

Outdoor Learning Apprenticeships Case-study



■ Name of Apprentice - Finlay Richards

■ What is the name of the company you work for and what is your role?



Boundless Outdoors
Outdoor Activity Instructor Apprentice

■ Please give us a bit of information about the outdoor activities and services you deliver

I work for Boundless Outdoors in Malvern which is a multi-activity centre. My role is an Outdoor Activity Apprentice, which involves me running a wide variety of sessions and participating in centre upkeep in the downtime.

At Boundless Outdoors we deliver a wide range of Outdoor recreational activities in a safe environment including: high ropes activities, low ropes, climbing, hill walking, target sports, problem solving, bushcraft and paddlesports, predominantly with schools attending residential. We also deliver birthday parties and corporate team building days.

■ Why did you decide to undertake an apprenticeship?

I have always liked the Outdoors! I finished College, and University didn't seem like the right option for me. I was keen to work with kids because I already enjoyed doing this with the scouts and have always spent time walking with family on holidays growing up. This felt like an ideal opportunity to do a job in the environment I enjoy so much.

■ Can you tell us about your experience as an apprentice? What were some of the highlights and challenges that you faced during your apprenticeship?

It's been a really positive experience. I feel like I've come out of my shell a lot, in college I was very introverted, but I wouldn't say I am at all anymore. I don't have any trouble speaking to new people or in front of groups of people now. I think it's been positive on my health, being more active in the outdoors and I have made so many new friends.

One of my key highlights from my apprenticeship was our 4-day canoe expedition, we had fantastic weather, and we were in the outdoors for 4 days straight. It was great to get to know my new colleagues. My second would be when I ran a session for a group of year eights, which we don't have very often. We had a boy in the group who wasn't very happy with heights at all. We did zip wire the first session and he wouldn't even come up the ladder. On the last of the four-day residential we were doing a quad poll session. He had a go and got halfway up the pole which is a HUGE achievement. When he came down, he was so different, chatty rather than withdrawn and said a big thank you for my help. Moments like these are so powerful.

I have found it challenging to find the balance between doing such a physical job and sitting down to do written work, but my tutor and mentor have supported me in creating a plan to complete this work to develop my knowledge of Outdoor Instructing.

My first sign off was a huge achievement as I had to give a big brief and take charge of the group. I found other sessions such as rifle shooting more challenging to achieve sign off, but my mentors and seniors provided lots of constructive feedback to help me develop.

■ What did you learn during your apprenticeship, and how have you been able to apply that knowledge and skills in your work since completing the programme?

I've learned so much in the apprenticeship. I learnt how to climb and belay, how to paddle, how to check kit is safe and what kit to buy. I also learnt how to manage children's behaviour, pastoral support as well to support children with additional needs, because I had never really been exposed to this. I also learnt how to set up and run a safe, fun and developmental session, alongside how to do first aid. I have really liked learning all about the role and why we use different pieces of kit for different jobs in the centre.

■ How do you see your career progressing from here, and what are some of your long-term goals?

I hope to stay in the Outdoor Industry. I'd like to stay at Boundless Outdoors for at least the next year, continuing to progress what I've learnt with the people I know. At Boundless Outdoors we have the opportunity to progress onto a trainee instructor role, which is extension of our learning beyond the apprenticeship. This is focused on developing teaching skills, working with a range of participants and a great opportunity to stay in the same supportive environment.

In the long term I'd love to be an Alpine Mountain Guide in the UK or Europe.

■ How would you describe your apprenticeship experience, and would you recommend it to others?

Yes, I would recommend it! I think this apprenticeship is a really good foot in the door. It would be hard to apply for an instructor role without the experience and qualifications. With the apprenticeship you gain so much background knowledge, skill and experience, as well as expensive qualifications. All of these are important to get a job. I would definitely recommend it to a friend.

