

## A letter from Alex, Girls Programming Network

Hey there!

My name is Alex and I'm a software engineer and I also run the Girls' Programming Network (GPN) in my free time. I also have 2 cats, love to bake and have recently been learning how to crochet! When I was in school, I went to an all girls school and I was the only person in my year that was interested in programming. I learned how to code when I was in year 9 and I found it really fun. I liked being able to build things and figure out problems and then show my friends what I had made (I made a lot of games back then). But programming didn't feel like a possible career for me, I actually thought I was going to be a teacher, mostly because I didn't know anyone with a career in tech, and I couldn't imagine what that would look like.



Luckily for me, I had an awesome IT teacher, who encouraged me to try out some extra-curricular programs like the Girls' Programming Network. I went along and met all these amazing students who were my age, and were interested in a lot of the same things that I was, and I also met a lot of women who were in university studying computer science, or in the industry working as software engineers. It was really exciting and it opened up this world of possibility I hadn't noticed before.

I ended up doing a Bachelor of Computer Science at university, and started volunteering for GPN, teaching high school students how to code and trying to show them that they belonged in tech as well (so in a way I did end up being a teacher). I'm now working at a big tech company, and I love my job and getting to build cool things with cool people every day. And I'm still volunteering with GPN, now as the COO, helping us expand to new cities and teaching the volunteers how to teach and write fun workbooks for the students.

If you like to make things, whether that's crochet, drawing, woodworking, baking or anything else crafty, then I would really encourage you to give programming a go. It's super creative, because you learn these building blocks (variables, if statements, loops) and then you get to figure out how to put those building blocks together to try and solve a problem or make the thing you want to make. Sometimes you get to learn new building blocks that makes it even easier to make the thing you want, and that's really exciting as well.

Tech sometimes gets this stereotype that it's a really isolated, with just one person on a computer, but it's actually really collaborative! In my job I don't go a single day without working with someone else on a problem, asking or answering questions, chatting about what we're building next or what our customers think of the thing we just released. As a girl in tech, it can get a little lonely if you can't find other people who are like you who are also interested in programming, that's definitely how I felt when I first started learning to code, so communities like GPN are really helpful. Coming to a GPN workshop every term and feeling the energy of being part of a community of people who all love coding and are there to support each other is one of my favourite parts of being a woman in tech.

Whether you want to be a programmer, a doctor, a teacher, a painter or anything else, learning to code is a really great skill and a very fun hobby. The future is going to be changed by technology and code, and it's so cool to get to be a part of that, and to understand it more deeply. And we certainly can't leave the boys in charge of it!

I hope to see you at one of our GPN events in 2026!

All the best,  
Alex Penna