it, and never following a policy which does not coincide exactly with the Legion's stand. The national policy of the Auxiliary is formed by the National Convention which always takes action on legislative matters which are identical with that of the Legion's National Convention, giving the Legion and Auxiliary a joint program.

If a unit is interested in securing or blocking some piece of legislation, it should present the matter to its Legion post and secure its support. The post may then carry the matter to the department convention for consideration of the Legion at the department level. If it receives endorsement, the Auxiliary at the department level will follow suit, and if it is a national matter, the department will carry it to the national convention.

The "Auxiliary eNews" letter published by the Auxiliary, and the "Dispatch" published by the Legion, keep members of the Legion family abreast of current legislation and the position of the Legion. Members of the Auxiliary stand ready at all times to launch letter-writing campaigns on the local, state and national levels when called upon by the Legion.

MEMBERSHIP

The lifeblood of the Auxiliary is its membership. The only form of membership that is authorized is active membership. There can be no awarding of honorary membership. If the veteran relative of the candidate is living, he or she must be a member of the Legion. There are two classes of membership: senior and junior.

Eligibility for membership is set by the Legion and is limited to:

1. Mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, granddaughters, great-granddaughters, and grandmothers of all men and women who were in the Armed Forces of the United States during any of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946; June 25, 1950, to January 31, 1955; February 28, 1961, to May 7, 1975; August 24, 1982, to July 31, 1984; December 20, 1989, to January 31, 1990; August 2, 1990, to the date of cessation of hostilities as determined by the government of the United States, all dates inclusive, or who, being citizens of the United States at the time of their entry therein, served on active duty in the Armed Forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during any of the said periods, and died in the line of duty or after honorable discharge.
2. Female veterans, who, of their own right, are eligible for membership in The American Legion.

Each unit of the Auxiliary is the judge of its own membership, subject to the restrictions of the Constitution and Bylaws. No person who is a member of an organization that advocates the overthrow of the United States government by force or violence, or who subscribes to the principles of any group opposed to our form of government, shall be eligible to become or remain a member of the Auxiliary.

Because all of the programs of the Auxiliary are so dependent upon a strong membership, an effective membership campaign is imperative. Many suggestions are offered to the units, but the unit ultimately decides what works best for them. Of course, personal contact always seems to work best. Membership solicitors must be well informed about the Auxiliary. There are many aids available from the Legion and the Auxiliary to promote membership.

It is the unit's responsibility to educate new members about the Auxiliary, and this cannot be stressed too strongly. Being knowledgeable about the programs and having the feeling of belonging engenders enthusiasm in new members.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The national security of this nation is the utmost concern to every member of the Auxiliary. The Auxiliary believes the national security is directly dependent upon adequate national defense. Past history has shown that this concern has been well founded. Every member should be fully informed about national security and be able to disseminate this information to all citizens of the community. Forums, lectures, videos, slide presentations, and movies can be used for this purpose. *The Firing Line*, published by the Legion, contains much current information on this subject.

The Auxiliary was one of fifteen women's patriotic organizations that made up the Women's Forum on National Security that met annually in Washington, DC to study the current national security situation. The final Women's Forum on National Security was held in 1981. The Auxiliary, not to be deterred in its concern for national security, promptly organized and sponsored the Awareness Assembly which convened in 1982 and has been held annually in Washington, DC since then. The Washington Conference, formally known as the Awareness Assembly is open to all members and the public.

POPPY

The Legion was the first national organization to adopt the poppy as a memorial flower. This action was taken at the National Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio on September 27-29, 1920. The Auxiliary adopted it at the October, 1921 National Convention that was held in Kansas City, Missouri.

These are the only poppies that are handmade by hospitalized veterans. The veterans are paid for every poppy. All proceeds realized from the distribution of the poppies are used by the Legion and Auxiliary exclusively for the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation work, and for the families of the veterans.

This program provides the public the opportunity to join with the Legion and the Auxiliary in expressing appreciation to the veterans who survived, in remembering those who gave their lives for the security of this nation, and in giving aid to those veterans and their families who are in need. All of this is expressed by the wearing of the memorial poppy.

The young people of the nation are invited to participate in Poppy Poster contests, which are held in schools. The units of the Auxiliary throughout the United States sponsor these contests.

The publicity campaign for poppy distribution is widespread and provides an excellent opportunity for the public to learn about the work being done by both the Legion and the Auxiliary.

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

The National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation committee constantly updates the program and disseminates the information to the Departments and Units through bulletins.

The unit VA&R committee is comprised of as many members as is necessary to oversee the various phases of the program. Often, in working with the families of the veterans, the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation chairman and the Children and Youth chairman work together. A close working relationship between the post and the unit is essential.

The various phases of the program include aiding the veteran and his/her family, providing Hospital and Field Service volunteers, Home Service, Gift Shops, and assisting in job placement for veterans.

Seeking out direct aid for veterans and their families requires close cooperation between the post and the unit. Veterans and their families who are seeking assistance should be referred to the post service officer. He has the resources and knowledge to research the veteran's benefits that are available in each case. The post and the unit can provide temporary assistance, but aid from other agencies should be sought as well.

Auxiliary Hospital volunteers have contributed millions of hours of service to patients in all 173 Veterans Administration medical centers and in contract hospitals. Volunteers serve as patient escorts, receptionists, workers in the pharmacies and libraries, and as visitors to patients. They also provide comfort items to the veterans.

In order to work in the hospitals, the volunteers must take an orientation course that is provided by the VA director of volunteers and the Auxiliary. The volunteer can work on a regularly scheduled basis, or on a part-time basis. The volunteers work under the direction of the Hospital Representative who is appointed by the Department President. She is the liaison between the VA and the Auxiliary.

Field Service volunteers work with veterans in nursing homes, geriatric day care centers, halfway houses, and in their own homes. Among the services provided by these volunteers are visiting and entertaining the veterans and transporting the veterans to doctors, recreational activities, church, shopping, etc. They also provide services to the veterans' families.

The Guide for Volunteers contains the rules and regulations of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation program and a description of the duties for all volunteer groups in rehabilitation. This booklet is available through the Department Headquarters and on the National website.

By action of the 1975 national convention, a new method of reporting the number of volunteers, hours and cost of material and supplies was initiated to record the services provided to veterans by volunteers in the volunteers' own homes. Home Service provides a true record of service given by all Auxiliary volunteers for reporting to the Congress of the United States, and it also recognizes all volunteer hours of service given by our National Organization. Home Service relates to those hours worked by members in their own homes; sewing, cooking, etc., for veterans and their families, and other hours that are not counted as part of the Field Service or Hospital volunteer hours.

Gift Shops are held at VA medical centers each year. Through the Gift Shops, gifts are provided to the hospitalized veterans' immediate family members as gifts from the veterans. The units of the Auxiliary contribute these gifts and there is no cost to the veterans. The Gift Shops are staffed by Auxiliary volunteers.

Job fairs and other job placement services are provided by the Legion posts, and unit members assist in this program whenever possible.

AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund committee was created by a resolution of the National Executive Committee at its meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on November 10, 1969. Funding for this program originally came from a bequest from the estate of Helen Colby Small of Wisconsin to the Auxiliary, the bequest to be known as the Helen Colby Small Foundation.

The Auxiliary Emergency Fund is administered by the Auxiliary's National Secretary and National Treasurer, and a representative from the Legion's Americanism and Children and Youth Division is on the 'grant' committee. This fund is used to give financial assistance to members who find themselves in temporary financial hardship.

Action of the 1981 National Convention broadened the concept of the Auxiliary Emergency Fund to include the displaced homemaker. The specific purpose of the Displaced Homemaker Fund is to provide assistance to members who, by reason of divorce, illness or death of a spouse, have been forced to enter or return to the job market and lack the skills, or need to improve the skills necessary for employment.

CAVALCADE OF MEMORIES

Memories made tangible by tokens and mementos can be found throughout the halls and offices of the Auxiliary National Headquarters. Since its establishment in 1973, it has served as a reminder of the many achievements of the Auxiliary and its members.

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

The Constitution and Bylaws committee has the charge of recommending changes in the Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules. The national committee also makes recommendations to the departments and units in reference to their Constitution and Bylaws. All recommendations for change should be submitted through the Constitution and Bylaws committee.

It is the responsibility of the unit committee to keep the Unit Constitution and Bylaws current with the national and department amendments, and to help the membership to be aware of and understand the amendments.

FINANCE

The financial structure of a unit is exceedingly important. An adequate budget takes into account the financial needs of various programs of the unit and the income the unit can expect. A close check must be maintained to ensure that the two remain in balance.

LEADERSHIP

The Leadership program is important to each unit, as the unit is only as strong as its leadership. Thus, it is necessary to develop leaders who are knowledgeable in all phases of Auxiliary work and in the Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules of the unit, department and national organization, as well as the guidelines for specific programs. Instruction is available from the organization on how to plan and implement a project from start to finish.

LIASON TO THE CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION

The American Legion Child Welfare foundation was created in 1954

- (1) To contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children and youth through the dissemination of knowledge about new and innovative organizations and their programs designed to benefit youth; and
- (2) To contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children and youth through the dissemination of knowledge already possessed by well-established organizations, to the end that such information can be more adequately used by society.

Serving with the Board of Directors of the Child Welfare Foundation is a liaison committee of three appointed by the National President of the Auxiliary; a liaison committee of three appointed by the National Chapter of the Eight and Forty, and a liaison committee of three appointed by the National Commander of the Sons of The American Legion.

Every year, in mid-October, the foundation Board of Directors meets in Indianapolis, Indiana, to consider grant requests. Our board is authorized to expend whatever funds are available toward achieving its purposes. The foundation makes grants to nonprofit institutions, organizations and agencies that are tax exempt and, in the opinion of our board, have the ability to accomplish our two primary purposes.

The primary sources of foundation funds are contributions from our individual members, as well as, posts, units, squadrons, departments, districts and national contributions from the Legion, Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion.

PAST PRESIDENTS PARLEY

The purpose of the Past Presidents Parley is to keep those who have served as presidents of units, departments and the national organization in active service to the Auxiliary. The care of disabled ex-servicewomen is its special charge. Other activities may be assigned on the department and local levels. To be a member of the parley, one must be a member in good standing in her unit.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Ideally, the Public Relations committee is made up of three members: the chairman, who directs all phases of the program; a vice chairman, who works directly with the press; and a member who works directly with the newspaper, radio and television media. The committee has the responsibility for making the public aware of the image of the Auxiliary. Direct and friendly contact with the media opens many doors. Well-written, informative, and timely articles are important. They are welcomed by the media and will keep the community aware of the activities of the Auxiliary. The Public Relations chairman works closely with every other chairman so special projects receive good advance publicity.

The *Heart of America* Awards were created to recognize talented print and broadcast professionals who make positive contributions to American women, children and families by informing the public about timely issues, by providing valuable or thought-provoking information, or by promoting a better and more positive image of women and children within our society. The Public Relations committee assists in the promotion and judging of these awards.

The Auxiliary is fortunate to have a first-class publication, the *Auxiliary Magazine*, which goes to every senior member at no additional cost. This publication brings up-to-date information about the units and departments to the entire membership.

The Auxiliary was founded for the purpose of assisting veterans and their families, and the families of those who gave their lives for this country. Over the years it has grown, and it continues to be responsive to the needs of those persons.