

Tomorrow's Girl Guides... today

A message to all Girl Guide Members from the Girl Guides Australia National Leadership Team:

- *Robinette Emonson, Chief Commissioner Girl Guides Australia and Chair of the Board*
- *Susan Campbell, Assistant Chief Commissioner*
- *Miranda Cummings, Assistant Chief Commissioner*
- *Kit McMahon, CEO*

January 2016.

We do great work

For over 100 years Girl Guides has been doing great work: locally, across our vast continent and across the World. With ten million members in 146 countries, Girl Guides Australia is a part of the WAGGGS, the largest organization for girls and young woman in the world. It's something to be very proud of and something not to be taken for granted.

Our program delivers. It *does* empower, it *does* build resilience, it *does* provide girls with the space to know who they are and discover their voice. Our Girl Guides find themselves making incredible contributions to our community, and we regularly meet women in the leadership of industry and society who proudly say that they were a Girl Guide.

We know that what we do is unique. No one can do non-formal experiential and girl led learning to girls and young women like us. NO ONE.

Our volunteers are passionate, skilled and incredibly committed. Their desire to make a difference is embodied in the work they do, be it managing a district or region, running a unit, raising funds through a Trefoil Guild, OB-PS society or Friends of Group, planning a camp or outdoor adventure, being on a Board or training others.

We value our volunteers and continually strive to improve the volunteering experience for our members. We hear you and appreciate both the joys and challenges that go with belonging to Girl Guides.

Reality Check

One could be forgiven for thinking that all is well in Guide land. Unfortunately this is not our reality. We are reaching fewer and fewer girls and young woman. In spite of the great program, the amazing opportunities we offer, and 3000 committed and passionate volunteers, we cannot sustain nor grow our movement. We are at the threshold of our capacity. We can't stretch anymore.

We are about to speak of issues that face the organisation (the engine if you like) of Guiding in Australia: that infrastructure that sits behind what you do and supports you and your work.

For some of you, what we are about to say may be a surprise. It may be far removed from your week-to-week experience of supporting girls in the community. For others, what we are about to say may be tiring because you have heard it all before and it seems that nothing ever changes, or because, well, the sky hasn't fallen. We ask you to listen to three leaders of the national organisation who have some real concerns about our beloved movement.

Again, we say to all of you, we are at the threshold of our capacity and we can't stretch anymore. So what are the issues that we are concerned about?

Our current National structure, which includes the seven State Member Organisations and Girl Guides Australia, creates duplication, places major constraints on our resources and limits the talent and skills in our organisation from being accessed by all. We have limited our ability to respond to changing community needs because we are too busy making sure that the eight separate engines are being 'fed'. Rather than making sure that we have the right person in the right places at the right time, our people wear three or four different hats, positions are left unfilled, and individuals are simply 'burnt out'. You see it. We see it. Each of our eight organisation are living with it.

In spite of the tireless energy of our amazing volunteers, we can't ask any more of you. We have to change the way we understand volunteering, the way our organisation uses volunteers and our expectations of volunteers. We can no longer continue to hold onto our outdated ways of work, our cumbersome structures and our duplication of roles and responsibilities across the country.

We can no longer hide behind the excuse of, "it's the Guiding way", "it has got us this far" or "my unit, district or region is OK". We must do this in a way that doesn't compromise our mission, our vision, or our pride of being a part of the largest movement for girls and young women in the world.

There would be no one amongst us who would sit back and let Girl Guiding disappear from the Australian landscape. We believe in the power of what we do too much.

We are faced with a real choice: to embrace innovation and change in order to build a sustainable and growing organization, or not to exist at all. Barack Obama said in a 2008 speech “If we think that we can secure our future by just talking tough, without acting tough and smart, then we misunderstand this moment and miss its opportunities”.

Our rich traditions and heritage will all be for naught if we do not see this moment for what it is: a burning platform for change to better utilise our capacity and our capability to be more responsive, more girl-led, provide more opportunity and create a better world. Change won't happen tomorrow, but if we work together it will happen.

Plan for Change

The understanding of these risks and the vision for a bold tomorrow for Australian Guiding is at the heart of the Girl Guides Australia Strategic Plan. This is a plan that has the support of all State Girl Guiding Organisation. It holds that our mission and vision for the future will not be met unless:

1. We provide relevant, innovative, flexible and fund programs for girls and young women;
2. We deliver high quality volunteering experiences to the Australian Community; and
3. We are an effective, efficient and productive movement.

Over the next 12 months you will start to hear about some of the reform work that GGA and the eight state-based organisations are undertaking;

- adapting and growing our Australian Guiding Program;
- making a more transparent, relevant and consistent Adult Awards system;
- creating better policy and procedures that reduce the paper work burden; and
- taking a good hard long look at our national operating model to release more of our capability into the field and be more agile, relevant and responsive.

This is a significant program of reform that we invite every single one of you to be a part of and understand.

Tomorrow's Girl Guides are depending on us - each one of us - to ensure the future of our Movement so that they too can be inspired and empowered to grow into confident, self-respecting, responsible community members.

For further enquires please contact the CEO Kit McMahon on 02 9311 8000.