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The Edge on Training

Whitefriars has proved Coventry has the edge when it comes to training, after being shortlisted for a new major award.

The not-for-profit housing group has claimed a top spot in the Edge Awards, a national competition launched earlier this year, for its work with young people. Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and Yo! Sushi founder Simon Woodroffe are two national stars backing the awards.

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. It also offers external training to help residents join other local businesses and runs various work experience schemes, including programmes for undergraduates, to allow students to cut their housing teeth.

Whitefriars joins five other local organisations, including Compass Group, Lyreco UK and MetSec, as finalists in the West Midlands' regional competition. It beat, amongst others, Alton Towers, Landmark and Allied Healthcare to be shortlisted. The regional winner will receive a £10,000 boost to its training scheme.

One of those Whitefriars has helped is Richard West, of Potters Green, Coventry.

After leaving school with minimal GCSEs, the 16-year-old was struggling to see the career ladder, let alone get a grasp. Fruitless job hunting had his hopes in tatters, but thanks to an apprenticeship scheme he feels he has a brighter future.

Richard, a former Ernesford Grange pupil, said: "It's been good. I didn't really like school but this is much better as it's the real world. When I left school I just wanted to get a job, but I couldn't get anything. I really enjoy going to college and if I'd not got on the course I'd probably still be looking for a job like my mates. I'm lucky to be here and I think I've gone far since I left. It will be great for my future."

Tesco, Rolls Royce and BAE Systems are just some of the high-profile organisations in the running for the various regional categories. Regional winners will then be entered into the national contest, the winner of which will scoop a £200,000 training jackpot.

Currently Whitefriars has 16 internal trainees on its books and a further 30 external trainees.

Pam Westers, corporate training officer at Whitefriars, said: "We are really pleased to have reached this stage and that our work to help youngsters in the city has been recognised. We've long recognised the benefits of apprenticeship schemes and training for young people and are delighted the awards are highlighting the importance of such projects.

"As a large organisation, with around 18,000 homes across Coventry, we recognise we have a huge role to play in securing the city's future, so we are delighted to be shortlisted. The £10,000, or even £200,00, will be very welcome."

Edge is a new charity that aims to change attitudes towards practical learning. The Employer Awards are open to all employers in England, large and small, public, private and voluntary. A condition of entry is that the prize winnings must be reinvested back into work-based learning initiatives for 14 to 25 year-olds, such as apprenticeships or work placements.

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