

## CyberCenturion

# SHAPING YOUNG MINDS: ANA'S JOURNEY WITH CYBERCENTURION

### Igniting interest in cybersecurity

In the evolving landscape of digital security, Ana's experience demonstrates the power of innovative competitions such as CyberCenturion in shaping young minds. As a final year student at the University of Warwick studying cybersecurity, Ana reflects on her seven-year journey with CyberCenturion from a curious Year 10 student to a seasoned competitor and now a mentor. Ana's involvement with CyberCenturion shows how such programmes can ignite a lifelong interest in cybersecurity, inspiring educational and career choices along the way.

Ana was first introduced to cybersecurity in Year 10 when she first participated in CyberCenturion. The competition captured her interest and laid the foundation for her pursuit of further study in cybersecurity.

"About seven years ago is when I started competing in the competition myself through secondary school. We didn't place very well at first," Ana admits, but the lack of immediate success did not deter the team. It was this foundational experience that honed the team's skills and fuelled their interest to continue entering the competition.

The team's perseverance paid off when they won the competition in year 13. "It was a pretty good way to finish our CyberCenturion run!"

Ana found the competition rewarding as well as challenging, the different stages provided new ways to test their skills with the support of their schools.



### Developing skills and mentoring young talents

Ana's role in CyberCenturion changed over the years as she began forming teams of younger students and guiding them through the complexities of the competition.

"This is my third year of entering a team into the competition," Ana shares. The experience of leading and mentoring has been a rewarding experience for Ana as much as it has been for her mentees. This nurturing environment has not only encouraged her team to pursue their STEM interests but also reinforced Ana's passion for the field.

## Impact of CyberCenturion on Career Choices

CyberCenturion has influenced Ana's career choice. The competition not only reinforced her interest in cybersecurity but also opened new opportunities.

"Winning the competition has opened a lot of doors for me," she says. The victory also paved the way for her current pursuit as it inspired her university course choice and she is now studying cybersecurity.

The approach of the competition towards cybersecurity made the learning process both engaging and effective, allowing her to realise her passion and potential within the field. "The gamification of a competition by nature is very helpful for being able to better understand where your skills lie," she reflects. This realisation helped Ana decide on her university course. "I quickly realised that this is what I want to do. This is what I enjoy doing," she said.

## Challenges and Learning Strategies

Cybersecurity, while intellectually stimulating, presents a unique set of challenges for Ana. As someone with ADHD, Ana faced barriers which meant she needed to develop methods of adapting. "I find learning new concepts particularly challenging sometimes," she shares.

Ana developed strategies that helped her focus and learn more effectively. One specific tool she used in the CyberCenturion competition that she particularly found beneficial was the creation of checklists for each stage. Over time, this practice became an essential learning mechanism. The discipline of checklist-making helped her beyond the competition, in other areas of life and study.

Ana's experience with CyberCenturion is an example of an adaptable learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of students. This inclusive approach not only nurtures individual talents but also fosters a culture of collaborative learning.



## The role of community

A key part of Ana's CyberCenturion experience has been the sense of belonging in a field that often feels isolating for young students, particularly young girls in STEM. She found herself immersed in a network of peers who shared her enthusiasm for cybersecurity. "I was over the moon to get involved in the community and find people who were also interested in competing and doing well," she said.

For Ana, the community aspect of CyberCenturion was not just about camaraderie; it was about collective intelligence and shared passion driving collective success.

