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October 19 2006

Hats off to students

A graduation ceremony with a difference took place last night to recognise the achievements of 15 young people who had left school with no formal qualifications.

The awards night marked the end of an 11-week innovative training project organised by Whitefriars Housing Group to help keep young people off the street and give residents in Stoke Aldermoor a second chance.

The young people, all from Stoke Aldermoor, attended with their parents to claim certificates marking their achievements in finance, cooking, decorating, budget-keeping, teamwork and woodwork.

Whitefriars invited the 15 young people to take part in the course after seeing them hanging around on the streets. The aim of the scheme was to give some of Coventry's most disadvantaged youngsters the chance to gain valuable experience and put them on track for prosperous careers.

Trainee Michael Brown, of Stoke Aldermoor, said the course had helped him a lot.

The 21-year-old said: "I wanted to learn a trade, as that means you're pretty much set for life. I've a baby, and another on the way, so I need to provide for them. This qualification proves I can do what I say I can."

His proud mum and girlfriend were both on hand to see his pick-up his certificate.

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Mum Anne Brown said: "I'm proud of my son. The People's Place is doing wonderful things for young people."

Girlfriend Marie Garside said: "Whitefriars has helped him achieve a lot, he's now able to decorate to a very high standard which will really come in handy."

All 15 recruits completed the course which was funded by SRB5 and the Stoke Aldermoor Regeneration Project. So far, three have found full-time employment and a further four have been accepted onto further training schemes. The remainder are considering their options.

In addition to gaining experience of a trade, the young people also ploughed their new found skills into the area during the course by giving a fresh lick of paint to a community building.

The students were awarded their certificates and accredited qualification by Whitefriars' managing director Richard Monk.

He said: "These young people have shown tremendous dedication and I congratulate them on completing the course. It truly shows what can be achieved when organisations give young people a chance. These students grabbed the opportunity with both hands and I wish them luck in the ventures they take up in the future."

"I also would like to thank all the Whitefriars staff who put so much effort, including their own time, into this project. By going the extra mile they have really made a difference to 15 young people, and by association, the entire community of Stoke Aldermoor."

It is hoped the project will be extended to other areas of the city once further grant applications have been accepted.

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