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Future's Bright for Job Fund Trio

JOB hunting can be a confidence-sapping experience - especially when prospective employers can't seem to make up their minds whether it's lack of experience or over-qualification holding you back.

Such is the experience of Craig Fitzpatrick and Claire Whittlam who are among the latest group to secure Future Jobs Fund placements with New Charter, one of the North West's biggest social landlords.

Following graduation last year, both Craig and Claire found they were losing out on jobs to other graduates whose work experience gave them the competitive edge. They both hope that New Charter's comprehensive training package for people on FJF placements will show future employers that they mean business – that's if they're not snapped up by New Charter first!

Craig Fitzpatrick's turned into a six month contract at New Charter, which last year was named sixth best company to work for nationally in the Times newspaper's list of top employers.

Craig's hard work in his role as tenancy enforcement assistant at New Charter has been enough to turn his placement into a six month contract at the company, based in Ashton-Under-Lyne, Greater Manchester. He said: "I had been keeping my eye out for somewhere like New Charter, because I knew it's recognised as a great place to work and it's definitely somewhere where you can plan for a career, rather than a job.

"Most of the jobs I'd applied for in the past were asking for at least six months experience and a reference, which was definitely holding me back, so this placement should be exactly what I need."

Claire Whittlam, currently working on placement as a neighbourhood management assistant reports a similar experience: "Not having a job can really knock your confidence. Being unemployed gets much worse as you go along, especially as you are told time and time again that you are either over qualified, or don't have the experience. Employees don't seem to realise that some people will work just so they can be in work!

“I don’t have a clue what I’d be doing now without the FJF. I’d probably still be trying to get back into work by going for any job I could.”

Unfortunately, their experience is all too common, said Tameside Council’s FJF co-ordinator Lesley Taylor, who helped arrange Claire and Craig’s placement. She has so found FJF placements for around 250 young people and hopes the scheme will have helped closer to 700 before it ends in March 2011

Lesley said: “The training and support provided by New Charter has been fantastic. We’ve had a great working relationship with managers at New Charter and when I’ve visited to see how they’re getting on I found they are always involved with training. That will be of immense benefit to them in the long run.”

Jamie Sheridan, currently on placement with New Charter as a revenues assistant, says that being made redundant for the third timer time in nearly as many years, delivered a heavy blow to his confidence.

But taking part in courses like IT, equality and diversity, and data protection – all run internally by New Charter’s organisational development team - means he can not only deal effectively with New Charter’s diverse tenant base, but has a powerful tool under his belt should the need arise to undertake the dreaded job hunt in future.

He said: ““I felt like i had fallen into a gap. There seemed to be a lot of help available for people younger than me, but not a lot of help available for people of my own age.

“FJF has been a real confidence boost. If my contract at New Charter isn’t renewed after a year, it will be a knock – but not too much of a knock. FJF will have given me the confidence to pick myself back up and carry on.”

Jackie Owens: “Young people on the programme have been unemployed for six months or more. But how did they get to this position? Often it is because they have the experience, despite having fantastic qualifications. FJF gives them all the experience they need to build up work experience they need to compete in such a harsh market.

“As well as valuable work experience FJF includes a great deal of job related training in any field a person could need – whether it’s specifically related to the role, or more general training in numeracy or literacy. It is as flexible as the people on the programme!”

Notes to editors:

1. New Charter formed in 1999 as the new landlords to own and manage homes transferred from Tameside council in Greater Manchester. With a turnover of £70million a year and a workforce of 880, New Charter is one of the region's largest registered providers of social housing, and is regulated by the Tenant Services Authority, a Government watchdog. The Group owns 18,600 homes. It was named at 6th place in The Sunday Times 100 best companies to work for in 2010.

2. Aksa Housing Association is a registered provider of social housing. It has operated since 1990 and owns over 670 homes in Oldham, Tameside, Bury and North Manchester. Its offices are in Oldham town centre, and its Board chose to join New Charter in November 2005.

3. **iN business for neighbourhoods** is a long-term project highlighting housing associations' performance. As social businesses, housing associations do not make profit. They offer homes for rent and sale at prices local people can afford. Housing associations provide more than homes - they help create places where people want to live. Wherever you see the **iN business for neighbourhoods** sign, something great is happening in the area. Housing Associations who display this logo are committed to their customers, the neighbourhoods they work in and strive for excellence in everything they do.

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