



Ashley Carson's Story

When Ashley Carson from Ballycastle left Sandeford School she was not sure what she would do next. Ashley, her family and social worker felt the Adult centre was not an option for her; she wanted community-based day services. Ashley's Social Worker, Sharleen Thompson referred her to the Northern Trust's Day Opportunities programme.

The Day Opportunities Programme was set up for adults with learning disabilities following recommendations in the Equal Lives Report and the Northern Trust's "Widening Choice and Day Opportunities Strategy" for the modernisation and reform of day services. The programme covers four areas of opportunity: recreational, vocational, volunteering and further education. The Day Opportunities coordinator works with individuals and their families to tailor the programme to individual needs and aspirations.

Zara Armstrong, Day Opportunities Coordinator for the Ballycastle area said, "When Ashley first joined the Day Opportunities programme, her particular needs were looked at with herself; her family and social worker and the right mix of activities developed for her. Ashley has always had a good work ethic, so she was particularly interested in progressing towards paid employment."

Ashley Day Opportunities Co-ordinator talked her through all of the opportunities available. She was then referred to Greenlight Gateway. Greenlight Gateway is a social enterprise which aims to provide real and meaningful work and employment experiences to enable people with a learning disability to enhance and develop their self confidence and skills. Ashley was also referred to Mencap who supported her with her job.

"I work in the local co-op on a Wednesday. I stock shelves and also help customers with their enquiries. I enjoy working and being able to help people with their shopping" Said Ashley.

When not working Ashley attends "The Base" in Ballycastle. As part of the modernisation and reform of day services, The Northern Trust has developed 10 such "Bases" across the Trust. Their purpose is to create a space where adults with learning difficulties can drop-in and meet with friends and take part recreational activities.

"We do lots of fun things such as cooking, baking, trips out, bowling, cinema, play boccia and we learnt circus skills earlier this year. We raised £750 for children in need in November, this event was my idea. I was able to bring my idea to the Base Steering Group, who gave me approval and my Day



Day Opportunities

Opportunities Coordinator Zara and Base Coordinators helped to arrange it.

“I am also working with my Day Opportunities Co-ordinator to find a volunteering placement where I can work with children. I am really looking forward to this.” Said Ashley.

The Day Opportunities programme has given Ashley the opportunity to become a fully integrated member of the Ballycastle community. Zara Armstrong, Opportunities Coordinator said, “Ashley now attends the Base, works one day a week and is working towards getting a voluntary position. Ashley has now both an active social and working life. She enjoys getting out and meeting new people and has learnt many new skills. The Day Opportunities Programme has allowed Ashley to be a more independent person and fully integrated member of the community.”



Ashley Carson, Ballycastle