



Empowering girls through girl led Guiding

A story from the inner city | Holly Bracken

If you talk to Holly Bracken about being a Leader for a Guide Unit in inner city Melbourne, you very quickly become aware of what drives her passion and dedication for Australian Guiding.

For Holly, the Guiding Journey started in rural Tasmania when she was seven and for her it was the opportunity to “practice independence”. Holly recalls clearly the trust that was placed in her at an early age and how it empowered her as a girl and young woman.

“The ability to empower girls and young women is what keeps me leading”

This keen understanding of the powerful effects of trust in young women, is what directs her work today as a Unit Leader at 1st City of Yarra Unit in North Fitzroy Melbourne.

“I love taking my Unit camping and watching them go through a set of challenges. Seeing the girls feel proud of their achievements, and themselves is great!”

On working with girls and young women, Holly describes how “Girl Led Guiding” in Australia works in practice. “We let the girls develop their own program. They decide what they want to run and we are there to support them.”

The benefits of this are clear for Holly and her team: “You see young women sorting their problems out for themselves and negotiate challenges.



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They may become frustrated with each other but they work it out with smiles and develop those key life skills for living in a community.”

“It is about learning the value of community and the skills required to live in a community. To see other people’s point of view. How to get along and bite your tongue. When to stand up for yourself, and when to choose your battles.”

The experiences that Holly and the team of Unit leaders at 1st City of Yarra offer their Guides is all about empowerment – something that Holly notes that in her area, is needed for young women and girls to shine. A teacher in training, Holly notes that many girls and young women today lead very busy lives.

“The high school and late primary school years for many of our girls are a time of great change, of great stress with all the growing up that occurs. We try to make our Unit a refuge, a constant in their lives and provide an environment where they can be themselves and forge long term friendships.”

“We will go to a camp, and the girls will think that they can’t do an activity or a task. It is hard to let them go and not interfere. But when the girls get there, and feel so proud of doing something themselves – keeping dry on camp, feeding themselves, completing a hike – you are seeing them grow.”

“Look we are not perfect, but what we try to do is provide a space where they can be capable. We make the assumption that the girls do know what to do, and that as leaders, we don’t have to know all the answers. As a Unit we operate on the knowledge that together we can work it out.”

“I find that if kids are told that they can’t do things, then how can they be their best? That’s what we try to do in Girl Guides, provide an environment where they can be their best.”

For Holly and her team, this work of developing the next generation of leaders is all about living the Girl Guide Promise and Law. “It is about “being your best”. Holly notes that “the current view that I find is that there is an assumption that “kids can’t”. Holly acknowledges that she works with girls and young women who are growing and learning about the world.

However, “this doesn’t mean that we assume that children and young people can’t do things – you should assume that “kids can”.



“Having first hand knowledge of Holly and her Unit, you can see the passion and engagement that Holly brings to each meeting,” says Wendy Lewis, CEO of Girl Guides Victoria. “The girls are stimulated, enthusiastic and challenged and demonstrate a fantastic example of Guiding in action.”

After seven years of being a leader, Holly offers this advice: “It is important to realise that girls are capable and that the success of a Unit is on everybody’s shoulders – girls, Unit, parents and district. Good Units thrive when you are all in it together and that means letting go of the control.”

At the moment, Holly relishes her role as a leader and a newly appointed Learning Partner and looks forward to other possible roles in Guiding in the future. “Working as a Leader of Adults interests me, but not at the moment ...”

Holly’s passion for Girl Guides and first hand knowledge of the benefits of what it can provide to the girls and young women of Australia are clearly evident. She describes herself as a “first rate recruiter” for the organisation. “I would definitely recommend it to anyone considering getting involved. I talk to lots of parents about the profound and positive impact that it has on girls all the time.”

“As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child, and we know this to be true in Girl Guides,” says State Commissioner, Robinette Emonson. “Clearly, we rely on talented volunteers like Holly and her team to deliver great opportunities for girls. It is this team, that includes the parents and supporters of a Unit, that make for a successful Unit – and the great outcomes for girls that Guiding achieves just wouldn’t happen without them”



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