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Tillery Valley & Prince's Trust food industry placements give Blaenau Gwent youngsters hope

Young jobseekers from Blaenau Gwent gained experience and qualifications in food management thanks to an initiative run by youth charity The Prince's Trust and food firm Tillery Valley. During April, Tillery Valley hosted the Trust's two-week 'Get into Food Management' programme, aimed at young people aged 18 to 25 who are not in education, work or training.



Tillery Valley provides meals to the public sector across the UK, delivering daily to schools, hospitals and local authorities. Its production plant in Abertillery employs 350 people from the local area, and has the capacity to produce one million meals per week.

The free course provided a taste of working life in the food industry alongside a variety of structured job preparation activities including interview skills, CV writing, and health and safety training. Attendees also completed an accredited food safety qualification and spent time in a range of departments across the site, to gain specific on the job experience.

Jamie Griffiths, 19, from Brynmawr, met a Prince's Trust representative at the Job Centre, who told him about the placement. His experiences on the course have changed his attitudes about applying for work.

Jamie said: "I never wanted to apply for a job in a factory before as I thought it would be boring, but I really enjoyed the work and the atmosphere. I worked with the dispatch department, and going in and out of the -28C freezer was great fun. I thought the placement was brilliant. If I could, I would do it all again." Jamie is now on a zero-hour contract with Tillery Valley, providing cover when work is available, and is applying for a wider range of jobs than before through an agency based in Ebbw Vale.

The programme has helped another participant, Nigel Webber, take steps towards a career he had given up on after joining the army at the age of fifteen.

Nigel said: "I had to leave the army at 19 due to an injury, and was interested in the placement as soon as I heard about it. I always thought about being a lorry driver, and when it came to choosing a department to work with I asked straight away to join the distribution team. I went out on two deliveries, even though it meant leaving at 3.30am. I really enjoyed it, and am now looking into getting my lorry driving licence."

Nigel continued: "One of the best things about the placement was the atmosphere at Tillery Valley. Everyone made you feel welcome and like part of the team."

Both Jamie and Nigel would recommend the programme to others in a similar situation.

Rebecca Gwilliam, HR Manager at Tillery Valley said: "Structured work placements such as these are a great opportunity for young people to improve employability skills, and the experience gives them a much greater chance of standing out when applying for jobs."

Seeing Jamie, Nigel and the other participants develop and build their confidence was hugely rewarding. The Tillery Valley managers involved in the programme were all encouraged by how keen the participants were to grasp the opportunity and want to work.

The participants have all taken something positive from the process, in terms of work experience, new qualifications and hope for the future. We are delighted to have worked alongside the Prince's Trust on this initiative."