

‘School pressure, family life, digital identity, increased expectations’: the reason Girl Guides exists today

Girl Guides NSW & ACT will focus on the role Guiding plays in supporting young girls navigate school pressures, family life, digital identity and raised expectations with the launch of a new campaign called A Place To Grow to coincide with May - Girl Guides Month. This vital piece of communication to young girls, their families and thousands of active and potential volunteers, will highlight the diverse experiences on offer and its relevance for the young girls of today. Sarah Neill, State Commissioner said that Girl Guides provides a place for young people to feel secure. “We come together over a variety of activities, build confidence and resilience which makes our young people better able to cope with their lives. “We encourage our girls to build life skills, and have the freedom to be adventurous, learn strong communication skills, laugh, and make life-long friendships,” said Commissioner Neill. Ella Ezergailis, aged 12, was inspired to join Girl Guides after hearing her mother’s stories of Guiding and wanted her share of adventure and fun. In 2018, Ella became the youngest Girl Guide to take part in ‘Girl Takeover Parliament’ event, in which she watched Question Time in the Chamber of the House of Representatives. Disgusted by the behaviour, Ella wrote a letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison telling him so. “I decided to write to the Prime Minister and ask him to change the culture in Parliament House. I told him he should visit my school to learn how to behave respectfully. “My letter was shared around the world on social media and was reported by news outlets. “Girl Guides has given me the confidence to do such a thing, however the result made me feel that a 12-year-old girl’s voice was important, and girls do have the power to change the world,” said Ella. Now in its 99th year, Girl Guides in NSW & ACT has 7,400 members across 540 Units. Commissioner Neill said recent research revealed that 90% of girls joined the organisation before the age of 11 and stayed because it provided the perfect antidote to the complex and pressured lives of young people. “Our research showed that young girls join for the things they need most at this stage of their lives: fun, meeting friends outside of school and developing new skills. “Parents said they wanted their daughters to join to help them build their confidence, meet new friends and have a community orientation to their life. “Our programs offer a connection to experiences and community that schools and busy families can’t. “We have large scale events and the traditional jamboree, but mostly girls choose their own activities to complete, from creative pursuits to sailing, coding to cooking, orientation to fundraising,” said Commissioner Neill. A Place To Grow will use the 540 Units of Girl Guides NSW & ACT, to promote the stories of resilience, confidence building and friendship it encourages, through social media, local press, local events such as school fetes and Girl Guides own Come and Try nights. Helen White, CEO said, the grass-roots approach is what Girl Guides excel at. “Over 1,000,000 Australians are or have been a Girl Guide. We work at the local level, in communities and across regions supporting and empowering the women of tomorrow. “There is a resurgence of interest in Girl Guides, as young people and their families look at ways to combat the pressures of busy and digital lives. We’re all about supporting someone to find their own path, to build resilience, and life skills to take them wherever they wish,” said Ms White. However, is Girl Guides still relevant for the girls of today? Ella says that it is. “Girl Guides is even more relevant to young people growing up with a digital life. “Girl Guides teaches you how to interact socially, be a responsible citizen, how to deal with emergency situations and gives you the courage to accept challenges. “I even went on camp for a week without my phone, and I survived.” More information: www.aplacetogrow.org.au

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