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TVH PARTS

Are offenders the solution to the skills shortage?

At the Construction Plant-hire Association's (CPA) annual conference earlier this month, one of the subjects covered was the 'rehabilitation of young offenders through training' and how a new scheme is assisting participants to secure employment within construction thanks to partnerships with business.

Police Constable Sonya Hill of the West Midlands Police is a full-time coordinator for an initiative known as the 'Prince's Trust Team Programme'. As a result of her work on this, together with 30 years police service she was recognised with an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours. She spoke to Cranes & Access about the programme.

Hill knew nothing about the construction industry until recent media coverage of the skills shortages within the sector caught her attention. Construction currently employs 2.6 million in the UK and is set to grow by a further 224,000 over the next five years. This prompted her to contact the Construction Industry Training Board to discuss how the young offenders training programme might help address the skills shortages.

Prince's Trust

West Midlands Police has worked with the Prince's Trust since 2006. Its Team Programme is a 12 week youth engagement course aimed at getting 16 to 25 year olds back into employment, or education through personal development and mentoring. It also offers work experience and the opportunity to gain qualifications and practical skills. Participants also get involved with community projects such as fund raising, helping the elderly and assisting the homeless etc. The course also includes a residential week to encourage team work. All of this is supported by help with CV/resumé writing, job applications and mock interviews. More than 70 percent of unemployed participants



obtain jobs, training or education within three months of completing the programme.

"West Midlands Police constables and community support officers are responsible for the day to day running of the programme from police stations across 10 local units, while the Trust also works in partnership with four colleges within the area. We refer to the colleges as Delivery Partners," says Hill. "Although we work in partnership with the Prince's Trust - the work placement relationship is between the police and businesses, because having worked with an individual for eight hours a day over 12 weeks we are in the best position to identify their readiness for work and progression."

Cost saving implications

"We use the Team Programme as an offender management/youth engagement tool, focusing on offenders, ex-offenders and those considered to be on the cusp of offending. We also engage with vulnerable young people including

those in or leaving care, education underachievers and the long term unemployed. We have to be careful of the mix within each team to ensure the greatest chance of success. A team made up entirely of offenders, for example would not be appropriate. Successful outcomes can help reduce demand for services, essential given the budget cuts we are currently experiencing and with a further reduction of £130 million expected over the next four years."

Partnerships with business

"Team members also take part in work placements to help prepare them for work, partnerships with a business have a huge impact on the success of a programme, which then helps increase the number of referrals. This enables us to be more selective and retain more participants for the full 12 week programme. Our aim is for the most disaffected young people to become positive role models for others, while contributing to their local communities. When we have a business engaged with a particular programme we see participant retention rates of between 80 and 90 percent and a re-offending rate of just 31 percent."

Partnerships with Hawk Plant, Amey and BAM Construction are already underway, while the West Midlands Police is also working with organisations such as the CPA to help solve skills shortages while giving disaffected young people a real opportunity.

Hawk Plant general manager Paul Allman said: "The plant hire sector is facing a huge shortage of operators and fulfilling the requirements of planned infrastructure projects will be a challenge. Working with Sonya Hill at the West Midlands Police and the Prince's Trust is a great opportunity to train young people for the plant hire sector and help meet current demand. It also provides a very positive message for the industry and will hopefully give young people from difficult backgrounds a chance to build a career in an expanding marketplace."

Hawk Plant is also participating in a pilot programme with prisoners with the aim of developing their skills and routes to employment as operators. The police hope that this pilot scheme will also be a route

into its Team Programme. It is also looking to expand the programme to offenders and ex-offenders, currently too old to participate in the Team Programme.

Achieving ambitions

Will Tyas of Amey said: "By working together, we are helping some of the most disaffected young people build a career and achieve their ambitions. Those that complete placements under this scheme often become candidates for apprenticeships and other roles within Amey, and the confidence they gain from the experience really stands out."

PC Hill added: "It is not just large companies we want to work with, we are encouraging smaller companies to participate. We have the potential to fill some of the thousands of vacancies with previously undiscovered talent. Everyone deserves a break and a second chance to realise their potential."

Hawk Plant Hire is an active participant in the programme



Haydn Steele, CPA training & safety manager said: "We think this is a great initiative and would encourage our members to speak with Sonya Hill and the Prince's Trust to help fill the skills gap to meet industry demand. We need to give young people from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance to build a career and why not in the plant hire sector where we are facing a huge shortage of operators and mechanics."

PC Sonya Hill can be contacted on 07747 476426.



(Front L-R) Connor Brannan and Stephen Jeffries. (Middle) PCSO's Martin Kennedy and Carly Bladen (Back) Teresa Byrnn of Solihull College, PC Lee Soanes, Dave Nolan a former Prince's Trust graduate and apprentice, and Amey's Will Tyas



Participants also help out on local community work