



Keeping the Focus and Building Resilience - It's all about the Girls...

Regional Victoria | District Manager Petina Blackwell

Speaking from experience, Bendigo District Manager Petina Blackwell is very clear about what her job is: "it's about supporting the leaders and minimising the work that takes them away from the Girls". A designated "Leader of Adults", the role of the District Manager is to sit alongside the Leaders of the Girl Guide Units and support them to "Try to give them the time that they need to run a good quality program."

For Petina, a Guide since she was 11 years old, a leader from the age of 18 and a District Manager for the last 18 months, she knows what a quality program is. Part of her job is to go around and observe how the units are running, to see that they are working well and that the Units are engaging with the Guides.

"You get a feel of what is happening - it's the vibe that tells you, the chattering. Little girls shouldn't be quiet. You should walk into a hall and hear the excitement and the little girls should be telling you what they are going to be doing next week."

"For the older girls, you know it's going well when they don't walk straight out after the meeting. They stay and hang around to connect. They want to spend time and be involved, and this is a testament to the Leaders of the Unit..."

Petina understands the benefits for Girls. "For the teenagers it's a place for them to be themselves and know that it's okay. When they are out in the world as young women it is hard to be just you and not worry what someone thinks of you. At Guides we just provide a place where they can express what they think of themselves."



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Petina talks with pride of Guides in her area who express honest opinions and notes that "...there are very few places where a 16 year old girl can say what she thinks without the pressure of expectations and know that they are not going to be shut down or excluded because of it."

For Petina, the support provided by Guides to build confidence is important: "You know that Guides works because out in the real world our Guides have resilience - they know what it means to be yourself. They also have learnt that there is support behind them. They have learnt a set of values that become their values."

For her area of Victoria, in the City of Greater Bendigo, the most popular activity is Horse Riding. Each unit develops their own program though with some loving the cooking nights, one focusing on the outdoors and those units with older girls focusing on regular activities that allow them to have fun in a known environment.

Petina notes that often the girls will learn without knowing it. She puts this down to the key learning framework of Guiding which is based on non-formal education. "You will ask them what they learnt tonight and often they won't know that they have actually just spent an evening learning about teamwork, or leadership, or sustainability. It is real learning because it sticks."

Girl Guides in Australia learn about the world around them based on a clear ethical framework - many learn advocacy skills.

"It is so ridiculous to think that young people can't do it - they can!"

The worst we can do is underestimate them" Of her own experience as a Leader of Youth Petina says "my five year olds can't cure cancer but they can work in teams. And no one understand advocacy better than a five year old because they know what is 'not fair and what is fair'."

"Thinking that kids don't get it is more about our inability to talk to them. Thinking that kids don't get it is about our fears of what they will come up with. At Guides we don't treat girls as if they don't understand - we know that they do..."

"Petina is a role model for District Managers in Victoria. She has embraced the new approach devised for this role and understands how she contributes to the development of girls and young women and feels valued in the role she is undertaking," says Wendy Lewis CEO of Girl Guides Victoria.



"Everyone has a role to play in Guiding and by working together and valuing everyone's contribution is how we can achieve great outcomes."

For Petina, all the work that Girl Guides carry out on a day to day basis is about living the Promise and Law that she made as an 11 year old. It is how we live everyday. "Promise and Law is about what we do outside of Guiding as well as inside the Unit. Promise and Law is very much central because we are role models to others."

For new leaders Petina has this advice "Have fun and don't let it become a chore and remember that there are people out there, ready to help you and be a sounding board".

Petina is keen to keep her focus in her community and through this support the broader work of Guiding. She recommends Guiding to anyone and says that it is "never too late to start". Proud of her record of recruitment, Petina notes that even some of her former housemates in the past have been come Leaders in Girl Guide units!

"The role of District Managers in Girl Guiding is important to the smooth running of units," said State Commissioner Robinette Emonson. "What we see in the work of Petina and similar roles across Australia is the work required to enable Units to focus on the girls. These "Leaders of Adults" are a crucial administrative role supporting successful Girl Guiding in Australia. It highlights the diverse range of opportunities available to members of the Community interested in becoming a part of Girl Guides - you don't need to be a Unit Leader to be a part of our great organisation!"



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Then call **1300 GIRL GUIDES** for more information
www.girlguides.org.au