

In 2009, the GMEC Award for Reducing Re-offending was won by GES Contractors Ltd and Six Town Housing for their “strong partnership approach in Bury to tackling worklessness amongst ex-offenders despite significant public preconceptions”.



The story behind the award

As an active member of BurySafe and the Offender Management Board, Six Town Housing in Bury was keen to do what it could to reduce crime and fear of crime in their borough, which is why a new rolling four-year project with GES Contractors and GM Procure fitted their needs perfectly.

The collaborative project offers 12-month work/training contracts to ex-offenders, known as PPOs (Prolific and other Priority Offenders), in the very neighbourhoods in which they used to offend, to help them rebuild their lives and reduce neighbourhood crime.

Following screening and risk assessment, the PPOs were taken on by GES Contractors, a painting and decorating firm that won a major contract with Six Town Housing. The scheme, during which the PPOs are closely supervised and trained by experienced trades people on external works, leads to an NVQ Level 2 in painting and decorating.

The first six months of the scheme saw GES take on four PPOs plus one other offender, all of whom were unemployed and claiming benefit.

Why would an employer want to take on ex-offenders when there is a ready pool of labour from which to draw?

GES managing director Errol Stewart said: “I wanted to get involved in a project that helped people because I needed help once when I was younger and I know how much a helping hand means to someone with few prospects.

Employment can help remove much of the stigma associated with serving a prison sentence; we can provide the mechanism through which lives can be rebuilt.

I currently employ nine staff, four of which are ex-offenders. These lads are among the top 50 most prolific offenders in the area, so after all the necessary checks have been carried out we put them to work. Some of these lads were career criminals with no work ethic whatsoever, so working hard in this environment was a huge change for them. I hope to hire one of the lads fulltime at the end of the project.”

What are the benefits of the scheme?

Errol said: “As an employer the project has given me the opportunity to show future social housing clients what we’re capable of, to showcase our wares. These PPOs are also good for business. As a result of the quality work we’ve done with the apprentices’ help we’ve secured another major contract with Moss Care. I believe I won the contract because I was willing to help employees from their area.

Social landlords have a responsibility to the neighbourhood in which they operate. There's no point bringing in companies and employees from outside the area if you want to stimulate the local economy.

The benefits of the project lie both in accomplishing some good work and also in the personal satisfaction I get from offering someone a helping hand. It proves that giving people a chance does work. I'm willing to help any hard to reach groups but there must be a drive to succeed from them otherwise there's no point. They need to show willing."

How would you judge the success of the scheme?

Errol said: "If we got eight people through our doors and sent them out to the labour market, we will have achieved what we set out to do."

The scheme has drawn plaudits from various stakeholders

Councillor Iain Gartside: "This is a really important project as it will help individuals get out of the cycle of re-offending and help them make a positive change in their lives."

Susan Jordan (Chief Executive of Six Town Housing when GES was set up): "All the feedback we have received has been really positive."

GES Contractors trainee: "I honestly did not think I would get an opportunity like this. I didn't think that an employer would take me on with my record and lack of work experience. I am determined to achieve the qualification and I am enjoying working and being part of a team."

GES Contractors managing director Errol Stewart: "GES Contractors is a small independent business which proves that you don't need to be a big concern to help out, to make space for someone in need of help."