

Mary's story

Derwen College Retail graduate Mary Tait, from Worcestershire, is using her skills in business and customer service on a Supported Internship which she hopes will lead to paid employment. We asked Mary to tell us about her time at Derwen and her aspirations for the future.

What made you want to come to Derwen?

As soon as I came to visit Derwen College for the first time, and I saw the college, its facilities, its staff, and all of the other students.

Did it take a while for you to settle in?

Yes, I felt nervous and shy. But staff were very attentive and supportive. And I soon made friends with other students.

What did you most enjoy about Retail and Enterprise?

The staff made my lessons fun and interesting, and I had lots of hands-on experience working in the College's Garden Centre and Shop, The Vintage Advantage charity shop, and an external work placement at the local Co-op.

What other things did you enjoy about life at Derwen?

Learning to live independently, hanging out with my housemates and other students, and the social life in and out of college was great. I made a lot of friends. We enjoyed hanging out together, going to the student discos, going horseriding, and going out to shows and for meals, and other activities.

How do you think you have changed because of Derwen?

I have become much more confident and less shy. I have learnt how to do my laundry, how to cook for myself and my housemates, how to get ready for work on time, how to work in a shop, and all the skills I needed to complete a Duke of Edinburgh's Gold award!

Do you use the independence skills you learnt at College?

I am living back at home right at the moment, but I am about to move into a supported living house with three other young adults, where I will be able to practise all the skills I learned at Derwen, and will continue to learn more skills.

Where do you work now? I am on a MENCAP Supported Internship programme which will finish off preparing me to be able to work independently. As part of the course, I spend a day a week on a work placement. I am currently working at Waitrose. For the rest of the week I also work on a local farm feeding animals, cleaning their sheds, planting and picking fruit and veg, chopping trees, and sometimes doing washing up in their café.

What do you do for fun? I love music and dancing, going to discos and watching live concerts, going out for meals with friends, performing in pantomimes, and playing with yoyos! I regularly meet up with friends I used to know from school as well as friends I made at Derwen.

Would you recommend Derwen College?

Absolutely! It was the best experience ever! It helped me to learn to live more independently, prepared me for work experience, and it was a lot of fun!

What achievements are you and your family most proud of?

I am very proud that I was awarded the Duke of Edinburgh Gold medal and became the first member of my family (I have three brothers and a sister) to have done so! I am also very proud that I won the Retail Student of the Year award as well as the first ever Caitlin Kelly Spirit Award for determination and spirit! But most of all me and my family are proud of how I have managed to learn so many independent living skills!



Mary works at Waitrose as part of her Internship. She was awarded with a box of chocolates after a customer praised her customer service working on the tills.

Mary's parents say ...

"Mary has been transformed from being a quiet and shy young girl to a confident young lady now able and willing to throw herself at any challenges that might come her way. Not only have her reading and writing improved immeasurably (and she can now read the time even on clocks with no numbers!), but she has also learnt so many work-related skills that she was able to secure a Supported Internship at MENCAP (which is only offered to students who they are confident will be able to work independently after a one-year placement); and she will shortly be moving to a supported living scheme where she will be able to practise and continue to develop the independent living skills she learned whilst at Derwen because she is now so confident in her abilities.

"Derwen was the perfect placement for Mary. It offered the best possible environment for preparing her for semi-independent living which will enable her to maximise her potential and maximise her enjoyment of life!

"Even when Mary was 16 we could not have imagined how she could manage to live on her own, even with support. But as soon as we saw the Derwen College campus we could see how other students like her were managing to do so.

"We would recommend that any other parent with a child with learning disabilities visits the college to see for themselves – it opened our eyes to a world of possibilities for Mary that would not have been otherwise have been available to her, and we think it will open your eyes too!"