No Brownie Points

Scouts make girl with HIV pout

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Nine troops, two months and a barrage of national media is what it took for one 8-year-old to find a Brownie troop that would accept her—HIV and all. The Brownies, a program of the Girl Scouts of America, pride themselves on fostering “sensitivity to others and respect for their needs, feelings and rights.” But this was not quite Quashawn Donovan’s experience.

Dianne Donovan was up-front about her wannabe-Brownie daughter’s HIV status with New York state’s Adirondack Girl Scout Council, and said officials responded enthusiastically. Initially, several local troop leaders showed interest in adding Quashawn to their ranks, but as each one found out she had HIV, the offers vanished faster than a box of Girl Scout cookies. “The rejections came from a lack of HIV education. But the Girl Scouts didn’t realize who they were messing with,” said Donovan, founder of Positively Kids, an advocacy group for kids with HIV.

After Donovan alerted the media, the council’s top brass said it didn’t view the Brownie about-face as a case of HIV discrimination. According to executive director Kit Huggard, the refusal was simply a space issue: “Quashawn was on a waiting list, like 30 other girls.” The tenacious trooper finally made the cut in December when Brownie leader James Caligiuri, a nurse, welcomed her into his pack.

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