

The Role of Unit Commissioners in Rescuing, Rebuilding, and Rechartering At-Risk Units: A Case Study of Pack 386

Doctorate of Commissioner Science Project

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Foreword

My Scouting story began when I was six years old, wearing the uncomfortable blaze orange shirt of a Tiger Scout. The Tiger program itself was only a few years old at the time, but it opened a door that would shape my life. I will skip past all the incredible memories that followed, but I will share the reason I chose unit service. For me, it is the most direct way to support Scouting programs and the youth who depend on them. I am especially motivated to invest in struggling units, because I believe every child deserves the chance to experience Scouting as I did. At times in my youth, Scouting provided stability and purpose when little else did, and it is no exaggeration to say that Scouting may very well have saved my life. Just as Scouting shaped my own life, I believe it is our duty as commissioners to ensure that no youth is denied that same opportunity.

Recently, since writing the first draft of this case study, I made the decision to pursue a new professional opportunity and leave the company where I had spent more than half of my life in service. The transition gave me an opportunity to reflect on what I value most in leadership and personal growth. Early in my journey with my new employer, a mentor shared a perspective that reshaped how I view both leadership and service: *Solutions Architects are not the library, but the librarians.*

The more I thought about it, the more I realized how perfectly that applies to unit service. Unit Commissioners do not hold all the answers; they hold the keys to where those answers live. Our value lies in helping others find their way, interpret what they discover, and grow confident in their own capability.

This insight is still fresh for me, and I share it because it marks a turning point in how I approach both my professional and Scouting lives. The best leaders never stop learning, and I believe that the same curiosity that drives professional excellence also deepens the spirit of service. I encourage others to remain open to new perspectives that can renew their sense of purpose and deepen their understanding of what it truly means to serve.

The story of Pack 386 is not mine alone. It belongs to many. I would like to acknowledge the tremendous direct involvement of my fellow commissioners, **Brady Morris, Jim Nipper, and Roger Barnhart**, who worked alongside me to rescue and sustain this unit. I also extend deep appreciation to **Tony Schneeman and Blake Overton**, who stepped forward into the roles of Cubmaster and Committee Chair. Their leadership gave Pack 386 not only survival but new life, and today the pack is thriving because of their dedication.

Finally, this work is dedicated to every commissioner who chooses to stand in the gap for struggling units. May you always find the patience to guide, the courage to step in when needed, and the wisdom to step back when the time is right. Most of all, may your service ensure that no child is ever denied the gift of Scouting. In doing so, commissioners help fulfill the mission of Scouting America: *to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.*

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Introduction

The role of a unit commissioner is to serve as coach, resource, and advocate for healthy Scouting units. Commissioners are called not only to observe and report, but also to intervene when necessary, to connect units to resources, and to guide leaders toward sustainable practices that keep the Scouting program alive in their communities.

Scouting America's mission is *"to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law."* For youth to experience this mission, units must be active, well-led, and stable. When a pack, troop, or crew becomes at risk, the commissioner's role becomes vital.

This paper presents a case study of Pack 386, a Cub Scout pack chartered in Circle Ten Council, serving families in southern Rockwall and northern Kaufman County, Texas. Like many units, Pack 386 was deeply disrupted by the COVID pandemic. Families disengaged, leaders stepped aside, and membership dwindled to only a handful of scouts. By the fall of 2022, the pack faced the real possibility of not rechartering, which would have left a geographic gap in Scouting opportunities for dozens of families and schools in the area.

What followed was not a typical commissioner assignment, but an extraordinary response. Four experienced commissioners temporarily stepped into direct leadership roles to prevent the unit from folding. This was an extraordinary, last-resort intervention to preserve Scouting opportunities. It was, in many ways, an "all-hands" moment for the commissioner corps, similar to a surge effort in a crisis. While not as dramatic as military analogies might suggest, the intensity and urgency of the response set it apart from ordinary commissioner duties.

The methods outlined in this case study reflect the commissioner's journey to help rescue, rebuild, and recharter an at-risk unit. Leadership stabilization, unconventional recruiting, financial stewardship, program planning, resource partnerships, and boundary reestablishment are all examined in detail. Each step is tied back to the truth that unit service exists to ensure Scouting America's mission is delivered to every youth, even when a unit has lost the strength to do so on its own.

Case Study: Pack 386

Background: The At-Risk Unit

For many years, Pack 386 thrived as a healthy Cub Scout pack. However, like many units, the COVID pandemic disrupted its operations. Families disengaged, meetings ceased, and membership steadily dwindled. By the fall of 2022, the pack had shrunk to only a handful of active families. The Cubmaster and Committee Chair both stepped aside, leaving no immediate volunteers to fill their roles.

Allowing any unit to fail without assistance is concerning, but Pack 386 carried an additional distinction: it was the only Cub Scout unit serving the geographical area of southern Rockwall County and northern Kaufman County, Texas. Families in this “gap” would have struggled to participate in regular events at more distant units. In addition, the schools within Pack 386’s territory would have lost direct contact with Scouting; both through program delivery and recruiting efforts.

Several warning signs identified the pack as “at risk”:

- Membership dropped below sustainable levels.
- Meeting frequency had dwindled from weekly to monthly
- Meeting location had moved to the backyard location of the Cubmaster’s residence.
- Unit failed to recruit, both during the fall and continuously.
- Unit Key 3 actively avoided and did not engage with assigned Unit Commissioner.
- Committee meetings were not occurring, and most positions were vacant.
- The chartered organization had limited involvement.
- The annual calendar had collapsed to a few sporadic events.
- Without intervention, the pack would not have rechartered, and local youth would have lost access to Scouting.

Early Trigger: Lack of Parent Involvement

Additionally, a non-line-item factor worthy of special mention was the lack of parent involvement. This became the initial trigger point of concern for the commissioner. As parents withdrew, the remaining unit leaders were forced to take on additional responsibilities to cover gaps left by others vacating their positions. Over time, this created an unsustainable and unreasonable workload. When the time came to identify a new Cubmaster and Committee Chair, it was not simply a matter of filling vacant roles, but also of transitioning away from a culture where two or three individuals were carrying the entire program.

Step 1: Assessing the Situation

The unit commissioner's first responsibility was to gather facts. This involved speaking with the remaining parents (as the previous leaders had stepped aside), reviewing membership data, and contacting the chartered organization representative. A parent meeting was held with all remaining families, representing a total of three active scouts according to membership records.

Although this is a very small number, there was still clear parental interest in keeping the program alive. The challenge was not enthusiasm from the youth, but the absence of adult leadership and organizational structure.

It is important to note that even with few or no active scouts, a decision to disband should not be made prematurely. Typically, such a decision is only considered after a failed fall recruiting season and confirmation that membership numbers are insufficient to recharter. For this reason, Step 1 is best understood as a discovery exercise rather than a go/no-go trigger point.

Step 2: Establishing New Leadership

Securing adult leadership proved to be the most difficult and time-consuming challenge. The commissioner scheduled a parent meeting, explained the urgency of the situation, and emphasized that without a Cubmaster and Committee Chair, the pack could not recharter. Despite this clarity, no parents initially volunteered to take on those roles.

To prevent the unit from folding, four serving unit commissioners temporarily stepped into direct leadership positions. Two filled the roles of Cubmaster and Committee Chair, while two others provided additional program and administrative support. This extraordinary measure kept the program alive long enough for families to see Scouting in action again.

It took nearly four months before parents began to take ownership of responsibilities, and even then the commitments started small. One parent agreed to organize the Blue and Gold banquet, while another offered to run a Pinewood Derby building workshop. After the holiday break in January 2023, another significant relief came when a parent volunteered to serve as Webelos den leader. That role provided much-needed support for the youth who were preparing to transition to Scouts BSA, and it marked the first true step toward restoring a functional leadership structure. These early "yeses," though limited, provided a foothold for building broader involvement.

A useful strategy in these situations is to begin with small, specific requests. Parents who consistently decline broad or open-ended commitments may be more willing to accept a narrowly defined task with a clear beginning and end. Over time, these small commitments can build confidence and lead to larger roles. Commissioners should remind new leaders that *Every Youth Deserves a Trained Leader*. Training not only prepares them for their specific responsibilities but also builds confidence and prevents the burnout that comes when leaders feel overwhelmed or unprepared.

It is also important to recognize the lasting impression created by a unit culture where one or two leaders carried an unsustainable burden. Parents had just witnessed the collapse of leadership when roles became too large, too undefined, and too heavily concentrated. Commissioners must help reshape that narrative. As the saying goes, experience drives belief. By creating new experiences where responsibilities are shared, clearly scoped, and supported, families begin to believe that volunteering in Scouting can be both manageable and rewarding. This cultural shift is critical for long-term sustainability.

At the same time, commissioners must exercise caution not to reinforce the very pattern they are trying to change. In this case, two seasoned unit commissioners stepped into leadership roles only as a temporary intervention to keep the unit alive. While it was necessary in the short term, it must be clearly communicated that this is not normal or healthy for a unit. The goal is never to have commissioners running packs or troops, but to guide parents into leadership roles they can sustain. Falling back into the cycle of overburdened leaders, whether unit-based or commissioner-based, only guarantees future burnout.

 ***Lesson Learned: Even one new leader can create a turning point if the role is visible and meaningful.***

Callout: Commissioner Cautions

When working with at-risk units, commissioners must be mindful not only of what *to do*, but also what *not to do*. The case of Pack 386 illustrates several important warnings:

- **Do not normalize commissioners running units.** Stepping in as Cubmaster, Scoutmaster, or Committee Chair may sometimes be a temporary necessity, but it should never be seen as a long-term solution or an example of “healthy” leadership.
- **Guard against repeating the same unhealthy patterns.** If commissioners take on too much, they risk modeling the very behavior (overburdened leaders, unsustainable workloads) that caused the crisis in the first place.
- **District Commissioners must choose carefully.** Not every commissioner is suited to extraordinary stopgap roles. Selection should favor those with the available time margin, such as retirees or volunteers not already stretched thin.
- **Expect limits.** Even highly capable commissioners with full-time jobs may eventually need to step back. Intervention should be treated as “buying time” until parents step forward, not as an ongoing arrangement.

- **Reinforce the end goal.** The purpose of commissioner intervention is to *transition* the unit to parent-led sustainability. The longer commissioners remain embedded in operational roles, the harder that transition becomes.

✓ ***Lesson Learned: Extraordinary measures buy time, but they are not sustainable. Commissioners must keep the end goal in sight: parent-led leadership.***

Step 3: Recruiting and Retaining Scouts

Recruiting new members was not immediate. By the time commissioners became engaged in late September, both the “Meet the Teacher” night and “School Night for Scouting” opportunities had already passed. With those key recruiting windows missed, the pack turned to a word-of-mouth strategy. Families who remained in the program invited friends and neighbors to join, and parents were encouraged to share their positive experiences.

To further incentivize new membership, the pack used available funds in its treasury to offer full reimbursement of the initial signup fee and to cover annual dues for the first year. This reduced the financial barrier for new families and created a clear, attractive reason to give Scouting a try.

This strategy produced immediate results. Between September and December of 2022, the pack grew from three active scouts to seven, a sufficient increase to complete recharter. The growth, while modest, was critical: without it, the pack would not have survived into the new year.

Formal school-based recruiting did not resume until the following August and September of 2023, when “Meet the Teacher” and “School Night for Scouting” events were once again utilized. By that point, the groundwork laid through word-of-mouth and financial incentives had already stabilized the pack and provided a foundation for sustained growth.

Retention efforts focused on ensuring that scouts and parents had positive, early experiences. Although the program was still rebuilding, every opportunity was taken to celebrate advancement, involve families, and highlight the fun aspects of Scouting. Parents who saw their children engaged and recognized were more likely to remain involved and spread the word further.

✓ ***Lesson Learned: Missing traditional recruiting windows does not end the story; creative incentives and word of mouth can sustain and even grow a unit.***

Recruiting Realities: Shifting Beyond the Conventional

The experience of Pack 386 highlights a larger truth: unconventional recruiting methods are no longer the exception. They are becoming the norm. Word of mouth, creative incentives, and family-to-family invitations often succeed where traditional events alone fall short.

The long-held belief that recruiting can be accomplished primarily through methods common 10 or 15 years ago, such as flyers, classroom talks, and single-night events, is becoming more myth than reality. While those approaches still play a role, they cannot be relied upon as the sole driver of membership growth.

It is important to acknowledge that this shift can create tension between volunteers and paid Scouting professionals. District executives are trained and evaluated with an emphasis on conventional recruiting events. Commissioners and unit leaders may see greater success in informal, grassroots approaches. This observation is not intended to diminish or disrespect the critical role of professionals. It reflects the reality that the recruiting landscape has changed. Commissioners must be prepared to support units in adapting to these new realities.

Table 1: Conventional Recruiting vs. Unconventional Recruiting

Conventional Recruiting	Unconventional Recruiting
Flyers sent home from school	Word of mouth between families
“School Night for Scouting” as the main event	“Kindergarten Roundup”, “Meet the Teacher Night”, other community recruiting events.
Cubmaster or DE gives a classroom talk	Parents invite friends and neighbors to try Scouting
Council-driven schedule	Unit-driven creativity and flexibility
Emphasis on a single recruiting night	Recruiting as an ongoing, year-round effort
Dependent on school access and approval	Independent of school limitations, adaptable to local circumstances

Step 4: Building a Program Calendar

Families rarely commit to a program that has no visible plan. The commissioner volunteers worked with the remaining parents to build a simple, achievable calendar for the remainder of the 2022–2023 program year.

The first step was reestablishing a solid and consistent meeting location at the chartered organization’s church. This stability alone gave families confidence that the pack was

back on track. Because membership was still very low, the unit could not sustain a traditional schedule of weekly den meetings and a monthly pack meeting. Instead, meetings were held every other Wednesday, with a pack meeting scheduled on the fourth occurrence of that cycle, which realistically meant every other month.

To ensure that scouts and families still experienced the high points of Cub Scouting, the leadership team committed to including “keep the promise” events. At a bare minimum, the calendar featured a Blue and Gold banquet, a Pinewood Derby, a spring campout (to make up for the missed fall outing), an Arrow of Light crossover ceremony, and a “rank-up” celebration in May. These cornerstone events embodied the methods and ideals of Scouting America, giving families visible milestones to look forward to, and only succeed when led by adults who know how to deliver the program safely and effectively. *Every Youth Deserves a Trained Leader* is more than a slogan; it is a safeguard that ensures program quality, youth protection, and the promise of Scouting.

This calendar served two purposes. It reassured existing families that Scouting would be consistent again, even if on a reduced schedule, and it became a marketing tool for recruiting new families. The presence of dependable meeting frequency and the promise of fun, meaningful events restored confidence in the program.

 ***Lesson Learned: Dependable frequency, paired with cornerstone events that fulfill the Scouting promise, can stabilize even the smallest unit and demonstrate that the program is alive and worth joining.***

Table 2: Calendar Comparison: Healthy Pack vs. Stabilization Pack

Healthy Pack Calendar	Stabilization Calendar (Pack 386, 2022–2023)
Weekly den meetings	Den meetings every other Wednesday
Monthly pack meetings	Pack meetings every other month (on the fourth meeting cycle)
Regular fall and spring campouts	One spring campout to make up for missed fall camping
Full slate of monthly activities	Focus on “keep the promise” events only
Large leadership team spreads responsibilities	Commissioners temporarily filling Cubmaster and Committee Chair roles, with parents gradually taking on tasks
Program calendar built for growth	Program calendar built for survival and visible stability

Step 4a: Leveraging Resources and Partnerships

One of the most important lessons from Pack 386’s recovery is that commissioners cannot expect a struggling unit to succeed in isolation. When numbers are low and

leadership is thin, “keep the promise” events may not carry the same impact as they would in a larger, well-established pack.

This reality became clear during Pack 386’s Pinewood Derby in early 2023. With only seven scouts participating, the event was undeniably underwhelming compared to a typical derby. However, it was able to happen at all because Pack 386 borrowed a track from Pack 896, a large and well-sustained pack in Rockwall, Texas. Although modest, the derby still delivered the essential thrill of racing and gave the scouts pride in competing on professional-quality equipment.

The partnership with Pack 896 continued with the spring campout. Recognizing that Pack 386 did not have the numbers or leadership depth to run a full-scale campout alone, the commissioners arranged for them to join Pack 896. To ensure compliance with Scouting America’s requirements, a commissioner attended specifically to serve as a qualified BALOO-trained leader for Pack 386. In addition, two-deep leadership was maintained at all times, in accordance with the safeguarding youth training requirements (formerly youth protection training).

Functionally, Pack 386 operated as its own unit while camping in partnership, and the program was delivered in a way that preserved both compliance and integrity. To strengthen coverage, two BALOO-trained leaders from Pack 896 were also registered as multiples on the Pack 386 roster. This arrangement ensured that Pack 386 not only met policy requirements but also benefited from the experience and depth of a strong, established pack.

These experiences highlight the “secret sauce” of unit service: connecting units to resources beyond their immediate reach. Sometimes that means engaging district resources to fill specific needs, such as equipment or training. Other times, it means pairing a struggling pack with a stronger one to deliver shared experiences. By leveraging these connections, commissioners can ensure that even the smallest units “keep the promise” of Scouting while they rebuild.

✔ Lesson Learned: Even when participation is small, commissioners can help at-risk units deliver key program promises by connecting them to district resources and partner packs.

✔ Lesson Learned: Policy compliance is non-negotiable, even for struggling units. Commissioners can help by leveraging partnerships and multiple registrations to ensure both safety and program quality.

For commissioners, the real value often comes not from providing the resource directly, but from knowing where to connect the unit to get what it needs. The examples of the Pinewood Derby track and the spring campout illustrate the point, but many other struggles require the same kind of intervention. See Appendix: Commissioner Quick Reference for a summary of common challenges and the district resources that can help address them.

Step 4b: Moving from Reactive to Proactive Planning

While calendar planning in 2022 was a reactive survival exercise, 2023 marked a turning point. With more families engaged after fall recruiting, the pack began planning a full program year in advance, planning their calendar in July, rather than just filling in events one at a time.

This proactive approach included summer programming that made Pack 386 eligible for the **National Summertime Pack Award**. This recognition showed families that the unit was not only surviving but also thriving enough to meet Scouting America's standards for year-round activity.

 ***Lesson Learned: Recovery begins with reactive planning, but true stability is demonstrated when a unit shifts to proactive program design and earns recognition for consistency.***

Step 5: Restoring Committee Functions

A Cub Scout pack cannot succeed without a functioning committee, but for Pack 386 this was one of the last pieces to come together. Through most of 2023, the pack continued to operate with four commissioners sharing the critical responsibilities needed to keep the unit functioning. Each provided stability in different ways: one serving as acting Cubmaster, another as acting Committee Chair, and the third offering ongoing administrative and program support. Parents gradually began to step in with small, event-specific tasks, but the commissioners' involvement was essential in bridging the leadership gap. While this approach bought time, it was not sustainable in the long term.

Only after the successful fall recruiting season in 2023, largely through Meet the Teacher Night efforts, did the pack have enough families engaged to begin restoring the committee structure. A new Committee Chair was identified late in the year, which marked a turning point.

However, the work was far from easy. In practice, the new Committee Chair initially had to juggle three positions at once: Chair, Treasurer, and Advancement Coordinator. The chair was often the one making runs to the Scout Shop to purchase badges and awards, while also dealing with a bank account that had not transitioned cleanly from the previous leaders. It was not until the spring of 2024 that roles such as Treasurer, Advancement Coordinator, and Secretary became stable and fully functional. One reason for the early burden was the lack of trained leaders ready to step into roles. Commissioners must emphasize training from the beginning, because *Every Youth Deserves a Trained Leader*, and that requires a full committee where every adult understands both their duties and their limits.

This reality demonstrates that restoring committee functions is not a quick-fix approach. For a time, it required one leader with a strong heart for Scouting and a spirit of servant leadership to do whatever was necessary to keep the pack moving forward.

Commissioners must prepare units for the possibility that stability may take months, and that the transition can be inconvenient and demanding.

Callout: The Treasury Factor

Pack 386 had an unusual advantage during its recovery: a healthy treasury balance. This allowed the unit to offer incentives such as reimbursed registration fees and covered dues, and to deliver events without the immediate pressure of fundraising. Not every pack will have this benefit, and commissioners should avoid assuming that fundraising is the first or only solution for an at-risk unit.

When funds are low, commissioners can guide units toward:

- **Right-sizing the program** to available resources so the pack does not overextend.
- **Seeking district or council assistance** for specific needs (equipment loans, camperships, program grants).
- **Exploring alternative fundraisers** beyond traditional popcorn sales, which can be difficult to execute in small or struggling units.
- **Prioritizing experiences over extras**, ensuring scouts still receive the core program even if budgets are lean.

Reintroducing Dues and Financial Support

As Pack 386 regained stability, it was necessary to reintroduce reasonable dues to cover program costs. This step was important for long-term sustainability but had to be done carefully so as not to turn new families away. Commissioners and unit leaders should remember that a fresh start in Cub Scouting can represent a significant financial investment for families once uniforms, books, and event costs are included.

When reintroducing dues, commissioners can help units:

- **Set amounts at a reasonable level** that balance program needs with family affordability.
- **Phase dues back in gradually**, especially if treasury reserves can cover costs for a short period.
- **Communicate clearly** what dues cover, so parents see direct value (awards, program materials, activities).

It is equally important to highlight financial aid options. Families should know about:

- **Friends of Scouting hardship funds**, which may cover registration or camp fees.
- **District or council financial aid programs**, often available but not always well-publicized.
- **Support from the chartered organization**, which in some cases can assist families directly.

By making financial support visible, commissioners and leaders ensure that no family is excluded from Scouting because of cost.

✓ ***Lesson Learned: A functioning committee may take time to establish, but even a small and partially staffed team creates the accountability and shared responsibility necessary for sustainability.***

✓ ***Lesson Learned: Finances can make or break a struggling unit. Treasury strength, dues policies, and financial aid all require careful planning so families experience Scouting as accessible rather than overwhelming.***

Step 6: Reestablishing Commissioner Boundaries

As Pack 386 regained stability, it became important for commissioners to transition back into their proper advisory role. While extraordinary measures had been necessary in 2022 and 2023 to keep the unit alive, continuing in those roles would have blurred the lines between unit service and unit leadership.

Commissioners could do so confidently only once they knew that trained leaders were in place and capable of carrying the unit forward. This reflects the commissioner's ultimate responsibility: ensuring that *Every Youth Deserves a Trained Leader* is not just a slogan but a reality in every unit.

This transition required intentional steps. The commissioners who had stepped into leadership roles, including those serving as acting Committee Chair and Cubmaster, were formally removed as signatories on the pack's bank account once new leaders were in place. The remaining two commissioners who had supported program and administrative functions were never signatories, so this administrative change formally ensured all financial and operational authority was returned to the unit itself.

In addition, commissioners gradually withdrew from day-to-day communication channels, such as the unit's GroupMe chat. By stepping back from operational conversations, commissioners made it clear that parents and unit leaders were now responsible for managing the program. Commissioners remained available for coaching and support but no longer functioned as active participants in unit operations.

Callout: Don't Forget Custodial Accounts

Some units also have custodial accounts managed at the council level. These accounts are less visible than local bank accounts but can contain unit funds or activity balances. As part of the transition, commissioners should ensure that custodial accounts are updated to

reflect current unit leaders, not acting commissioners. This step prevents future confusion and ensures that financial authority rests with the proper volunteers.

Callout: Step-Back Signals for Commissioners

A commissioner can begin to step back when the following signs are present:

- New leaders are listed as bank and custodial account signatories.
- Committee meetings are occurring regularly, with minutes and clear roles.
- Parents and leaders are actively running communications (e.g., GroupMe, email, Scoutbook).
- A functional program calendar is being planned and executed by the unit itself.
- Key leader transitions (Cubmaster, Committee Chair) have stabilized.
- Parents are solving problems internally, with commissioners consulted only for advice or resources.

 ***Lesson Learned: Commissioners must know when to step back. Reestablishing boundaries restores proper roles, builds confidence in parent leadership, and prevents long-term dependence on commissioner intervention.***

Step 7: Steady-State Commissioner Involvement

Once a unit has stabilized, the commissioner's role shifts from intervention to steady-state support. For a previously at-risk unit, this involvement should strike a balance: present enough to monitor health and provide encouragement, but distant enough to preserve unit autonomy and leader confidence.

What steady-state looks like:

- **Regular check-ins:** Monthly or quarterly touchpoints with the Committee Chair and Cubmaster to ask how things are going and to listen for early warning signs.
- **Attendance at key events:** Showing up occasionally at pack meetings, Blue and Gold banquets, or crossover ceremonies as a supportive presence, not an organizer.
- **Charter renewal guidance:** Assisting with recharter paperwork annually, ensuring leader training and youth protection requirements are met, without doing the work for the unit.
- **Problem-solving partner:** Being available when leaders face new challenges (e.g., a sudden Cubmaster resignation or recruiting struggle), but letting the unit attempt solutions first.

- **Encouragement and recognition:** Reinforcing positive progress by congratulating leaders, nominating them for awards when appropriate, and celebrating successes with the district team.
- **Ongoing resource connector:** Continuing to point the unit toward district and council resources, but not being the first responder for every need.

The critical difference is that in steady state, commissioners serve primarily as **mentors and connectors**, not as operators. A previously at-risk unit may always need a little more attention than a never-struggling pack, but the commissioner's posture is one of confidence in the leaders' ability to sustain themselves.

✓ **Lesson Learned:** *A healthy unit still needs commissioner care, but in a steady-state role that emphasizes encouragement, accountability, and connection rather than hands-on leadership.*

Analysis of Successes and Challenges

The recovery of Pack 386 was marked by both successes that can be modeled and challenges that must be understood as part of any realistic commissioner strategy.

Successes

- **Extraordinary Commissioner Involvement:** The willingness of four commissioners to step directly into leadership roles provided the critical bridge that prevented the unit from folding. While not typical or sustainable, this intervention demonstrated the flexibility and dedication commissioners can bring to preserving Scouting opportunities.
- **Parent Engagement Through Small Wins:** Early commitments, such as a parent planning the Blue and Gold banquet or running a Pinewood Derby workshop, created momentum. These small “yeses” led to larger roles over time, including a new den leader in early 2023 and a fully staffed committee by spring 2024.
- **Unconventional Recruiting:** Word-of-mouth incentives in late 2022 doubled membership from three to seven scouts by recharter, proving that creativity can be as effective as traditional recruiting. Later, leveraging school events and district resources produced even stronger growth.
- **Program Calendar as a Stabilizer:** Reestablishing a consistent meeting place at the chartered organization, coupled with “keep the promise” events, reassured families that Scouting was still alive. By 2023, proactive planning even earned the National Summertime Pack Award.
- **Resource Partnerships:** Borrowing a Pinewood Derby track from a neighboring pack and pairing for a spring campout allowed Pack 386 to deliver meaningful experiences despite limited size and resources.

- **Financial Cushion:** An unusually strong treasury enabled the unit to cover dues and incentivize membership during its most fragile period, buying critical time for recovery.

Challenges

- **Slow Committee Formation:** The committee did not stabilize until the end of 2023, and one leader had to serve simultaneously as Committee Chair, Treasurer, and Advancement Coordinator for months. Bank accounts and advancement supply runs often fell to this one person, underscoring the inconvenience and burden involved in rebuilding.
- **Boundary Blurring:** The commissioners' deep involvement, while necessary, created a risk of over-identification with unit operations. It required intentional steps such as removing commissioners from bank accounts and communication platforms to restore proper roles and prevent long-term dependence.
- **Financial Realities:** Although Pack 386 had a treasury advantage, most at-risk units do not. Reintroducing dues in a way that balanced sustainability with affordability was challenging, and leaders had to be intentional about communicating value and connecting families to financial aid resources.
- **Unconventional Recruiting as the New Normal:** The reliance on nontraditional methods highlighted a growing reality. Conventional recruiting strategies alone are no longer sufficient, and this remains a point of tension between volunteers and professional staff. Commissioners must be prepared to coach units toward creativity without undermining the broader recruiting framework.
- **Time and Persistence:** Perhaps the greatest challenge was the sheer length of the recovery process. From fall 2022 to spring 2024, commissioners and families had to invest more than 18 months of effort before stability truly took hold. There were no quick fixes, only patient steps forward.

✓ **Lesson Learned:** *Success in rescuing an at-risk unit depends on extraordinary commissioner commitment, creative approaches to recruiting and programming, and patient cultivation of leadership. At the same time, commissioners must set realistic expectations. Recovery is not fast or easy, and it often requires months of inconvenience and sacrifice before sustainable health is achieved. Long-term sustainability depends on building a broader culture of shared responsibility among parents.*

Conclusion

The recovery of Pack 386 demonstrates both the challenges and the possibilities of unit service. What began as an at-risk unit with only three scouts, no leadership, and no visible future became, over time, a functioning Cub Scout pack with active families, a working committee, a reliable program calendar, and a pathway toward sustainability. This turnaround was not quick, simple, or easy. It required commissioners to step into

extraordinary roles, connect the unit with district and partner resources, and patiently guide parents to take ownership of the program.

Equally important, the story of Pack 386 shows that success requires knowing when to step back. Removing commissioners from bank accounts, reestablishing leader-managed communications, and restoring operational autonomy were just as critical as the early interventions. The final measure of success is not whether commissioners kept the unit alive, but whether families are now able to lead with confidence while commissioners serve in a supportive, steady-state role.

Because of the persistence of the commissioners and, most importantly, the commitment of new pack leadership, Pack 386 is now thriving with more than 40 scouts enrolled. This growth represents not only a successful rescue but also a vibrant future for families in southern Rockwall and northern Kaufman Counties, Texas.

The journey of Pack 386 is a testament that, with support, even struggling units can thrive again. Every Youth Deserves a Trained Leader, and when commissioners ensure that standard, they ensure that Scouting remains strong for future generations.

Scouting America's mission is *“to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.”* That mission frames every step taken in this case study. From leadership stabilization, to unconventional recruiting, to financial stewardship, program delivery, and boundary setting, all methods here aimed to ensure that youth in Pack 386 and the surrounding area continue to benefit from what Scouting has always promised.

For commissioners, the methods outlined here reinforce key truths:

- Units rarely recover alone. Commissioners must be willing to engage deeply when the situation demands it.
- Recovery is not linear or quick. It takes months or years of persistence, inconvenience, and servant leadership.
- Creative approaches, from unconventional recruiting to resource-sharing partnerships, are often essential.
- Boundaries must eventually be reestablished. The commissioner's goal is not to run the unit but to return to an advisory role.
- A steady-state commissioner role, marked by encouragement, accountability, and connection, ensures that stability becomes long-term success.

✓ Lesson Learned: *The ultimate task of unit service is to safeguard Scouting America's mission. Rescue and rebuilding may begin with extraordinary measures, but true success occurs when a unit stands on its own. Pack 386 now stands as proof, serving more than 40 scouts who are actively living out the values of the Scout Oath and Law.*

Appendix: Commissioner Quick Reference

When to Engage District and Community Resources

A commissioner's value is not only in coaching and advising, but also in connecting at-risk units to the resources they cannot access alone. Use this guide as a quick reference when you see signs of struggle.

Unit Struggle / Use Case	Why It Matters	Who / What to Engage
Low membership after missing fall recruiting	Without new scouts, the unit risks folding at recharter	District Executive for school access, other units for joint recruiting events, district membership committee
No Pinewood Derby track or equipment	Signature program event cannot be delivered	Neighboring pack with equipment, district activities chair, council service center lending library (if available)
Unit cannot meet safeguarding/training requirements (e.g., no BALOO)	Program activities (like campouts) cannot legally or safely occur	District training chair, neighboring packs to register multiple leaders, council training team
Parents unwilling to take on large leadership roles	Risk of burnout on a small group of volunteers	Commissioner coaching with small asks, online or in-person leader training, district key 3 engagement
No stable meeting place	Inconsistent program delivery undermines family confidence	Chartered organization facilities, district facilities chair, local community centers, churches, schools
Weak program calendar	Families leave when they cannot see what the unit will offer	Other units for shared events, district roundtable program helps, district activities calendar
Committee non-functioning	No financial accountability, advancement tracking, or shared decision-making	District committee trainers, unit service resources, mentoring from strong committees in nearby units
Conflict between leaders and chartered organization	Can stall progress or end in charter loss	District Commissioner mediation, District Key 3, council relationships committee

Commissioner's Reminder: Your role is not to do everything, but to connect units to the people, training, and resources that can. A small, timely intervention can prevent burnout, preserve compliance, and keep a unit on the path to recharter.

Appendix: Financial Aid Options for Cub Scout Families

Helping Families Manage the Cost of Scouting

A fresh start in Cub Scouting can be a significant financial investment for families. Uniforms, handbooks, dues, and event fees all add up quickly. Commissioners and unit leaders can ease this burden by making families aware of financial aid options that may be available through Scouting America and local partners.

Aid Option	What It Covers	How to Access
Friends of Scouting Hardship Funds	Registration fees, annual dues, sometimes camp fees	Request through District Executive or Council office
Council Financial Aid Programs	Camperships, activity scholarships, partial fee coverage	Applications typically available on council website or through council program office
District Assistance	Case-by-case help for uniforms, books, or event fees	Contact District Key 3 (District Chair, Commissioner, or DE)
Chartered Organization Support	Unit-level help for dues or activity costs	Ask chartered organization representative if assistance programs exist
Community Resources	General youth program support (e.g., United Way, civic clubs)	District or council partnerships, or local community referral

Commissioner's Reminder: Cost should never be the reason a child cannot participate in Scouting. Always ask district and council leadership about aid options, and make sure new families know help is available.