

Owlett-Jaton

WORK PLACEMENT: Case Study by Strathmore College

In June 2019 Thomas began a supported work placement at Owlett-Jaton in Stone, Staffordshire. Thomas was supported by Strathmore College staff to attend a successful working interview. Following Thomas's interview a work placement was agreed with the manager of the packing department.

Previously Thomas had been supported in a work placement for a local company Ayudante in Fenton, Staffordshire where Thomas worked for two years. Ayudante is a Social Enterprise Company who contract work from local and national companies to include multi-national companies. Initially Thomas had assembly work transported into College and was allocated staff support in a quiet environment to complete the assembly of small components for JCB.

Thomas quickly demonstrated his ability to complete the work to the standards expected and was then given the opportunity to visit Ayudante to deliver the assembled components, giving Thomas the opportunity to see where the items were going and to see the actual workplace. Gradually Thomas was introduced to the work environment and was then able to commence a supported placement within the factory itself.

Thomas's diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder made this a challenging environment and Thomas initially chose to wear ear defenders and to regularly use a variety of sensory items to self-regulate. Working half a day to begin with, Thomas settled into the job role well having 1-1 support from college staff and being set targets to support his progress and independence within the work place. Thomas quickly increased his hours of work on-site followed by an increase to working two days per week as he developed in his confidence to complete the tasks given to him with more independence and learning many new skills, for example; how to manage his time by setting a timer on his iPad for structured breaks/lunch times, following health and safety in the workplace by walking in the correct marked and coloured safety areas within the factory, wearing PPE independently and becoming more independent with regards to the routine of his working day.

In June 2019 it became apparent to the Strathmore College staff supporting Thomas that the valuable work skills he had learnt would be better suited within a work placement where the outcome could be future paid employment.

After the successful working interview at Owlett-Jaton, Thomas impressed the manager of the packing department and the Team Leader with his adaptable skills and how quickly and efficiently he completed the given interview task that he was offered three days per week of a supported work placement to start immediately. The work placement was designed to provide Thomas with a smooth transition into a realistic working week of three days which were adjusted accordingly to his now present working day of 10am until 2pm. Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Based on the skills that Thomas had developed through the previous work experience at Ayudante, the position on offer to Thomas was in the packing department completing various orders by labelling, packing DIY components either by counting out or weighing and sealing bags for distribution to various DIY outlets countrywide. Thomas transferred all of the skills previously learnt at his previous work placement and has subsequently learnt many new ones, such as the correct use of safety equipment, for example safety knives, labelling guns, staple guns and also good manual handling skills to lift and transport heavy boxes. Thomas has a keen eye for detail and is meticulous, having the knowledge, dexterity and ability to work with speed to meet deadlines making

Thomas a valuable member of the packing team who is highly regarded by his team leaders and work colleagues.

Thomas has learnt the route to his work place when travelling using public transport, being able to identify the correct bus to catch, presenting his bus pass to the driver, staying safe during the journey and recognising his destination. Thomas has been supported whilst travelling to help develop his independence and to maintain his safety whilst out in the community. In the workplace environment, Thomas has made a great personal achievement in being able to work with more independence. Thomas no longer relies on his designated support staff member for guidance and now takes instruction from his trusted team leader.

Thomas's genuine cheerful personality, hard work ethics and dependability have provided many positive comments from the staff in the workplace who support him daily and also from his team leaders. Thomas is able to complete the workload equivalent to his colleagues and does so to a high standard working to set deadlines. The staff working with Thomas offer unwavering support and their attitude towards Thomas as a valued member of staff supports to reinforce that "disability" is not a barrier to work and Thomas's presence in the workforce has changed the attitudes of many of his colleagues and 'opened' the eyes of many as to the possibilities and hidden talent that is out there amongst people with disabilities. Thomas's presence has also got employees talking more and sharing their own experience of family members and people they know who have disabilities.....in a nutshell, Thomas has totally changed the culture and ideology of his work colleagues in the most positive of ways!

Thomas is always happy at work and brings a smile to everyone's face when he arrives laughing and cheerful. He now chooses not to wear his ear defenders and instead will choose to sing along to the radio, demonstrating how he feels comfortable in his work environment and confident to complete the work he is given to do.

Thomas and his support staff were so proud the first day that he wore his full work uniform given to him by the company and everyone at Strathmore College are immensely proud of Thomas's achievements and work based success. Thomas's parents are extremely proud of Thomas, his progress and how he has developed in his work skills and are very happy to see Thomas being part of a workforce and are looking forward to Thomas having some paid employment in the future.

Lastly a huge thank you to Owlett-Jaton for seeing beyond the 'physical' Thomas who many months ago bounced into your reception area on his tip-toes, wearing his ear defenders and waving his fiddle sticks ready for his interview! Your support and accommodation of Thomas's needs, your own learning and development around understanding 'disability' and the added value that someone like Thomas can bring to a company, the ability of your employees to embrace Thomas as one of their own, seeing and 'getting' Thomas's wonderful personality and humour but mostly for the opportunity and support you offered to Thomas has been second to none.....seeing was believing – thank you!



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