

Billie-Jo's story

Billie-Jo, from Middlesex, graduated from Derwen College last year. Thanks to skills learnt at College, she is now travelling independently to her job at Nando's.

Billie-Jo graduated from Derwen in summer 2021, and has now started a new chapter using the skills she learnt as a residential student at Derwen.

Thanks to transferable work and independence skills, and the newfound confidence she gleaned at Derwen, 22-year-old Billie-Jo now works as a waitress in Nandos, in London. She travels across the city on her own five days a week.

Billie-Jo says: "I get up at 7am and get my breakfast. I walk to the tube, which is about ten minutes away. There is one train change, and I cross the platform. I walk to work at Nando's and work from 11am-3.30pm."

"I am a waitress. I take customers to their tables, bring them food, clean tables, sort out spice bottles, clear tables and stuff like that."

Billie-Jo first came to look at Derwen, after friends, who were already at the College, recommended it to her.

"We went to visit and met up with friends, who told me how much they liked it. My parents had looked at every special needs college in the country and when they visited Derwen they also knew it would be perfect for me."

"When I started, I was a little bit nervous. I was nervous trying to make new friends. When I went into second year, I was confident in myself."

Billie-Jo opted for the College's Horticulture pathway. Working in the College's Garden Centre, she learnt customer service and other transferable skills which enabled

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Billie-Jo loves her job as a waitress at Nando's.

her to enter different fields of employment.

"I liked the staff, and the potting shed. I liked to learn lots of plants and chat to staff to see if they needed help."

While at College, Billie-Jo made the most of the social life and opportunities to join in with activities and trips. She also took part in Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, and achieved a Gold award.

In Billie-Jo's second year, she moved into one of the College's Agnes Hunt Bungalows, a 'village' where students live together in their own home, with more independence from staff.

"I liked the bungalows and the independence. I lived with two amazing friends.

"We sometimes went to the SU to get a drink or something or we might go to the gym, or swimming pool."

Billie-Jo says that her time at Derwen helped her to become more mature and more independent.

She says: "I came out of my shell at Derwen. I also learnt to make beds, make breakfast, do washing and stuff like that. I am living at home at the moment. I make my bed and sometimes make bacon sandwiches and pasta and put the washing machine on. I can be helpful and

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make my mum and dad cups of tea."

Billie-Jo remains active, and attends a dance group and gym regularly. She likes to meet up with friends, and tries to see her boyfriend when they can arrange it."

Billie-Jo's parents say:

"Bill loved her time at Derwen, she has gained in confidence and independence and takes herself off to work every day! Which we are in awe of. I sing the praises of Derwen to every parent who has a child with special needs. I love its 'university' campus feel. It was something I didn't think Bill would get to experience, but the student union, the elections, the safe site, the staff, the many opportunities she had there – from DofE to horse riding, theatre trips etc – were just great. The bungalows were great for her independence, but overall, the care of the staff was just the best."