

# THE INSIDER



## AN INSIDER VIEW FROM INTERVIEW TO END OF SEASON

**W**orking at an activity centre can be a long and intense season, despite it only operating for half of the year. So it really helps if the centre is in a beautiful setting: putting a smile on my face and instantly making me feel happy to be back at work upon arrival.

It was just the senior team in for the first few days to get us up to speed before the first intake of instructional staff arrive. For me it's all about learning the specifics of systems and procedures for this company. It's a lot to take in but it's necessary and expected, and the tone of delivery is relaxed and supportive, which eases any pressure.

One thing that becomes apparent quite quickly is the industry shortage of staff. Although we're functional and operational in staffing terms, we could still use a few more bodies across the board – in catering, as well as instructional and senior staff. However, job advertising websites are full of companies crying out for staff, and this could be a concern for me/ us too as there is always some loss and turnover of staff.

COVID-19 is still a threat and being a relatively small centre (160 guests max), even a small outbreak could shut us down. The arrival of our first staff intake is a tangible reminder that the arrival of guests is just around the corner, and there's a lot to do to get both staff and centre ready for this. The youth, diversity and different needs of the staff is quite striking. For some, this is their first job and work away

from home, so my immediate focus is welcoming the staff into a warm, safe and supportive environment. Then it's all about training, to get them qualified, and signed off to deliver activities, with some cleaning, tidying and maintenance shoehorned in to get the site looking good and ready to receive guests.

In a blink the first week of guests has passed and it was so eventful that it feels like a full season in a week. There were many issues to deal with including extreme weather, irate parents, homesick children, staffing and safeguarding. Despite this, we receive fantastic feedback from our groups: a testament to our team, so things are looking good for the season ahead. However, we have already lost a member of staff and I can only hope we can replace them quickly.

### Mid-season update

The crazily busy roller coaster of a season continued with back-to-back groups as schools, youth groups and families seem to be clamouring to get back outdoors after C-19 and lockdowns. With only a few hours to turn the centre around between groups, there's a lot of pressure on the staff and long days which stretch us, particularly as we are short-staffed.

There has been an unusually high turnover of staff, who have sometimes left for their own reasons, other times for mine. It almost feels like there's 'one in' then 'one out' but we always make it work. Next up there's a mid-season appraisal for everyone. During my own appraisal, I talked to the Head of Acorn about how we address the staffing issues and the company are offering free training courses as incentives to retain staff and hopefully get them to return next year.

We, like some other Outdoor companies, have our own mid-season Christmas soon since we don't get to share the real thing as it's out of season. There's 'secret Santa', a Christmas party and meal – all for a bit of fun and to raise team spirits. So, happy Christmas to all you centre workers out there! ■

### AUTHOR

Calvin Healey, Centre Manager

Calvin has over 20 years of experience in the Outdoors industry and has had senior roles in the UK, France and Australia. This year he has started as a Centre Manager in Brecon (South Wales), for a company he's not worked for before – Acorn Adventure.

