

## Barnardo's defies recession and offers staff in-store training from EDI

Positive stories in the current economic gloom are few and far between, but Barnardo's stores have a reason to celebrate. Aged 23, Paul Boulton, the youngest Manager of a Barnardo's store in the UK, has won the National Advanced Apprenticeship 2009 Award and also the Overall Winner Award in the Work-based Learning Awards 2008/1. Paul's story is one of determination and success. He is a testament to the virtues of work-based learning having made the transition from volunteer to Store Manager in just two years.

As a direct result of his success, four Barnardo's stores are implementing a National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) programme from EDI with training provider Positive Outcomes, with a view to rolling it out across Barnardo's stores nationwide.

At the end of September 2008 the retail industry employed over 2.8 million people. This equates to 11 per cent of the total UK workforce. Yet despite retail being the UK's third largest industry, research from Skillsmart Retail, which represents the employers' voice on retail skills, shows that one fifth of UK retailers report skill gaps, with one in three retail employees having only basic qualifications or no qualification at all.



A great advocate of work-based learning, Paul, who is Manager of Barnardo's Alfreton in Derbyshire, said, "I left school at 16 with virtually no qualifications and no self confidence. School was hell for me. I got bullied and couldn't wait to leave. When I first joined Barnardo's as a volunteer, I had no idea that it would transform my life so significantly. Learning in the workplace really made a difference. Instead of feeling harassed, I felt nurtured and my confidence grew. I realised I had skills that I could put into practice and, for the first time in my life, I enjoyed learning."

Paul has gained EDI's NVQs in Customer Service, Retail Operations and Management across Levels 2 and 3 (GCSE and A Level equivalent) and an A1 Assessor's Award that now means he is a qualified assessor for NVQs. A keen promoter of on-the-job learning, Paul has encouraged several members of his team to sign up for EDI's NVQs with Positive Outcomes.

He continued, "The training provided by Positive Outcomes is excellent. It is really fulfilling for me to watch the team progressing and to see them learning skills that are so pertinent to the job. No two people learn in the same way, so courses are tailored to meet the needs of the individual, learning opportunities are maximised and real work skills can be immediately put into practice in the workplace."

Gerard Cousins, Director of Retail and Trading, said: "This is a fantastic achievement for Paul and we are all very proud of what he has achieved both for himself and for this team."

Helen Hart, Head of Training and Quality at Positive Outcomes, commented, "In offering bespoke training in the retail sector, we work closely with businesses to ensure that the skills are relevant to the employee's personal development plan and the company's overall business objectives. EDI is flexible about the way it works so in turn we are able to deliver the training tailored to the needs of our business partners."

Helen added, "Traditionally the retail industry suffers from the perception that it does not offer comprehensive and appealing career prospects and many employers question the value of vocational and skills-based training. However, many individuals recognise that in a future where their career is uncertain, as it is in this recession, that re-skilling is crucial. Work-based learning is also an efficient way of helping businesses forced to make redundancies to offer a first class customer service with fewer staff."

For Barnardo's and other large employers in the retail sector, the benefits of nationally recognised qualifications extend beyond simply improving skills within individual stores. Helping professionalise the retail industry, the qualifications are fundamental in attracting new recruits and promoting significant career opportunities within retail.

"It is essential that training and qualifications directly meet the needs of each individual business", said Gareth Phillips, Director of Sales and Business Strategy at EDI. "Employers are constantly being encouraged to invest in staff development and many have made the strategic commitment by signing The Skills Pledge. One of our roles as an awarding body is to work with employers and training partners to achieve formal recognition and accreditation for their own training programmes, as well as helping them develop qualifications which can be mapped to the national occupational standards. As a result, not only can employers fulfil their commitment to The Skills Pledge, but also increase productivity and business performance."

For more information about EDI, please contact the Customer Enquiries Team on 08707 202909, email [enquiries@ediplc.com](mailto:enquiries@ediplc.com), website: [www.ediplc.com](http://www.ediplc.com).



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