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## **Adding colour to residents' lives**

An inspirational Coventry man has beaten the odds and turned his life around, thanks to a little help from Whitefriars Housing Group.

This time last year John Crick, a resident at the Chace Hostel, Willenhall, was facing a sixth year of unemployment. Following his divorce, the 49-year-old found himself homeless and seriously ill, but proving you can teach an old dog new tricks, this week he picked up a batch of professional qualifications.

After spending nine months on the Intermediate Labour Market Programme (ILM), a scheme run by Whitefriars, John, along with four other recruits, was this week awarded six OCN credits for a range of skills including upholstery, painting, and plastering.

However, for John, the qualifications are worth more than just a piece of paper. His hard work and dedication impressed Whitefriars Housing Group so much they have offered him a full-time position as a painter and decorator – something he thought he would never achieve.

The dad-of-one said: "I got divorced around five or six years ago and then found myself staying with different friends on their floor. When I became homeless, I thought it would be like that forever. You just think of getting by on a day-to-day basis and don't think of the future. You just survive."

It took illness and a stay in hospital before John was given a place at Whitefriars' Chace Hostel. After getting his feet back on the ground, he went on a short employment course and then onto the ILM programme.

And despite having to wake up at 6:30am and hard graft, he is keen to recommend similar courses to others.

He said: "I prefer to be working. I'd been unemployed for a long time and it is difficult - you just get used to it. I'm still getting back into it, but the job has given me more than money, it has given me confidence and something to do," he said.

"I'd encourage other people to do the same, I mean if I can do it at my age anyone can."

As a participant in the course, John, along with the four other successful trainees - all of whom are now in full-time employment - undertook decorating work to improve the local neighbourhood, including the redecoration and refurbishment of St Anne's church in Willenhall.

With his plans to one-day move into his own flat and to gain a full NVQ, Whitefriars' community project supervisor Stephanie Inns said John was a perfect example of the difference the scheme can make.

She said: "John impressed us so much, he is the oldest person we have had on the team and really proves you are never too old to start learning.

"The people employed on the ILM programme, who were all previously out-of-work, now have many strings to their employability bow, and they also have the required experience.

"Our aim is not just about improving the quality of homes, but also to change people's lives for the better."

The Intermediate Labour Market team was funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF).

Tuesday's award ceremony, attended by Howard Farrand, Chief Executive at Whitefriars, also recognised the achievements of eight local residents, whose achievements includes OCN credits in carpentry and soft furnishings. Five apprentices were also awarded their NVQ 2 in maintenance operations.

**Ends**

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