

Last year, in the midst of a planning meeting, I found myself agreeing to take my Brownie unit to 'Magic and Mayhem', held at Guiding activity centers around the country. Much to my surprise, the next words out of my mouth were 'Why don't I make it a joint event with the Rainbows?!' Back home afterwards it began to dawn on me just what I had agreed to do. Although in the past I have been on many Guiding trips, never before had I been in charge of taking a unit and now here I was doing all the organising for taking not one, but two units and a baby to a large scale event.

Before I scare you all off and you decide never to take your unit anywhere ever again, I would like to say that this has been, overall, one of my most rewarding experiences in Guiding so far. It was so rewarding to see the girls enjoying challenges throughout the day and achieving things I wouldn't have thought they could.

### **Before you book**

If you are thinking "This sounds great Esther, I want to take my unit!" but don't know where to start, don't worry - I am here to help. Often, you will find out about large-scale events through national or local Guiding newsletters, but you can also check your region or county websites or, if you're feeling really adventurous, the world center websites.

Most years there are a wide range of large-scale events run by Girlguiding and you can find something you think your unit would enjoy and is suitable for their age. For example, this year Girlguiding Midlands have a theme park day for Brownies, camp for Guides and Rangers, and a Rainbow farm day amongst others. When choosing an event it's important to consider not just what the event is, but also cost, location (would parents drop off or would there be extra cost associated with a bus or train), and timing - there's no point organising a trip the same day as half the unit have a school summer fair.

Once you've decided on the event it's time to tell the parents to see if you have enough girls wanting to go. For every event you will need consent forms for participants (and you may need health forms too) and these are also a good way to communicate details of the event to parents. When giving details here are some of the things I find it useful to consider:

- How much does the trip cost? Do you need to add to the basic cost you are being charged to allow for transport, the cost of leaders attending, or the purchase of badges?
- Where is the event and how are they expected to get there?
- Date and time - check, double check and triple check this!
- How is it going to be easiest for people to pay? Would some benefit from a payment plan or applying for a grant?
- When do you need the consent form and payment? I make this a bit before the deadline for booking places to allow for people returning them late.
- And most importantly... how can you get the girls excited about the event? What can you write that is going to make them want to go as much as you?

Now you've collected the consent forms and payments you have a clear idea of how many want to attend so you need to make sure you have enough adults. Ratios can be checked on the Guiding website but if you're short of adults you can always ask:

- Leaders in other units
- Parent volunteers
- Trefoil Guild
- Adults in Guiding that aren't attached to a unit

You may also need extra adults if you have members with additional needs or even just lots of little ones that will need many toilet trips (we made over 15 trips on our day out)!

### **Booking**

Time to book! Make sure you have all the money collected and information you need ready to pay for the event. Don't be like me and leave it close to the deadline to book - what should

have been easy was turned into a chain of emails to parents organising a change of dates and times as spaces on the original day were already full.

Another important thing to organise is your home contact. This is somebody who does not go on the trip but has the emergency contacts for everyone going and can contact them. As well as being used in emergencies they are also useful things change on the day e.g. a transport delay so that you aren't trying to phone parents whilst also looking after 20 girls.

### **Getting ready to Go**

What you need for the event depends on what it is and what the weather is expected to be like but things worth considering are:

- Spare uniform (especially for rainbows)
- First aid kit
- Snacks for everyone
- Sick bags

It's also a good idea to send an email to parents a few days before the trip to remind them what they need to bring, timings, etc.

The morning before the event is the time I choose to panic! Have I got everything I need? Have I left enough time to get there? What if it rains all day and every single rainbow has forgotten their coat?! This is why I like to make a list and get as much as possible ready the night before so I can be confident I haven't forgotten anything too important.

### **At the event**

This is the bit you've all been waiting for! The fun bit! We had a fantastic day at Magic and Mayhem with crafts, magicians, circus skills, bouncy castles and all sorts of adventurous activities (see the photo of me up a tree for proof of adventurousness). Despite it being incredibly hot we enjoyed being with other Rainbows and Brownies, trying new activities and, of course, eating ice lollies. Quotes like 'This is the best day ever!' and seeing girls' smiles as they enjoy new activities and achieve new things makes it more than worth all the hard work you've done to get everyone there. The highlight for us was watching every single one of our Rainbows and Brownies attempt the tree climb and feeling proud of trying their best.

### **Going home**

The activities are over - the end is in sight. You wave and smile as the last participant walks happily away then turn around and breathe out. What now? It's all over. Well not quite. If you're not organising the event there probably isn't a huge amount of clearing up you need to do but you need to make sure that any rubbish in your drop off/pick up area is picked up and that you have all your bags (you don't want have to report a data breach for leaving consent forms laying around). The other important thing to do is to stand down your home contact by letting them know that everyone has been collected. Then it's time to think about yourself, take one more trip to the place you seem to have spent most of the day (the toilets) and go home. I am a big advocate for having a takeaway dinner after a trip and if you have the energy, this could be a nice thing to do with your other leaders before you all collapse into bed.



**The next day**

After a well deserved rest, you wake up the next day feeling refreshed and recovered. Any little tiffs, grumbles and groans of the day before fade to insignificance and you are left with warm memories of exciting activities, happy girls and challenges faced. This is the time at which I like to share photos and thoughts about the day with parents, making sure I include any special moments and things I was particularly proud of. For example, one girl was very brave when her hair got caught in velcro and another impressed an instructor so much with her climbing skills that they called the event organiser to look. These are things that the girls may not think of telling their parents but they might appreciate knowing. Before sending photos I always double check photo permissions and look at each photo to make sure I have not captured anyone without permission. After that, it's off to the shredder to get rid of consent forms and think about what our next adventure could be!