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Fundraising simply child's play

Twelve Whitefriars Housing Group modern apprentices took on the challenge of a lifetime when they transformed a dull school playground into a vibrant outdoor adventure area.

The apprentices had one day only to revamp the old play area before children at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, in Deedmore Road, Wood End, return from their Easter break.

Their efforts to transform the concrete jungle followed a challenge from Business in the Community, a local organisation which aims to promote community involvement by connecting employers with local people.

Their final vision for the perfect play space included an adventure track complete with clatter bridge, railway sleepers and trail, woodland seating with wind crime, bird box and plants, a roadside-themed play area with painted games, a covered alphabet shelter and mural.

In addition to carrying out the work, the apprentices, aged 16 to 21, also raised the £2,500 needed to fund the project. Throughout the past seven months they've cajoled and coaxed employers from the city to do their bit. Fundraising activities included a 100-mile sponsored walk, football tournament, sponsored silences, cake sales and numerous raffles complete with 14 bottles of wine, shopping and meal vouchers, signed Coventry City football and family days out.

Mark Garratt, an undergraduate placement student with Whitefriars, has been project managing the work.

Mark, 20, said: "When I talk about the project I just cannot help but have a smile on my face because we're helping out three and four-year-olds who really don't have very much of a play area.

"It's a real team-building experience as it has helped us all come together and also helped get everyone talking. Everyone came out of his or her shell and we all mucked in.

"The area was dull, so we are very grateful for all the local people and businesses who helped us with this challenge with products, time or with doing the work."

Whitefriars runs an internal training scheme giving local youngsters the chance to move up the career ladder within the organisation and learn while they earn.

Pam Wester, corporate training officer at Whitefriars, said the nursery challenge was an ideal opportunity to showcase the apprentices' skills.

She said: "The apprentices really threw themselves into this project and demonstrated dedication, perseverance and initiative. Project management, budget-keeping, fundraising and organisation are just a few of the skills this scheme has taught the apprentices.

"It is a win-win situation and we are delighted to help the school out and give the pupils a new place to play."

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