



Girl Guiding in the Heart of Country

Alice Springs, Northern Territory | Connor Sommerville

In the heart of Alice Springs, Northern Territory, is a Guiding Unit that keeps its mind open for new ideas to support its members. For Connor Somerville, the Assistant Leader in the Alice Springs Guide Unit, the search for a relevant and engaging program to deliver to her girls is a core part of her volunteer work.

Connor begins with the girls. Her goal is to build their confidence and see these young women reach their potential.

“This unit has the oldest Guides in the district, aged 10 to 15, so sitting down with them to understand what they want to do is the start” she says. “We have such a diversity of background in Alice Springs, and we try to let the girls develop their own journey – Guiding really is Girl Led. We ask their opinions and try to develop what is possible and incorporate new ideas.”

Connor’s vision is for the Guides of Alice Springs to realise that “they are wonderful people and they can grow into their own skins.

When the girls arrive in Guiding they don’t know how wonderful they are, and how wonderful they can be.

I love to see the confidence in the girls grow as we work with them. We help them on their way to learn new things and make so many friends.”



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“The girls find out more about themselves – through talking and getting into new situations. It’s about showing them that what they can do is limitless.”

For Connor, growth is also about encouraging the girls to extend themselves in a supportive environment. “It is important to understand their comfort zone and then we encourage them, but don’t push them too far. We provide opportunities – like new badges to work through, or new camps.”

The range of ideas for the Unit is growing, with plans for visits to local water holes for camps, camel rides, rock climbing and abseiling. A Guide Finke Desert Race is also on the cards for the Guide Unit, where the girls will bring along their bikes to ride for 5 to 10 kilometres in a smaller version of the NT’s famous Finke Race. For all of these activities the planning focuses on keeping the girls interested, ensuring that they are having fun, and looking out for learning opportunities. For the Finke Desert Race, it will be an opportunity for the girls to practise and learn how to do first aid, change a tyre, and even find their way by using a map and orienteering.

A focus at the moment is preparing for the Alice Springs Show. The Guides are encouraged to develop skills in horticulture, and build their knowledge and understanding of the environment by submitting entries into the Show’s competitions using recycled materials. The Guides of Alice Springs often run the pet nursery each year which is a chance to connect more with the community, raise some funds, and sell those famous Girl Guide Biscuits!

On being in the Unit leadership team, Connor says “You have got to be constantly creative and constantly looking for something different. There will always be the favourites.” One of the girls’ favourites is cooking nights which the leaders use to not only develop skills, but also improve cross-cultural understanding in a district that has indigenous members, interstate members, and members from India and the USA.

“It’s important to have patience and tolerance to draw out the girls’ ideas” says Connor. “We have a loud crew” she adds, “but it is important to let the girls be themselves and provide the opportunity for the good ideas to come forward.” Her advice for new leaders is to “Listen to the Girls.”

“There is a lot of experience in a unit that you can use. You never know what is going to be offered so it’s important to keep your mind open and give people the opportunity to build on what they have done.”



Connor speaks of the need to remain flexible saying that “having fixed ideas can be an obstacle to realising that it is all about the girls, and they will do what they want to do anyway. So, try something different. As leaders we also need to get out of our comfort zone and ‘back bench’ some of our assumptions.” Although, having said this, Connor points out that she has a whole book of ideas just waiting to be implemented. Her ‘emergency ideas book’ is on hand for those nights when you need something quickly.

“What we see in the work of Connor is a constant vigilance to make sure that she is listening to the girls.” says Linda Durran, State Commissioner of Northern Territory. “It is so important to make sure that a variety of experiences relevant to girls and young women is provided that enables them to grow. Guiding provides the right, safe environment for girls to develop life skills and lifelong friendships, whilst all the time making sure it is the girls’ vision that drives the overall program of activity.”

Connor is looking forward to becoming a fully fledged Unit Leader in the near future, and completing her Leadership Qualification with Girl Guides Australia. After this she will see what the future holds but is pleased that, for her, there are many pathways in Guiding that she can choose for her own Guiding journey.

For now, the role that she plays at the Alice Springs Guide Unit is a daily act of living the Promise and Law commitment that she made at the age of 5.

“For me, the Promise and Law is about being the best that you can be - to look after yourself and those around you.”

My focus is on the girls and helping them realise their potential, and encouraging them to become inspirational to others.”



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