

CyberCenturion

FROM STUDENT TO MENTOR: JARED'S CYBERCENTURION STORY

Success for Gibraltar

Jared Cruz is a teacher of computer science and senior IT technician at Prior Park School in Gibraltar as well as leading the cyber school at Gibraltar Digital Skills Academy. His initial encounter with CyberCenturion was as a student participant, where he and a group of friends formed a team under the guidance of industry experts. He remembers this time with excitement saying, "[My connection with CyberCenturion] goes back to the second year that CyberCenturion ran which was when I was a student and I was participating as a team member with my friends at school."

This period was not just about learning; his team went on to win the competition at a final held at Bletchley Park, a victory that was both a personal achievement and a national moment of pride for Gibraltar. He recalls, "It was quite a special moment as well when we came back... we even had people from government departments come to celebrate with us."

Jared opted to take a job in industry after school over university education, and he recognised the value and demand for cybersecurity skills in the professional world. Jared reflects on this decision, "I started working, instead of going down the university path... those skills are in demand in certain places." This choice demonstrates the practical effectiveness of CyberCenturion to equip students with skills which are valued by employers.



A journey to become a mentor

Jared was driven by a deep-seated desire to give back and guide new generations in the field of cybersecurity. "I went back to my teacher who organised the whole thing and offered my help."

Jared assumed a key role at the Gibraltar Digital Skills Academy, leading the cyber school which is open to students from across Gibraltar. In this capacity, his influence extended beyond individual mentorship to shaping the curriculum and fostering a broader community of young cybersecurity enthusiasts. He has helped create an inspiring space where young students can explore, learn, and grow in a field that is constantly evolving and increasingly relevant.

Supporting diversity in cyber security

Jared's influence extended beyond the walls of his school to the wider Gibraltar community. His efforts in teaching and mentoring in cybersecurity have led to more teams entering the competition, with the formation of eight teams comprising both senior and junior students. He proudly speaks of the inclusivity and diversity in these teams, especially highlighting the all-girls team as a beacon of inspiration and empowerment in a field traditionally dominated by males.

CyberCenturion offers a way of broadening participation and representation in technology, in Jared's words, "We have a very impressive senior girls team, all girls team. We strive to show that it is open to absolutely everyone. And we really want to showcase the girls because they are absolutely amazing. Right now they're contending to be in the finals."

Jared's efforts are pivotal in showcasing that cybersecurity is not only a viable but also an exciting and fulfilling career choice for young women. His involvement and advocacy go a long way in inspiring confidence and ambition among students, proving that with the right guidance and opportunities, barriers can be broken, and new paths forged in the digital world.

Jared also appreciates the introduction of junior divisions within the competition, which offers younger students a chance to shine. Reflecting on this change, Jared notes its positive impact, saying, "It was nice to give a status to the juniors so that it entices them to carry on, instead of how it was before where if a junior [team] tried, they wouldn't be able to beat the seniors, so they would never get to the final and they might feel defeated and lose interest in that. So I'm very happy that they do have that junior division." This addition not only provides an avenue for younger students to participate but also plays a crucial role in building their confidence and interest in the field from an early age.



A wider impact

Jared sees CyberCenturion as a pivotal part of digital education, emphasising its role in developing not just technical skills but also life skills in the digital age.

His advocacy for the programme extends to encouraging other educators and teachers to embrace it, highlighting its value in building teamwork, improving problem-solving abilities, and increasing resilience among students. Jared says "I think the more people understand how important cybersecurity is the better. [CyberCenturion] is very rewarding...and it is not just a one-year deal, you can do it for many years."

