

## Never too old for an NVQ!

### 81 year-old Grandmother completes Retail qualification

Every year, millions of people gain all manner of vocational qualifications – either through their work or outside of it. However in April 2008, a Level 2 NVQ Certificate in Retail was sent to a very special lady. At the grand age of 81, Brenda Comer, a voluntary shop assistant in Scope, Nuneaton, achieved the qualification, proving the old adage that you are never too old to learn!

Supported by her Scope colleagues and Protocol Skills Training Centre where she undertook the course, Brenda studied for 12 months before completing the NVQ, certificated by EDI. According to her, not only was it one of the biggest achievements in her life but also one of the most enjoyable.



Brenda's career before working for Scope had been extremely varied, including working as a telephone exchange operator, a signals instructor in the Army, a PE instructor and classroom assistant. Passionate about helping others and having known people with cerebral palsy, the charity Scope has always been close to her heart. Six years ago Brenda began working voluntarily in her local Nuneaton store. After a couple of years she moved to the shop floor and has since never looked back. When the idea of studying for an NVQ came about through her manageress, Brenda jumped at the chance, strongly believing in keeping her mind active as she got older. At the time her grandchildren were at University and the idea of learning and doing something different with her life appealed to her.

Brenda commented: "Doing a qualification at my age had never really entered my head but then I thought why not? It's important to keep your brain and mind active as you get older and this was an excellent way of stretching myself. It was also a good way of occupying the long and dark winter nights! One of the biggest things I have learned is that you are never too old – I thought I was but I proved myself wrong. I would advise anyone to do it and hopefully the fact I have achieved it will give others in my position a boost. My motto is definitely 'never too old' and 'never too late!'"

The initial reaction from her family was of disbelief – according to Brenda, the actual words were: "Never Grandma!" and "Never Ma!" As a result she kept quiet about her intentions and didn't reveal what she was doing until part way through her qualification. Since gaining the qualification she has received nothing but congratulations from her family and feels it has brought her closer to them, especially her grandchildren at University. Brenda said: "I have told them to think of me as they get older and keep their brains going. I am always encouraging them to do something with their life and to keep busy. It's never

too late to change direction or to learn a new skill. They have been fascinated by my qualification and my granddaughter even told me she didn't think she would achieve as good a result as me!"

Completing the qualification has not only given Brenda more confidence in the shop but it has also taught her many new things. She commented: "Through the course, I not only learnt how to improve my customer service but also to appreciate fully the people I work with. I learnt how detail is important – greeting people as they come into the shop and ensuring that garments are carefully displayed. I love meeting people and this has given me the confidence to really get to know my customers."

At 81, Brenda is still working 3 days a week voluntarily. Retirement hasn't even occurred to her. She commented: "Nowadays people at 60 or 70 feel that they still have more to give in life. I certainly did and I still do and working voluntarily is something I enjoy hugely. It's easy to become bored in later life and doing something like a qualification can be just the boost needed. It certainly was for me – I am absolutely delighted to have achieved it and to anyone thinking of doing it I would say go for it – whatever your age!"



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