

## **How Girlguiding helped me find my path**

Hello! I wanted to firstly introduce myself, I'm Danielle! - I'm a Rainbow leader and I'm currently working towards my Queens Guide Award! My Girlguiding journey began in November 2020 when I joined one of my local Rainbow units in Cumbria South as a new Leader in Training.

In early 2020, I was in my final year of university studying towards a BA in Theatre Design. Originally my post-undergraduate goal was to eventually head to a university in America to study a masters degree in 'Themed Entertainment Design', which would hopefully lead to a career designing theme parks (I wanted to work for Disney!).

University is a different experience for everyone, for me, I was a very quiet person, I struggled with my mental health, especially with the anxiety around public speaking (a.k.a class presentations!) and living away from home, I didn't have a lot of confidence in myself and I had created this comfort zone growing up that I really did not like stepping out of!

When Covid-19 hit, I moved back home with my parents to finish my course. At this time I needed to start looking at what my options were for after I graduated. Due to the pandemic, I decided to apply to the University of Cumbria for my masters degree, with hopes that after everything was 'back to normal', I could actually head off to America to study the Themed Entertainment Design Course.

After being accepted onto my masters degree, I knew that I wanted to do something else alongside my studies, this is where I decided to restart my Girlguiding journey. I had grown up going to Brownies and Guides, I loved my time in Girlguiding when I was younger so I was really keen to get back involved!

I sent in my volunteer application and I heard back within the week - One of our local units needed a volunteer for a Rainbows unit. I hadn't gone to Rainbows when I was little and at that time I had no idea what I was about to get myself involved in and it felt very outside of that comfort zone I'd built, but I agreed that I would do it! (and I am so glad I did!!)

I had my first meeting with the Rainbows over Zoom, I had both parents and rainbows in front of me on my screen and I remember feeling so much anxiety. Over the next few weeks I learnt the Rainbow 'Hello' and 'Goodbye' songs but was too anxious to actually sing and I left it to the other leaders whilst I mimed and did the hand movements. I remember running an activity over Zoom for the first time and I was trying so hard not to shake from nerves whilst everyone watched me speak!

Over time I finally found my feet and by that time it was time to start back with outdoor meetings. I met all the Rainbows in person for the first time and they were absolutely amazing! Over time, I had found my confidence to join in and sing with the rest of the group. I loved running activities, I finally felt confident to talk in front of a group and felt much more confident in myself outside of Guiding meetings too! At this point I knew I had fallen in love with being a leader with Girlguiding and working with young people!

Alongside University and Girlguiding, I had a Saturday job at a local cafe - During one of my November shifts I got talking to a customer who I hadn't met before (we had a lot of regulars!), he was working from the cafe and looked quite stressed, I plucked up the nerves and asked if they were okay - they explained that they were the Youth Group Leader for a local charity who run a youth group in town for young people with disabilities, they were short staffed and were in need of some help. I replied something along the lines of 'If you need any help, I have some childcare experience with Girlguiding, I'm happy to come and volunteer until you find someone permanent'.

I thought I was just agreeing to a month or two of more volunteer work, I did not realise that this one interaction would actually change my entire life around! In the January, I began working with the charity on the young people's team and I absolutely loved it. I knew this is now what I wanted to do as a career!

Over the year I graduated from my masters degree, I took over as the Youth Group Leader, I finally feel so much more confident in what I do and my mental health is in a much healthier place! Not only did Girlguiding allow me to grow the confidence I needed to start that initial conversation with the customer but it also gave me the experience and love for working with young people and I now have a job that I adore!

I still love to design but I've definitely found myself whilst working with young people and I wouldn't change it for the world! Looking back to my pre-Guiding self, I've realised how much pressure I was putting myself under and just how far I have grown as a person whilst Guiding! - Going into 2023, I'm now a leader at my local Brownies and Guides unit and I'm starting the process to open my own Rainbows unit in April as well as working towards my Queens Guide Award!