Spotlight on Maz Matthews

Girlguiding South West England finds out about the advantages and challenges of being both a volunteer and employee with Girlguiding....

Maz is Leader of 1st Boscombe Down Guides in Wiltshire South and works as an Administrative Assistant at Foxlease TAC. In the Region Office the staff members who also volunteer prove to be a great source of Guiding knowledge for their non-Guiding colleagues and we guessed this might also be the case for Maz....

“I feel having a Guiding background is important when working at a Guiding Centre and helps the team massively. I know all the Guiding terms and what is required and have an understanding of the age ranges and badge work. I am one of the first points of call for booking camps, holidays and events and I know what the Units expect from Foxlease when they visit us, the information the Leaders require, and the best way to obtain the information we need from the Leaders in good time to enable events to run smoothly. When I first started work at Foxlease we were in the middle of ‘Wellies and Wristbands,’ but from the start I was able to deal with telephone enquiries about the event as I had given the same information to my Unit!”

“I am one of the first points of call for booking camps...”
Presumably you visited Foxlease as a girl, how has your perception of it changed now that you are working there?

“I visited many times as a Brownie and a Guide – I was a Member with the Unit I am now Leader of! I remember having lots of fun and making ice-cream for the first time. We still ensure Guiding groups have fun, especially with all the activities we provide.”

You obviously really enjoy working at Foxlease Maz.

“I get to meet so many new Guiding people, it’s lovely, and I am currently working on a seasonal Foxlease badge – everyone loves badges!”

So what about life outside Guiding. Tell us a little about your home life, hobbies and pastimes.

“I live just outside Stonehenge with my Mum, Dad and pet rabbit. I never thought I would say this as I hated PE at school, but one of my hobbies is running! I started two years ago for a charity in support of my best friends, and I never stopped! I really enjoy putting my music on (safely so I can still hear the traffic – I learnt this when the Police visited my Unit), and trying to beat my personal records. I have always loved being outdoors and having adventures - which helps when I am planning camps!”

And we hear you also love food! Any favourites?

“S’mores are always a favourite, especially now I’ve found vegan marshmallows so all the Guides can join in at camp! I love Mexican food and I always try a new dish when I am out with my friends. Mum’s home cooked food is amazing though!”

So how long have you been involved in Guiding Maz?

“In total, 13 years, with a gap of three years for University. I do wish I had continued Guiding during that time though.”

Did you join as a Rainbow?

“No, as a Brownie. I was too shy to move up to Guides until I was 11 – no-one believes that now! I went on to be a Ranger and Young Leader and have been the Leader of 1st Boscombe Down Guides for six years.”
You must have so many good memories. Has there been one particularly funny moment?

“One day working at Foxlease, a volunteer at Wellies comes in and we both look as if to say we know each other. So for half an hour we are running through our entire Guiding background but can’t find a common connection. Then suddenly we shout, ‘Big Gig! We had both volunteered there on the merchandise stand (and along with everyone else had an amazing time!).”

If you had the opportunity to live one year of your life over again, which year would you choose and why?

“Kenya! It is thanks to the skills and confidence I have gained through volunteering as a Guide Leader that I had such a fabulous experience. I rescued an elephant and zebra, hand-reared primates, conducted fish eagle surveys in lakes full of hippo’s, gained my scuba diving licence in waters filled with dolphins and green turtles and I volunteered with Born Free – and watched the beautiful sunset each night. It was simply, ‘WOW!’”

What has been your most exciting moment?

“I am a Queen’s Guide and gave a speech at the House of Commons as part of the Queen’s Guide Award – although in the video of my speech I look more scared than excited!”

Wow! What an experience Maz! What other amazing places have you visited through Guiding?

“Switzerland as a Young Leader! I remember it feeling like it was such a big deal that we could stay up for an hour later than the Guides to drink hot chocolate with the Leaders! It is a beautiful place and I have so many fun memories of my time there.”

I am guessing you have made the most of your time in Guiding Maz, what achievements are you particularly proud of?

“My time spent volunteering in Kenya was very special and finding local Units to help whilst I was out there. Most schools have Units attached to them and the kids are so proud of being Guides and Scouts. I won the Girlguiding #GirlsCan Follow Their Dreams photographic competition with a picture of me rescuing an elephant whilst volunteering in Kenya.”
What a fabulous adventure Maz. Thank you for sharing that with us. Now moving away from Kenya, we are going to transport you to a desert island. What three things would you take with you and why?

“An extra large waterproof jacket to use as a blanket and a hammock and to collect water and create shade – practical! I would also take my Teddy Bear who goes everywhere with me, and my scrap books which are full of all my memories and adventures.”

What advice would you as an adult today, have given to yourself as a child?

“Don’t worry so much, it will all be OK!”

So what is your idea of perfect happiness?

“Being with friends and family on adventures! At the TAC Conference we were asked, ‘What is an adventure?’ and my response was, ‘Doing something different’. Girlguiding offers that opportunity to all and everyone’s ‘different’ is different, whether it is a night camping in the local hut, or an international trip. They are all ‘adventures’ and Girlguiding can make it happen.”

And what did you last do which was different?

“Skydiving! And I would do it again!”

You are clearly very enthusiastic about Guiding Maz, but is there anything you would change to improve it?

“I would change the admin processes, but that’s my work background talking. As long as the girls are having fun, that’s all that matters – and I get to earn a badge too!”

Do you have any Guiding ambitions?

“People ask me why I volunteer. Because I was once that Guide who looked up to a Leader, I want to continue supporting the next generation. Being a Leader and working at Foxlease provides me with a great opportunity to do so.”

And finally, which three words would you use to describe what Girlguiding means to you?

“Making fun and friends (I met my best friend through Guiding five years ago!).”

Thank you Maz, we have enjoyed chatting with you.