

Tom's story



TOM, from London, is a former Derwen College Retail & Enterprise student who graduated in 2021. Tom developed work skills, confidence and independence which have helped him secure a supported internship.

Thomas has just completed his Retail pathway at Derwen College and is set to start a supported internship back at home.

He has learnt important work skills during his work placements in the college's commercial areas and at a local supermarket. He is also proud to have gained confidence and independence skills. He is keen to use his newfound skills to secure employment and, eventually, his own home.

Tom, from West London, has a moderate learning disability and Autistic Spectrum Condition. He and his parents felt that Derwen College was the right college for him from their first look around.

'There was lots of space and it was quite big, it felt more like a proper college than other places I visited. The accommodation looked like my brother's flat at university,' says Tom. His parents also wanted Tom to enjoy a college experience like his siblings.

'We wanted Tom to have the experience of living away from home and living with other young people, in the same way that our other children did. We felt Derwen offered a full curriculum of meaningful training



Tom had a weekly work placement at the Spar supermarket.

and socialisation opportunities for Tom. We felt Tom would really enjoy the whole experience. We knew that Tom would not learn and practice essential independence and social skills if he remained at home, like all our children he needed to learn this away from home.'

For his Retail pathway, Tom took part in internal and external work experience and has completed BTEC qualifications.

He liked to work at Derwen's Garden Centre Shop as a cashier or checking stock and shelves, although he says his favourite part of the curriculum was working in the college's on-site Karten Print Shop. Duties at the Karten include printing marketing material for the college as well as for local businesses.

Off-site, Tom worked at Spar supermarket one morning a week. He enjoyed the work and interacting with customers.

He says: 'It is good to do work experience to learn to get a job and learn to work in a real workplace.'

During his time at college, Tom developed his confidence and independence skills. For three years, he lived in a shared bungalow in the Agnes Hunt Village with two friends, and learnt self-care and household tasks needed for a more independent future.

He says: 'I learnt to make my bed and keep my room tidy, use the washing machine and iron my clothes. The staff taught me how to cook food and I can make myself cups of tea and things for my lunch like pasta, eggs or pizza. I put my clothes in the washing machine and I did lots of hoovering and tidying up around the bungalow.'

His parents say: 'Tom's experience of



Tom enjoyed working in Derwen College's Karten Print Shop

living in the bungalows has shown him that he can live more independently and with other people. He loved having his own bungalow and front door key, the freedom to come and go but with staff around to support him.'

Tom has embraced sports, leisure and wellbeing activities outside his retail curriculum and is soon to complete his Gold Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) Award.

'I love music, so really enjoyed being part of College Band. I also did go-karts at the weekends and Boccia on Thursday evenings. I really liked going on trips at weekends with the College.'

Tom has gained a place on a local Project Search supported internship programme at West Middlesex Hospital. He will travel independently to the placement where he will work and train in three departments over the next year.

His parents say: 'The internship is a great next step for Tom to build on his skills with a view to finding an appropriate employment opportunity in the future. We are looking at local supported housing options but in the meantime, it is great to see Tom being able to look after himself more at home.'



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