

## **LLW Through English – B&Q Mae Simpson**

THOMAS SWEENEY: Well, hi there, my name's Thomas Sweeney, I've been with B&Q now 22 years. I was one of the original team in 1989 when we opened our first site in Northern Ireland, which was actually in this city. I've been with B&Q throughout the UK. I've worked in England and Scotland and recently in Belfast, and delightedly have just moved back here, back home again, which is great.

B&Q stands for Block and Quayle. It was the two gentlemen that originally founded the company in 1969. It was Richard Block and David Quayle. Not a lot of people know that. Started a very small store in Southampton up, selling gardening products.

We employ over 30,000 employees throughout the UK. We are a global company as well. In Northern Ireland, we employ over a thousand people. And our ages go from 16 years of age right up... Our oldest employee in the UK is 88. And at—Mae, at 78, Mae Simpson is our eldest employee in Northern Ireland. And she's been with B&Q now 17 years. Started off with us on a four-hour contract and has now up to 20 hours, and she's a great asset for the store.

Over the past number of years, Mae has won various awards for the store and for our region as Northern Ireland. We put her forward in 1992, I think it was, for Employee of the Year. And she actually came runner-up in the whole company. Which isn't bad when you consider there's 30,000 employees. And she went across to a big gala dinner, over in England, where our Chief Executive was present, and she had a great evening altogether.

Mae indeed brings specific skills and qualities to the job. Most likely just her experience of life, to be perfectly honest. She's such a wonderful person, such a warm person, and she can really adapt to all different circumstances and situations that dealing with the public can throw at us. So, she's been, you know, she can comfortably deal with somebody of a young age, and someone of an elderly age. She makes people feel really special and unique, and she is constantly always trying to go the extra mile for the customer.

Even as early as today, we had one of our customer recognition things, is what we call Voice of the Customer, where people can go online and write and tell us about our staff that have actually exceeded their expectations. And indeed as early as this morning we have received one about Mae from yesterday, where a customer was just singing her praises, as usual.

I do find it hard to believe that certain employers would discriminate against age. The older person has got so much to offer.

MAE SIMPSON: My name is Mae Simpson, and I've been working at B&Q for 17 years. I joined B&Q in May of 1993. I usually work at the checkouts. I can do telephones, as well. When I went for my interview at B&Q, they had only four hours left, because I was one of the last people to apply. So, I took four hours, and I used to work on a Sunday for quite a while. Then I got four on Saturday, and then I got 20 hours. It's up to 20 now.

What I like most about my job here at B&Q is meeting all the different people from all walks of life, and different nationalities, as well. And I love helping people find the products they're looking for. And we direct them to the correct aisle in the shop. Saves them time.

I love being part of the B&Q team. I get on well with my colleagues and my boss. And we all help each other. We all know our different roles that we have to do.

I've been very fortunate at B&Q. In 2005, when we were opening this new store at Buncrana Road, I got the honour of cutting the ribbon to open the store, so that was nice. B&Q contributes greatly to our local community. Firstly, by selling a wide range of products at competitive prices. But most importantly, by employing many local people of all ages.