

On-Line Meetings

by Heather Goacher – Alberta Lones

To have your Unit do an online meeting using an instant messaging program there is a choice of several programs: ICQ, IRC, MSN or compatible, yahoo chat, and others.

I have done several meetings/ceremonies using MSN or compatible program. The girls had a great time and the only things slowing us down were their ability to read and type. Many girls in Guiding are very familiar with at least one of these programs and often use them to chat after school/holidays with their friends.

If you are using Windows you already have a free program to chat – **Windows Messenger** lets you instantly communicate with friends and family all around the world from your computer, using text chat and even voice and video. Windows Messenger gives you control over who you talk to and when by letting you block certain users, view the typing status of buddies, and control who adds you to their contact list. Many parents really like this as they're not computer savy and do not like their girls downloading and installing programs.

Or you can also download **MSN** for free and is easy to install - - <http://www.imagine-msn.com/messenger/default2.aspx?locale=en-us>. It does the same as Windows messenger with lots of added bells and whistles - like adding your photo or a graphic for others to see.

If you use Linux there are several programs that are also compatible with MSN and Windows Messenger - works similarly and they have lots of bells and whistles. I use **Kopete**.

I set the date and time and planned the meeting:

1st meeting was Feb so we had Thinking Day ceremony and activities

2nd meeting was March and we had a Lady BP ceremony and advancement with everyone taking part.

3rd meeting was April and we did program work for 2.5 hrs that passed very quickly for me and the girls.

Using MSN, messenger or kopete worked well as each member had to be invited into the chat they couldn't just pop in like you can do in IRC. Leaving the main chat window open, I opened separate chat windows for each program activity, and invited just those girls working on that activity. The girls had to be patient for a few minutes while I opened each chat and set those girls up with their activity and also if they needed my input/help as I was jumping back and forth between chats helping each group - and some needed more than others depending on their age and activity. The girls were all very patient and we were able to cover a lot of program for each girl.

They all agreed they would like more monthly meetings for ceremonies, meetings, etc. There is a lot of planning for the Guider - - besides as always planning more than you can do just in case - - I found that it was best to be very detailed in the activities you were assigning - some just didn't work for an online meeting - have lots of resources ready (URL's, info you got from other bks etc already to just copy and paste into the chat, etc. I had lots of papers on my desk and computer lined up in order and ready to use - I did use most - so much easier than trying to think of things at the last moment or type everything in. I also kept a detailed list of who was doing what, what challenges they covered etc so at the end of the meeting I could let them all know. At the end of the meeting I called all the girls back into the main chat window where we had a closing - sometimes one I did, sometimes one a group prepared during the meeting chat.

I think that this is a great additional tool for Lones to use to spice up the program and activities we can offer them. I did this with both my Lone Guides and Pathfinders - and they liked the idea of a bridging meeting which makes it less time consuming for me in that I only have to attend one meeting - though planning for activities for both branches.