

2022 YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY AWARDS – Employer of the Year nomination for M&S - Evidence

Testimonials

“M&S has a longstanding commitment to helping disadvantaged young people into work. We have been working with The Prince’s Trust for the last 17 years and have been able to give work experience opportunities to over 10,000 young people in that time. We cherish our partnership with The Prince’s Trust, in particular we value their knowledge of our business and quality support they provide to our programme participants.

*We know that young people have been severely impacted by COVID-19 and M&S is truly committed to helping those in our communities who need us most. We have been able to continue our “Marks and Start” programmes throughout the pandemic and look forward to reaching more and more young people.” - **Emma Lucas, Head of Talent & Development at Marks and Spencer***

*“The last couple of years has been a powerful litmus test of the strength of our partnership foundations and commitment to work together. In what has been a very tough time for retailers and young people, M&S has stood out as a driving force to help The Trust innovate and be there for young people. This has resulted in our partnership becoming even stronger, and it is a source of huge pride across both organisations. Thank you, M&S.” – **Stephanie Bagworth, Senior Head of Corporate Partnerships at The Prince’s Trust***

Case study: Marks and Start programme - October 2020

Ashley, aged 21 from Tameside

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 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 second week at the store Ashley received a 5-star customer feedback about how brilliantly he had served a customer and you can’t ask for better than that!” – **Store Manager at the M&S Glossop store**

Case study: Marks and Start programme - October 2020

Alexia, aged 20 from Romford

Alexia was really struggling before she found Marks and Start, having been through difficult times within the airline industry and a lot of change and uncertainty going on during COVID-19.

At the start of the pandemic she was put on furlough having worked as an Air Hostess for Easyjet. She was then brought back off furlough and working throughout summer, only to be made redundant in September as a result of the pandemic and its effect on the industry.

Alexia was left feeling worried, anxious and uncertain about her future. She felt as if she wouldn’t be employed again for a long time and it had a negative impact on her mental health.

Alexia heard about Marks and Start programme through the job centre 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. She found the start a little challenging, feeling lost at times not knowing what to do and at times feeling as if she was lacking direction from a manager. However, through learning on the job she found that she picked things up through experience over time and got into the swing of the role. She found the experience to be positive, she made new friends in store, and really enjoyed the online learning. She felt she learned a lot about interview tips and techniques and found her Prince’s Trust contact to be a great personal cheerleader throughout.

She found the family atmosphere at M&S to be a positive atmosphere to work in and always felt like she was valued. This in turn had a positive effect on her mental health, making her feel more optimistic about her future.



After her placement Alexia was successful in securing a four-week fixed-term, which was then extended for a further two weeks. After completing these six weeks Alexia was then asked to stay on for another six weeks. Alexia is really excited about the future now and is grateful to have taken part in this programme.

“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**

Case study: Marks and Start programme - October 2021

Emma, aged 26 from Cardiff

Emma was living in London when she made the decision to move back to Cardiff to care for a close family friend. Although she had a good job in London, she was unable to be transferred to the Cardiff branch of her workplace, leaving her unemployed in a new city.

Emma says: “I made the move in September 2020 so was unemployed for nearly year. I found it difficult to find work in a new area after living in London.”

During her time on the Marks and Start programme, Emma felt completely supported by M&S and The Prince’s Trust and found the programme really empowering. The excellent work culture at M&S allowed Emma to flourish and boost her confidence.

“I have anxiety so when I went into the placement, they helped me make sure I was ready, and I use breathing techniques to help with this. It’s so obvious and we all forget it but just taking a moment to breathe and have a little dance wiggle makes you feel good and then you are ready.

It was a brilliant experience which gave me a well needed confidence for both my mental and general wellbeing.”

Following the programme Emma secured a home-working job in insurance, which she undertook on top of her fixed-term contract with M&S.

“The M&S job will mean that I can get some variety seeing people and a nice change and all the staff are a bunch of friendly faces and [I’ll get some] variety of socialising being up and about on your feet. I have made friend with lots of the staff at Marks and Spencer.”



Case study: Marks and Start programme - October 2021

Odin, aged 30 from Leeds

Odin joined this programme following 10 years of unemployment due to poor health. He lacked both confidence and self-worth after spending so much time out of the work environment, and this effected his mental health considerably.

During his time with The Prince's Trust, Odin took part in various workshops to improve his employability skills and confidence to help with seeking employment. He learned many new retail skills such as customer service and stocking shelves.

Odin says: "I have had my difficult days but the whole experience has changed my life. I have learnt to trust people again, and how to do well in a retail setting."

Odin successfully completed four weeks of placement with Marks and Spencer's and secured a fixed term contract in the Leeds centre store. Odin feels he now has something to wake up for in the morning, and both himself and his colleagues in store are in awe of how much his confidence and self-esteem has grown during this period. Odin is incredibly proud to join the M&S family and, although nervous, is incredibly enthusiastic for the future.

"I have had feedback from his buddy Lee that he is absolutely smashing it on homeware. He is good on men's but has found a real passion for homeware and keeps saying how much he is enjoying it and keeps seeking feedback. I have seen such a difference in him in a week, so much more confident and always smiling. The team are so impressed." - **Store Manager at the M&S Leeds Briggate store**



Case study: Kickstart programme – April 2021

Ailidh, aged 19 from Glasgow

Ailidh's Kickstart placement with M&S has enabled her to explore the world of retail, in a fast-paced environment, where she is able to develop new skills and a future career.

Ailidh lost her job in a café due to the pandemic. It was her work coach who introduced her to the possibility of working in the retail sector. Although Ailidh had no experience in the retail sector she believed it was an opportunity too good to miss as she enjoyed new challenges and learning new things. The fact that she could gain six months hands on experience while being paid was a bonus.

Alongside support from her colleagues at M&S, Ailidh is also receiving support from The Prince's Trust, this includes group and one on one support, which enables her to discuss her future goals, develop her skills and build her confidence.

Ailidh said: 'In the past few weeks working with M&S and the Prince's Trust, it has really opened my eyes in a good way, I really wanted to learn and gain experience in this industry.'

'One of my greatest learning experiences has been working with the public and being part of a team that will support me no matter what their job title. In the current times we are all living in, being part of the M&S team has made me feel welcome and more at ease than I could ever have imagined.'

‘Taking part in my Kickstart placement has helped me a lot. Before the programme I wasn’t confident and found it hard to cope with stress and anxiety, but now five weeks into the programme, this is the most confident I’ve been since I left school. I’m coping so much better with my anxiety and stressful feelings and I’m looking forward to the rest of the programme, learning more new things I haven’t experienced yet and graduating from the M&S Academy.

‘My advice to anyone considering Kickstart would be to just go for it! Not only do you get to grow and develop your skills and confidence, you also have some really great support around you from M&S and The Prince’s Trust.’

Case study: Kickstart programme – April 2021

Peter, aged 23 from Leeds

Peter, 23, from Leeds, was unemployed for five years before finding work at M&S through the Kickstart scheme.

‘I’ve been looking for work since I left school five years ago. I was mainly looking for jobs in shops, but they wouldn’t take me on because I didn’t have the experience. I also didn’t have the money to learn how to drive, so couldn’t get to some jobs.

‘I was able to volunteer at a charity shop for a year, but the pandemic ended that opportunity. I was still looking for jobs, but retailers were furloughing lots of people at the time, so it was hard to find places that were hiring.

‘Being out of work for so long was taxing on my mental health. My confidence took a really big hit.

‘I found out about Kickstart in March 2021 through the job centre and saw it as an opportunity to finally get a job. I interviewed for a Customer Assistant role at M&S and started working there in April.

‘The Kickstart placement at M&S has been brilliant. At first, I had a lack of confidence in myself, so I would struggle to do tasks without asking people if I was doing them right. It was a learning curve, but now my confidence has come on leaps and bounds, and I just crack on with my work.

‘I’ve learnt a lot of skills working as a Customer Assistant in both the food hall and clothing department, like organising stock, dealing with difficult customers and working the tills.

Peter is receiving wraparound employability support from The Prince’s Trust on his Kickstart placement.

‘We’ve done sessions on topics like confidence building and managing money. The second one gave me a new outlook on how to budget. I haven’t had to budget before, because I’ve spent a long time without money coming in.

‘With my confidence and self-esteem increasing from work, I’ve picked up my guitar and painting again for the first time in years. I enjoyed being creative back in school before I was unemployed, but then I was so down on myself I stopped doing things I enjoyed.’



“My brother hadn’t seen me in a few months because of the pandemic, and when we met up recently he said I’d changed so much since starting the Kickstart placement at M&S, it was like meeting a different person.”

Following the Kickstart programme, Peter was offered further employment with M&S and was really pleased to take up this offer.

Photos – young people on Kickstart and Marks and Start programmes



START SOMETHING



Prince's Trust



Ian, age 23

