

***“Early exposure to technology might help encourage young girls into the tech industry”***

*“Early exposure to technology might help encourage young girls into the tech industry, maybe through summer camps and other initiatives that provide hands-on experience with technology”,* explained Rianne Azzopardi when asked by the [National Commission for the Promotion of Equality \(NCPE\)](#) on what can be done to encourage more girls to go into the tech industry.

Rianne, currently studying for a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (Honours) in Software Development at the University of Malta, said that she had loved technology when she was a young girl. Rianne loved experimenting with her computer by programming dummy programmes using Scratch and building small Lego robots. She always knew she wanted to become a software engineer. Choosing the IT course came almost naturally to her. *“I love my course; I would be lying if I said that it’s not challenging at times, but with a little bit of dedication and effort, these challenges can be easily overcome.”*

Digital skills are very significant in this digital age, she said, especially considering that IT is found in every field imaginable, including daily life. The point was also raised by Christabelle Saliba, another IT student also interviewed by the NCPE to commemorate this year’s International Girls in ICT Day, celebrated on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2023. Christabelle added that *“things as basic as assignments and exams must often be submitted online, and digital proficiency makes this process faster and overall, less frustrating.”*

This year’s theme for Girls in ICT, [‘Digital Skills for Life’](#), encourages girls and young women to pursue a future in ICTs and to empower them by ensuring they have the necessary skills, confidence, and support to achieve their goals.

Both these students are passionate about technology. Rianne said that being ICTSA’s Academic Officer is one of her most cherished moments. [ICTSA](#) is the organisation that represents all ICT students at both University of Malta and MCAST. Through ICTSA, *“I got to meet so many new people and I made memories that I am sure I will cherish forever. The rest of the executive members have become a second family to me.”* On the other hand,

Christabelle’s most cherished moments as an ICT student have been the hackathons and coding competitions in which she has participated. She mentioned that being surrounded by people who show so much positive energy and enthusiasm, towards something she is passionate about, is such a positive feeling.

Christabelle has not encountered any hurdles during her studies per se, but she was always pushed to choose subjects which are traditionally more “feminine.” She was told she would have a hard time working in a male-dominated industry and create problems for herself. Comments like these could demotivate a lot of young girls from choosing the subjects they genuinely like. Indeed, in 2021, **25.7% of ICT specialists employed in Malta were women**. Although there has been a slight increase from 2020 (10.7%), this number is still low compared to **men (74.3%)**.

*“Whilst there is no guarantee that we could ever balance out the gender gap in the industry, we must look at students individually and push them to follow their true path, whether it is conventional or not,”* remarked Christabelle, who also believes that the toys with which children play strongly impact their interests later in life. By reducing the idea of gendered toys, the horizon would be broadened for all children, and more young girls would become aware of their interest in technology. Christabelle added that representation also plays an important role. Female role models motivate more young girls to join the industry.

When asked what message they would give to girls aspiring to pursue a career in ICT, Rianne and Christabelle said that girls should embrace challenges as opportunities to learn and improve, never give up and follow their dreams.

*The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2276 8200, [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt) or NCPE’s social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter - NCPE.Malta)*

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