

APPENDIX ii- Gingerbread Marks and Start Case Study

Suraya took part in the Marks and Start work Experience Programme in May in Slough. Suraya has 4 children between the ages of 19-5 and her last experience of work was 20 years ago.

Since taking part in the Marks and Start programme Suraya secured full-time Customer Assistant role in the placements store. Below Suraya describes her experiences and the impact that taking part in the programme has had.

Please describe in as much detail as possible, your life, emotional well-being and circumstances before your experience at Marks & Start?

Suraya has been out of work for over 20 years as she has been raising her family. As a result she has been supporting herself and children through welfare benefits which was something she was not proud of and has affected her confidence and emotional wellbeing. As her children got older Suraya was keen to gain work and support her family however as the time passed she was finding it more and more difficult to get back into work due to lack of confidence, no references, no recent work experience, also the “world of work” had changed dramatically. Back in the 90’s you would go straight to an employer, ask for work, give them your details and start the following week however now the recruitment processes are far more complex, including online procedures, application forms, CV, covering letters and also different types of interviews such as Group, company interviews and 1-1. Suraya was very intimidated by this and didn’t know where to begin as she had never had to do this in the past and also felt very anxious about using IT. This made her feel very insecure about her abilities as she felt she had no chance of competing in this “new world of work”.

Suraya also felt she was receiving conflicting information regarding seeking work through JCP and other sources.

Please describe in as much detail as possible, the sorts of barriers or problems you’ve faced in your life / getting into work:

Suraya’s last job finished in 1994 before she had her first child. Suraya felt that her barriers included:

- No references
- No recent work experience
- No idea about how to complete application forms or how to sell herself
- Out dated skill sets
- Never had a CV
- Didn’t understand what a covering letter entailed
- Unsure of what back to work benefits single parents may be entitled to when returning to work
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of motivation
- Using childcare for her youngest child
- No recent interview experience

Suraya was unable to obtain job interviews and was finding it difficult to complete job application forms as she didn’t have any references or have the knowledge or understanding

to complete them effectively. Each time she received a rejected letter or would if she did not hear back from an interview; it would knock her confidence further.

Describe in as much detail as possible, the experiences you had at Marks & Spencer / the programme partner? How did they help you?

Gingerbread - Suraya felt that Gingerbread has been a huge support system for her. When her JCP Advisor first informed her about the programme she was sceptical about working in the retail sector as she had not done this before and felt she would not enjoy it. She had recently completed a course in caring and was looking for care experience. However that all changed once she started the programme. Suraya felt very comfortable in the surroundings and also felt being with other single parents was a benefit as she didn't feel so alone. She learnt about back to work benefits and also the key elements required with regards to employability skills; such as interview techniques, completing application forms, preparing a good CV and also recognising and appreciating the skills she already possess as a single parent. This made her feel validated in a good way.

Suraya is very thankful to M&S for providing this opportunity to Single parents and also acknowledging the skills that Single parents have. Whilst on placement Suraya felt welcomed, part of the team and supportive at all times. She is grateful she had an opportunity to demonstrate her practical skills to them and also very happy they offered her a role which she happily accepted.

Describe in as much detail as possible, how Marks & Start has changed/affected your life?

Suraya feels that completing this programme has been life changing journey. She never thought that she would enjoy working in the Retail Sector and she loves the interaction with the staff and customers. She also enjoys the variety of the role and the skills she learns every day, enhances confidence and self-esteem. She feels that this programme has re-introduced her a new and improved self, so not only is she the mother of her children but also an individual called Suraya.

In as much detail as possible, what are your plans for the future?

Suraya feels that she has begun a new chapter in her life. She feels that she can begin to plan for the future and possibly take the children on a Summer trip to the beach; something which she has wanted to do for years but was not able to afford in the past.

She is so happy that she no longer on Job Seekers Allowance and doesn't need to report her job searching to JCP. She can support her family and put a little away in savings to treat herself and the children to something nice.

Any other information you'd like to include?

I am very grateful to have been given this fantastic opportunity. This has really changed mine and my children's life for the best. Thank you all so much.

Can you provide a brief statement to sum up your experience in Marks & Start?

It gave me a lot of confidence which I didn't have in the first place; I have gained valuable skills which have helped me progress in my life. I have met fantastic people and enjoyed every moment. It has opened up a completely new chapter in my life and I can't wait to see what the future holds.