

## Derwent & Solway Housing Association

# “breaking through the employment barriers”

Derwent & Solway Housing Association is a member of Harvest Housing Group, working across West Cumbria, one of the most deprived communities in the UK. West Cumbria has been in economic decline for more than 30 years with many households experiencing second and third generation unemployment.



Derwent & Solway's Routes 2 Work initiative acts to tackle the unemployment problem within the local community. Its clients include people with mental health problems, homeless people, ex-offenders and people with drug and alcohol addictions. Together D&S and Routes 2 Work with the support of Harvest offer bespoke training packages for individuals as well as helping with the hidden costs of returning to work, among them travel costs, work clothes and toll that may be required.

In recognition of Routes 2 Work's approach to tackling worklessness, Derwent & Solway has been awarded by the Housing Corporation a prestigious Gold Award for tackling worklessness. The award recognises Routes 2 Works commitment to breaking through the employment barriers in West Cumbria.

Judges commended Derwent & Solway, a member of Harvest Housing Group's proactive and innovative approach to the problem saying:



“ This is a unique approach to tackling worklessness in an area which is geographically isolated and has high levels of deprivation; it is one project that can be replicated in other areas. ”

Since Routes 2 Work opened its doors in 2005, they have helped over 2,000 people back into employment, 270 people onto learning support programmes and successfully trained 24 classroom assistants.

Part of the D&S and Routes 2 Work success is down to tackling and overcoming social and economic exclusion by:

- Helping** lone parents find work and leave benefit dependency
- Helping** disadvantaged residents into employment
- Helping** local people secure local jobs
- Helping** small businesses train and employ local people.

D&S and Routes 2 Work believe that everyone is an individual with their own barriers to returning to employment. We offer bespoke packages of support, setting achievable aims for the individual wherever possible. Unlike many mainstream programmes, Routes 2 Work works with the individual to ensure that the funding they receive meets their requirements and assists them to overcome their barriers.

Another of the Housing Corporation judges commented on Routes 2 Works ability to work in partnership with external agencies, ensuring all targets are met, they said:

“ D&S and Routes 2 Work were plugged in at every level of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), using their partnerships to ensure their programmes did not duplicate other provision. An excellent example of how LSP and Local Area Agreement targets are translated into local delivery and real outcomes through partnership working. ”

The ethos behind the Housing Corporations Gold Award is sharing knowledge, this will be done over a nine month period of dissemination that involves sharing knowledge and best practice with other housing organisations.

D&S are participating in several different events over the coming months including many conferences and seminars where they will be sharing their knowledge of tackling worklessness with others. A DVD is also available, highlighting the success of Routes 2 Work and the ability to replicate the project elsewhere.



For more information on **Routes 2 Work**, please contact **Julie Wedgwood** by email on [julie.wedgwood@harvesthousing.org.uk](mailto:julie.wedgwood@harvesthousing.org.uk)