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Construction challenge races ahead

More than 350 young people from across the West Midlands got their hands dirty and their careers into gear, following a special event aimed at reducing the construction skills shortage.

Whitefriars Housing Group, based in Coventry, teamed up with leading construction firm Wates Group, to sponsor the Building People event and show youngsters what the industry has to offer.

The 14-18 year olds who attended got to grips with gears, goggles and glue to produce a buggy and radio tower in a special construction challenge. They also got stuck in with wallpapering and bricklaying sessions.

Technology teacher Neil Henderson, from Manor Park Community School, Nuneaton, said the day showcased the pupils' skills, and what the construction industry can offer.

He said: "I am very impressed with how well they worked together. It taught them teamwork skills and also helped to build their confidence. It was a great day out for them, they loved it."

Continued/2...

Laura Grewcock, who celebrated her 15th birthday on the day of the event, said: “I really enjoyed myself. I did wonder whether I should come along on my birthday as I may not have had a good time, but it was excellent. I’m really glad I came, as it’s such fun.

“I think that I may want to work with children when I’m older, but I don’t know, so I’m trying to keep my options open. We had a real laugh on the day.”

Hannah Fildes, 15, a pupil at Queen Elizabeth School, Atherstone, said: “I really enjoyed myself. It was a great day out. We had new experiences and worked well as a team. I may consider working in technology or in a hands-on job, I really don’t know. It doesn’t put me off being a girl as it’s fun working with the boys.”

As well as enjoying new challenges, the school children also benefited from professional advice on how to write their CVs.

The day was organised by Walker Technical Recruitment. Whitefriars Housing Group and Wates Group took a hands-on approach with the event as both organisations train and employ apprentices and offer various opportunities for young people to get involved with the construction industry.

Nev Wells, regeneration manager at Whitefriars Housing Group, said: “It is well known that there is a massive shortfall in the numbers of people entering the construction industry – the latest estimate is that 430,000 new recruits will be needed over the next five years to meet demand for new schools, homes, roads and hospitals.

“The aim of the day was to encourage more school leavers to consider the various trades that the construction industry has to offer. Whether the day was a success in terms of attracting new recruits, is something we’ll see in a couple of years time, but everyone had a great time and there was a lot of interest from the young people.

Continued/3...

“The challenges really made the pupils think, and it is a fantastic way to introduce them to the industry and think about us when choosing their careers later in life.”

Adrian Grimes, construction manager at Wates Group, added: “When people think about construction, they often think that it just involves building walls, but there is so much more to it than that. There are vacancies in the industry for skilled people in every area, from plumbing to engineering and for men and women.

“It’s an industry that is not being considered enough, and that is what the day was all about, to encourage school and college leavers to add construction jobs to their potential list of career options.

“It was fantastic to see so many young people showing real interest, and indeed skill, in construction. We’ve planted the idea of a new career in their minds, and it will be interesting to see what grows from that.”

Recent research by the House Builders Federation revealed 73 per cent of companies reported that a shortage of suitably skilled site labourers was impacting on their activities and that 57 per cent were affected by a shortage of professional staff.

More details on National Construction Week can be found on www.ncw.org.uk

Ends

Notes to Editors

Whitefriars Housing Group is a not-for-profit housing and regeneration organisation established in 2000 that owns and manages approximately 18,000 homes across Coventry.

The Group has committed £240 million to the repair and improvement of its housing stock, ensuring that the Government’s Decent Homes Standard is met five years ahead of schedule.

Working in neighbourhoods, Whitefriars is committed to the national ‘iN business for neighbourhoods’ agenda and is a major player in the regeneration of Coventry and the provision of affordable housing.

In addition to providing homes, the Group works in partnership with communities and other agencies to provide training and employment opportunities and support services for local residents, with the aim of building sustainable communities.

Wates Affordable Housing is one of the UK's largest privately-owned construction companies. Established in 1897, it has a national network of delivery centres and employs more than 1600 people. Wates turnover in 2004 was £580m.

Affordable Housing accounts for a quarter of the Group's current activity and makes Wates one of the largest affordable housing construction businesses in the UK. 80% of projects are in framework relationships where working with customers achieves long-term objectives.

These projects include decent homes programmes, complex new build projects and mixed-tenure regeneration schemes all with a focus on sustainability.

We are proud to be an Investor in People

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