

Girls can be dragon slayers too

Having enjoyed Festival of the Girl in 2024, Willow (12) and her mother, Charmaine returned to an equally warm welcome in 2025. The friendships they formed the previous year were a major reason for their return. Charmaine recounted how Willow had connected with “*other autistic girls*” in 2024- friends she was delighted to attend the festival again with this year.

Freedom to explore her creative side

As someone fascinated by dragons, technology and art, Willow was able to dive even deeper into her interests at the 2025 festival. She recalls playing Dungeons & Dragons, experimenting with finger-drawing, and designing her own pizza on Microsoft Designer – and activity she described as “*fun and exciting.*” She also shared that Dungeons & Dragons is something she hoped to continue exploring long after the festival.

Willow also tried her hand at parkour, and took part in several workshops, including sword fighting, drawing to express emotions, and filmmaking. Filmmaking was a highlight for her – she recalled with excitement that she “*helped out with the sounds and directing.*”

As it was her first time doing parkour, Willow was able to step outside of her comfort zone and attempted something she never imagined doing. In doing so, Charmaine could see just how much confidence Willow gained from taking on this new challenge.

Charmaine described the festival as a “*really lovely experience due to its all-female space,*” noting how it allowed them to meet a variety of inspiring women - including a female Olympian this year and an astronaut the year before. She explained that these encounters help show girls the many different career paths they can pursue and broadens their worldview on what girls can achieve.

The importance of representation

Willow also shared that she learned about the fields where women continue to fall behind due to fewer opportunities compared to men. She recalled the statistics presented at the festival, highlighting the differences between women and men in professions such as doctors, nurses and teachers. She returned home feeling inspired and proud to be a girl, especially after collecting a set of affirmation stickers. One quote in particular stood out to her: ‘*She thought she could, so she did.*’

Charmaine, meanwhile, continues to be inspired by the experts she met at the festival. She recalls meeting a female bobsledder and many scientists and was particularly encouraged to see companies actively supporting women across various

fields – something especially meaningful to her as the parent of an autistic child. She's excited about the prospect of Willow exploring more of her sporty side, noting that activities showcased at the festival like rugby and boxing were “*really good*” for Willow to be exposed to.

Cultivating a long-lasting interest for arts

One month on from the festival, Willow was still deeply invested in Dungeons & Dragons and had spent time playing it with both friends and family. Alongside this new hobby, she fondly remembered working on an art mural at the festival, where she added her own dragon illustrations. She has also taken up coding on Scratch and discovered a love of bracelet making – a skill she credits directly to her experience at the 2025 festival. Proud of her creations, she shared that she has made beaded fish, snakes and many other animals. Continuing to expand her repertoire of handmade art, she even crafted a dragon tail based on the character, Toothless, from *How to Train Your Dragon*.

In addition to all of this, Charmaine explained that Willow and her best friend have decided to take part in their school's talent show - something she feels Willow would not have had the confidence to do prior to participating in the filmmaking workshop at Festival of the Girl. Charmaine explained that Willow engaging in this activity helped her realise “*she quite enjoyed doing that, and it wasn't as scary as she thought it would be.*”

Following the event, Charmaine and Willow have been encouraging friends and family to attend future festivals, having found it to be an incredibly valuable and meaningful experience for girls of all ages.

Willow and Charmaine's experience highlights how Festival of the Girl can inspire and cultivate areas of interest – particularly in the arts and creative expression. It also shows how the event helps build confidence in girls like Willow, who might be shy initially but leave feeling empowered to try new things and step beyond their comfort zones.