

Movement to Work – Employer of the Year application for M&S: Case studies

Ashley

Before being referred to The Prince's Trust, Ashley was unemployed. He was working with the Jobcentre to find work, but faced rejection for everything he applied for, and never made it to the interview stage. His confidence took a hit and he started to believe that he would never be able to find work.

In May 2020, Ashley was referred to The Prince's Trust via the Tameside Jobcentre Plus. Ashley initially took part in a 4-week programme online to build his confidence and life skills. Following the completion of this programme, a Prince's Trust youth worker suggested that Ashley apply for the Marks and Start employability programme to gain work experience with Marks and Spencer.

Ashley was nervous and wasn't sure he was suitable for the opportunity. He was also worried that after the programme he would be unemployed again, but the Prince's Trust youth worker reassured him that there was an opportunity to secure a four-week contract with M&S on completion of the programme.

Ashley completed the Taster Day and was offered a placement in the Glossop store within the Greater Manchester area. Ashley was still unsure if the placement and M&S would be the company he would like to work for or if he would be able to fit in. However, he wanted to gain some more work experience and skills for future jobs so decided to persevere with the programme.

Within his first week, Ashley was already getting stuck into his job role within the food department, taking on tasks on his own and using his initiative to aid his team during peak trading hours. The M&S store team began to see Ashley as a great asset to them, at first giving him more responsibility with supervision, and then giving him tasks to complete independently.

Ashley began working at the same level as most of the experienced staff members. Within his second week of placement, Ashley received a 5-star customer feedback – the customer was really impressed with his knowledge and manner when helping them out. Ashley's confidence grew week by week, with the store manager saying that they could not see the store without Ashley being part of the team.

At the end of the programme, Ashley was given a 5-week temporary contract!

"M&S and The Prince's Trust have really allowed myself to come into my own self and allowed me to become part of something. I have never really felt like I belonged anywhere, and this is now how I feel, I feel like I belong to the staffing team at Glossop. I feel like I wake up with purpose, and it might seem silly to some, but I really enjoy and love the job and the fact that I can now afford a few more things for myself and my flat now that I haven't ever been able to do is really great and a perk to the job. I really want to thank all the staff in Glossop that have helped me to become the worker I am today. Thanks to M&S for this opportunity as well, I feel like a new person." – **Ashley, Marks and Start young person**

"Ashley has been an absolute star! He has adapted to the team and the role amazingly well and should be so proud of himself as we all are at Glossop! Within his 2nd week at the store Ashley received a 5-star customer feedback about how brilliant he had served a customer and you can't ask for better than that!" – **Kate Prime, Store Manager at the M&S Glossop store**

Gurpreet

Gurpreet is originally from Kenya but moved to the UK at the age of 10. During the start of the COVID pandemic in June 2020, Gurpreet was completing a degree in graphic design and communication. She was concerned that there would be very few options for her after university due to the ongoing pandemic. It felt scary and daunting to leave university in such uncertain times.

Gurpreet decided to find work experience as she realised this was key to getting full-time employment. After months of searching for work Gurpreet came across The Prince's Trust through the Jobcentre and found out about the Marks and Start programme. She was excited about the idea of getting experience at M&S, but was concerned that she wouldn't be as confident or skilled as other people, and felt anxious that she may not fit in.

Despite feeling nervous, Gurpreet attended the online Taster Day which reassured her that the course would be a fantastic opportunity for her. As a result, Gurpreet was eager to enrol on the programme, giving her hope that her life was headed in a positive direction.

Gurpreet had an amazing time on her work experience with M&S. She found all the staff to be very helpful and friendly. On her placement Gurpreet worked in clothing, the gift shop, and Click and Collect department. Her favourite part of her work experience was interacting with the customers which gave her the opportunity to develop her skills in customer service. Throughout the programme, she felt more and more confident with the tasks she was given to complete and enjoyed interacting with customers around the shop.

Gurpreet really appreciated the skills she was able to gain during the programme as she feels these will be invaluable in any future employment. One of the most beneficial parts of the course was for Gurpreet to grow in confidence in herself and her abilities.

After the programme, Gurpreet was successful in being offered a four-week contract with M&S!

“During the work placement I feel like I gained skills and knowledge that will take me through life and help me face bigger challenges. It also gave me a perspective on how things work as I hadn't had any retail experience and it just shows how much staff and colleagues do in the background. Being part of the M&S family has given me a sense of being part of something that I know can change a person's day.” – Gurpreet, Marks and Start young person

Alexia

Alexia was really struggling before she found the Marks and Start programme. At the start of the pandemic, she was put on furlough from her job as an Air Hostess for Easyjet. She was then brought back off furlough and worked throughout the summer, only to be made redundant in September as a result of the pandemic and its impact on the airline industry. Alexia was left feeling worried, anxious, and uncertain about her future. She felt that she wouldn't be employed again for a long time and it had a negative impact on her mental health.

Alexia heard about the Marks and Start programme through the Jobcentre and was keen to get involved, having no experience in Retail and keen to stay in a customer-facing role.

Alexia was brought onto the programme after an impressive interview and was extremely keen throughout her placement. She found the start quite challenging, feeling lost at times and not knowing what to do. However, through learning on the job and gaining experience she picked things up over time and started to feel more comfortable in the role.

She enjoyed the positive, family atmosphere at M&S and always felt that she was valued at work. She made new friends in the store and enjoyed the online employability skills sessions. This had a positive effect on her mental health, making her feel more hopeful about her future.

After her placement Alexia was successful in securing a four-week contract, which was then extended by M&S for another two weeks!

“The Marks and Start programme has helped me get back into work, and regain confidence in my ability. I learnt a lot of interview tips and techniques and made lots of new friends. Marks and Start has changed my life dramatically.” – **Alexia, Marks and Start young person**