

## **How Girlguiding has supported my mental health**

### ***In support of the 'Guiding your well-being' campaign and World Wellbeing Week***

Hi, I'm Maya, a Rainbow leader and Guide/Ranger helper. I've been part of Girlguiding since I was 7 years old, starting in Brownies and making my way through Guides and Rangers before becoming an adult leader. In this blog, I want to highlight how Girlguiding has supported my well-being for World Well-being Week.

World Well-being Week takes place annually during the last week of June. The focus of the week is to bring attention to how people can improve their physical, mental and emotional health, as well as take part in meaningful work, upgrade their financial security, refine their social resilience and expand their relationship to their community. The celebration began during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and has remained relevant ever since.

Every year, Girlguiding gathers data from over 2,500 members aged 7-21 (both in and out of guiding), releasing this in the 'Girl's Attitude Survey'. The survey focuses on themes like sexism, online harm, climate change and of course, well-being. The 2024 survey (the latest addition at the time of writing this blog) has outlined multiple ideas of what young people's well-being is like. The survey has revealed that the older members get, the more likely they are to know somebody experiencing anxiety and/or depression, self-harming, worrying about how their body looks and struggling with an eating disorder. These statistics become higher the older members are, and they are even higher for those in marginalised groups (especially LGBT+ and disabled/neurodivergent members). You can find the full report here: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2024.pdf>

When I was part of the 11-16 age bracket, I was massively exposed to every one of these statistics through my peers. The majority of people I socialised with suffered from their mental health and past traumas. It was hard to witness, and I often ended up being dragged down with them whilst trying to be supportive and help, harming my own mental health. This is sadly the reality for the majority of teenagers today...

During this time, I was also a Guide and a Ranger. Going to my weekly meetings on a Friday was the best time of the week. It was a completely different environment and an escape from school. Everybody around me was genuinely happy and willing to be there. I had plenty of friends who were supportive, not just with mental health (at a lower level) but also during games and teamwork activities. Guiding was always there for me, a reward for making it through the week. Here are five important aspects that helped me along the way:

### **Providing a safe and supportive community**

From the moment I joined, I have been supported by leaders and young members. In Brownies, I was paired up with a buddy who helped me settle in and learn my promise. When the pandemic began in Guides, I stayed in contact with everybody through my leaders organising online meetings. When the pandemic ended and we all wanted to stay together, our Ranger unit was created. As I started as a young leader, ageing into an adult leader and taking over leadership of a Rainbow unit a month after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was surrounded by supportive leaders and encouraging friends who kept me going, with a bunch of these being my leaders and friends from back in Brownies! Throughout the whole of my guiding journey, I have always been made to feel as if I belong.

### **Building my confidence and self-esteem**

When starting out as an adult leader, I had very little confidence when speaking to parents. As a younger leader who is often told I look 14-16 years old (when I'm actually 19), it's quite nerve-wracking for me knowing I am being trusted with 20 4-7 year olds once a week (longer if there are sleepovers and trips). However, with the support of everybody around me and my overall experience being a Rainbow leader, this confidence has non-stop grown and now I'm confident communicating with all parents. I still ask for lots of advice about everything from everyone and I'm still quite nervous about making mistakes, but I know I've still got a long journey ahead of me! It has also been great to help the Rainbows gain confidence. I've had a bunch of members over the past year arrive at our hut scared and in tears, not knowing what to do or expect. A few Rainbows start with us before they have even started school, stepping into a very different world than what they are used to at nursery. Nothing excites me more than

when an anxious Rainbow says their name to the group during our circle time, or when they get fully involved with an activity they would previously refuse.

### **Encouraging physical activity and time outdoors**

My favourite part of Girlguiding will always be the outdoor aspects. I've done everything, from cooking full meals on campfires and nine-hour walks around the North West to camping around the UK and interrailing across Europe! Instead of spending time stuck at home on my own, guiding has gifted me the opportunity to explore with a group and develop a love for nature. Now, at every opportunity, I get my Rainbows outside in the fresh air so they can start to receive these opportunities too. At the time of writing this blog, I am already considering new adventures and opportunities for us at our local campsite next term.

### **Opportunities to give back**

Since turning 16, I have volunteered with guiding. As previously mentioned, I have been both a young leader and an adult leader, as well as a unit helper with my joint Guide/Ranger unit since turning 19. I have also taken time to volunteer at a wide range of events and even help other local units when they need leaders. Sometimes, volunteering is hard. There are a lot of policies to keep on top of, procedures you have to follow and lots of back-and-forth messaging to ensure you are following everything perfectly. It can be quite overwhelming, especially for a younger leader like myself.

However, everything is worth it near the end of the week, when the Rainbows run into the room with massive smiles and take part in the activities I spent weeks planning.

None of what I've mentioned could be possible without the amazing volunteers Girlguiding has! Leaders have brilliant opportunities to get all sections involved in activities that support well-being. Below I've listed a bunch of badges/activities (both part of the Girlguiding programme and challenge badges) that either leaders can complete with their units or members can complete in their own time. Some focus on mental health, others on physical activity, and a few on getting outside and enjoying nature.

<u>Activity/Badges</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Where to find</u>
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First Aid Skills Builder	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Feel Good Skills Builder	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Be Well Unit Meeting Activities	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Have Adventures Unit Meeting Activities	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Skills for my Future Unit Meeting Activities	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Lead Skills Builder	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Live Smart Skills Builder	Programme (completed at meetings)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/">https://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk/umas-and-skills-builders/</a>
Rainbow Interest Badges: <i>Agility, Nature, Fruit and veg, Healthy mind</i>	Programme (completed at meetings or at home)	<a href="https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/">https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/</a>
Brownie Interest Badges: <i>Dancing, Mindfulness</i>	Programme (completed at meetings or at home)	<a href="https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/">https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/</a>
Guide Interest Badges: <i>Fitness, Meditation, Natural Remedies</i>	Programme (completed at meetings or at home)	<a href="https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/">https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/</a>
Ranger Interest Badges: <i>Self-care, Sports</i>	Programme (completed at meetings or at home)	<a href="https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/">https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/badge-finder/</a>
Twinkle for Heather	Challenge badge (completed at meetings or at home)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Blog-post-7-Twinkle-for-Heather.pdf">https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Blog-post-7-Twinkle-for-Heather.pdf</a>
Love Rugby	Challenge badge (completed at meetings or at home)	<a href="https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NWE-Love-Rugby.pdf">https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NWE-Love-Rugby.pdf</a>

*‘Remember, it is not what you have but what you give that brings happiness’ – Olave Baden-Powell, first Chief Guide*