



## Stuart McQuiston's Story

Stuart McQuiston used to spend his days at Broadway Workshops in Newtownabbey, but after several years he decided he was ready for a change. Stuart is now about to start his first job, thanks to the Day Opportunities Programme.

The Day Opportunities Programme was set up following recommendations in the Equal Lives Report and the Trust's "Widening Choice and Day Opportunities Strategy". The programme covers four areas of opportunity, recreational, vocational, and volunteering and further education. The Day Opportunities coordinator works with individuals; their families and named workers to tailor the programme to their specific needs and aspirations.

Lillian McManus, Day Opportunities Coordinator for the Carrickfergus area said, "We looked at Stuart's particular needs and developed the right mix of activities for him, knowing that he was particularly interested in progressing towards paid employment."

To help Stuart with the transition into the work environment he was first placed with Acceptable Enterprises in Larne (AEL). A.E.L is a Social Enterprise scheme that provides support to people who require additional support, helping them to gain experience and to develop new skills. It helps build confidence to improve their individual employment opportunities and thereby to fulfil their potential.

At the same time Stuart successfully completed a two-year course titled "Wider Choices", a City and Guilds qualification at the Newtownabbey campus of the Northern Regional College. The course helped Stuart to prepare himself and to further develop the skills he would need for work. He said, "College is great; making new friends and computers is my favourite subject. I get the train to college and home again; I love getting the train".

Thanks to A.E.L, the college course at NRC and with his own determination Stuart has progressed through to Triangle's Progression Towards Employment Service (a partnership with the Northern Trust and the Dpt of Employment and Learning). Through this service, Stuart has been successful in getting a work placement with Lavender Cupcakes, starting this month. "I will be cutting the shapes out and icing the cakes, I can't wait" said Stuart.

Lillian McManus added "Stuart also attends the Base in Carrickfergus one day a week, giving him the opportunity to socialise, meet and to make new friends and make use of local facilities, such as the gym at the leisure centre, the



cinema and cafés”. The Base is a further community based Day Opportunity in partnership with the Northern Trust and Kilcreggan Homes.

Stuart’s grandmother Ella believes that the programme has made a huge difference to Stuart. She said, “Stuart loves going out and meeting new people. We have seen a big change in him since he started with the Day Opportunities Programme; the variety of things he does really suits him. He is an active, 26 year old, young man, who wants to be part of the community. He enjoys organising outings to Belfast, such as to Balmoral Show this year and to the gym. He loves getting the train.

The Day Opportunities programme has given Stuart the opportunity to become a fully integrated member of the Carrickfergus community. He now has a job, meets up with his friends, goes to the gym and attends college. As Day Opportunities Coordinator Lillian put it, “Stuart has both an active social and working life. He is now a more confident, independent person with a lot to offer the community and through the Day Opportunities Programme he has now been given the chance to do so.”