

Transcript: Life in the Adventure Sector - The Importance of Work Placement

Host: Alana MacLeod

Guest Speaker: Daryl MacFarlan

Alana MacLeod: 0:15

This podcast has been brought to you by the University of the Highlands and Islands careers and employability centre. In this episode we'll be talking about the value of and opportunities presented by completion of a work placement as part of your studies. I'm Alana MacLeod and today I'm joined by Darren McFarlane UHI alumnus and adventure professional. Daryl, thank you very much for joining me.

Daryl MacFarlan: 0:40

Thank you very much for having me, it's nice to spend a Tuesday morning with you.

Alana MacLeod: 0:45

I know, it's great to chat. So tell us a bit about yourself, where are you from, what course you studied...

Daryl MacFarlan:

My name is Daryl McFarlane, I'm 29, I'm from Ayr in Scotland. I studied the COL course or Certificate in Outdoor Leadership. It's only a one year course, and I did that in 2015.

Since doing that course, I've just kind of went everywhere and tried to really go push my boundaries a little bit and travel to different parts of the world, and learning different values in the outdoors in different countries. Because I was about older than most other people in my course. I was looking a bit further afield than just Scotland and England. I was like, right Okay. Whereabouts in the world can it take me. And that's kind of how I did it.

Alana MacLeod:

So you're in Scotland at the moment but when you go back abroad, where are you returning to?

Daryl MacFarlan:

I will be going to a company in Croatia. It's a small island in the kinda north of Croatia called Molat. The company is called Malek Adventures, it's a small run company, it's just the one guy and his wife that run it, and they specialise in stand up paddle boarding and sea kayaking multi day trips around the islands of the Dalmatian coastline. So, I'd much rather be there at this point in time, but obviously given everything that has happened I'll accept it, but hopefully I'll be going there in the next few weeks, and I'll get to enjoy some of the sun, and some of the beautiful paddling out there.

Alana MacLeod:

Worlds apart from Ayr!

Daryl MacFarlan:

Worlds apart from Ayr. However the Ayrshire coastline has got beautiful paddling is maybe just the, the water temperatures a little bit different.

Alana MacLeod: 2:44

So when studying you completed a work placement, how influential has that been in terms of skills development, and the job that you're in now or the experiences you've had since then?

Daryl MacFarlan: 3:00

I think it's a phenomenal idea, because when you go through college or university it's kinda like a one sided thing where you're being taught and guided through how your instructors or your lecturers interpret the outdoors. Once you get brought into a work placement, you're given so much more freedom and flexibility, obviously with restrictions, but you're given more freedom to think and create your own identity and your own style of guiding or instructing You're not protected as much so you've got to be much more aware. It gives you the opportunity to take what you've learned and evolve it much further and a little bit of a more open area as it were.

Alana MacLeod 3:51

So, did your work placement, do you think help with building a sort of professional network of contacts, would you say, and if so, what I mean, what are the benefits of having you know different contacts in different places around the world.

Daryl MacFarlan: 4:09

Eh yeah, mine did. Because I worked for an outward bound school, they've got huge staff team you know 40-50 different instructors, and the one that I worked for had international instructors, so you had people from South Africa, people from Australia, people from the UK, America... and having that kind of network, allows you not just to pick the brains of loads of different backgrounds and styles the outdoors, but when you're going on to do your next thing or where you're looking at places that you maybe want to go in the future, you've got them that you can kinda rely on to maybe get some advice or help push you in that direction, or even better you know, give you a direct contact. It's happened to me several times where, if I hadn't went somewhere, it probably wouldn't have opened up the door to the place that I went next. I think networking in every industry is extremely valuable, but especially for the outdoors because our **environment** industry is quite small, but it's quite specific, there's rules like how you handle yourself in the outdoors, like... You have to belay a climber if they're going up, you know unless of course your Alex Honnold, but it's kind of like that kind of thing.

It's really, really, valuable. When you network with loads of different people, they challenge you in different ways as well, and you maybe open up their mind to something they've never thought of so it's just like crazy pool of knowledge and thoughts and...yeah, it's incredibly valuable. I think I learned more from people than I do books...people who have been through something and share the experience with me, you know, makes you think about it a little bit more. And then if you get into this similar experience, that little bit of knowledge, even though you weren't directly involved...

Alana MacLeod:

Yeah, absolutely. And so, thinking back, why did you choose the adventure sector? Was it always the end goal? Was that always what you wanted to do?

Daryl MacFarlan:

No, no, not at all! I came into it quite late, so I didn't actually come into it until I was like 24/25. Up until that point, after I left school, as most young people I think come are still very kind of disillusioned have been force fed this idea that they need to know what they want to do by the age of 16 and they need to start working towards it from there on in. Don't get me wrong, I think there's some people that can do that and are of that genetic makeup but there's a lot of people that just don't have a clue. And I was one of them. And I chose to kind of leave and work and try and travel a little bit and see the world and open my mind up a bit. And then it was emmm aaa....Glenmore Lodge course that actually that I did for one of my birthdays, in kayaking, and it was just a totally random thing that I'd always loved adventure sports and being outside and hiking, but never really kind of went and tried it and tried to become better at it and did the learning. So I went and did this 5-day course there, and just talking to the instructors there, talking to the guides and the people that were doing the course with me, I just was like all of a sudden realised that this was something that you could do with your life, and from that moment on it was yeah, right okay this is what I want to do and it was very tunnel vision from there in.

Alana MacLeod: 7:28

Brilliant. Where is the best place you've been? Or is that an impossible question?

Daryl MacFarlan: 7:32

It's kind of an impossible question because each place you go has something different. I mean if you could take the best parts of everywhere that you've been, then you know you're going to be on to an absolute winner. I went and spent a year in New Zealand, I was sea kayak guiding in the Marlborough sounds, which is in the north end of the south island, and I did a bit of guiding down in the shortland area as well. I did a trip round the South Island on my bike, in my off time and as a country and as the people and from an adventure standpoint, there's nowhere quite like the South island of New Zealand, and I thoroughly enjoyed that.

Alana MacLeod: 8:11

Brilliant. And what do you enjoy most about your job? Wherever you are?

Daryl MacFarlan:

For one it's fun, right, I mean, I thoroughly enjoy what I do. So, I mean you know like smiling is infectious if you go out in a boat, even if you've had like a little bit of a stressful morning, the minute you get on a kayak and you take your people out onto the water that's it, you've got a smile from ear to ear, and then from there on in, it's easy. I love the people that I meet whether it be in a garden variety, or co instructor variety. And even when you work with children, it can be so...eye opening... Children can be very unfiltered and they just kinda say it as it is and you don't have the complications of adulthood in their life yet, so it can be quite refreshing to work with kids as well. I think that the people can make my job, enjoyable, in whatever variety it is.

Alana MacLeod:

What would you say to a student who is maybe thinking about taking off a work placement opportunity in any subject area but not maybe 100% sold on the idea. Any advice?

Daryl MacFarlan: 9:31

I suppose just kind of jump into the unknown a little bit, when you're coming out of a position of education to work placement, whether it be abroad or in the UK, whatever it is, it's a bit daunting, or you may get feelings of apprehension and nerves. I think more often than not, if you just take that step forward and take that risk, and really believe in yourself and believe in like, anything is possible, I...after leaving, I basically went around the world. And I mean, before I went to Fort William, I would never have thought that possible. Unless I took those risks. The best advice I can give is just believe in yourself, take the risk and try and learn as much as you can from everything that you do, and experience.

Alana MacLeod: 10:35

How would you say that the, the staff at West Island College UHI helped and supported and guided you towards your workplace placement?

Daryl MacFarlan:

See, to be honest I am not just like saying this because you are part of the UHI, I loved my instructors and my lecturers. I thought they had such a big part to do with me believing in myself and believing in what was possible from this industry more than anything so not just short term but long term – what developments you can have, and how far you can go, and how far you can look, I mean I could name, five or six of them, but every single one of them was so welcoming, so helpful, so knowledgeable, from different experiences in life as well when you basically get everyone in that kind of variety and into a pool, there's nothing but good things that can happen for me. As long as you go on with a very attitude, which is a very open minded you know I want to live, and I want to really take this opportunity with both hands then you know the minute you go into it, it can only be good. From my perspective anyway.

Alana MacLeod: 11:52

That's really, really, great to hear, actually. It's a very close community in Fort William, at West Highland College, with the adventure team. You're all very passionate about what you do, and that makes a really, really great environment.

Daryl those were all the questions I was, I had for you, I mean unless there's anything you want to say, any bold statement you'd like to make about, you know, working in the sector!

Daryl MacFarlan: 12:19

The greatest thing about this sector is, you just learn by every experience, you know, good, bad or indifferent. More often than not, you'll get bigger learning from doing something wrong, but you know everything is a learning outcome, every day can be different. It's very dynamic and it keeps you on your toes. I just could never understand why anyone would want to walk in any different industry I've got friends who are tradesmen, who work in offices, and all those kind of different sectors, and they hear from me, when I've maybe dealt with three or four really tricky clients, and wind was a little bit too heavy, or the sun was beating down on me too much and they're just like 'shut up'...you know...that's not a problem! Like, What are you talking about?! And it's like, well, you know, these are the decisions that you make and I really....whoever hears this....I implore you guys to think about this industry because it's so great for personal, professional development, people, seeing the world; everything. Absolute best decision I've ever made. From Fort William's perspective, I'm so glad that that avenue was there, you know? After Glenmore Lodge, went straight online and I found Fort William immediately, and I was like, I didn't even know this college existed. And it caters exactly to what you want, in a beautiful area of Scotland that's got everything that you need, it's perfect, or as close to perfect as you can get anyway.

Alana MacLeod:

You certainly sold it to me, might have to rethink my career path, I think. Daryl, thanks so much for joining me today it was great to hear all about that – your success, your journey, you know, everywhere you've been it's, it's really inspiring, I'm so glad you're enjoying it. It sounds like you're living the dream a little bit!

Daryl MacFarlan: 14:11

Thank you very much for having me on, It's been a nice little chat and I hope anyone that hears it can kinda hear the motivation and enthusiasm in my voice and think right okay, that's what I want to do.

Alana MacLeod: 14:30

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