

# NEWCASTLE



**DAVID PARKS**

TEAM MANAGER, YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM,  
NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL

[DAVID.PARKS@NEWCASTLE.GOV.UK](mailto:DAVID.PARKS@NEWCASTLE.GOV.UK)

[WWW.THESKILLMILL.ORG](http://WWW.THESKILLMILL.ORG)

+44 (0)191 2777377

## THE SKILL MILL

**COOPERATION BETWEEN PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS TO PROMOTE THE INCLUSION OF AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG EX-OFFENDERS.**

Newcastle is a city characterised by post-industrial and recession induced pockets of poverty and deprivation. In the city, the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds is 20.5% - usually young white males alienated from mainstream education and employment.

As such, Newcastle City Council's Youth Offending Team decided to establish a partnership with private and third sector organisations to address the disadvantages faced by young ex-offenders in the city.

The partnership includes the Newcastle City Council and different public, private and non-governmental actors and it is coordinated by an advisory board.

The target group of the programme are young ex-offenders:

- 16-18 years olds with low skills and poor educational outcomes
- who are former NEETs at the start of their employment
- with several custodial sentences

## THE SKILL MILL PROGRAMME

The programme provides young ex-offenders with opportunities to undertake reparative work within both urban and rural natural environments which leads to paid employment with a new non-profit social enterprise, The Skill Mill. The Skill Mill was established in September 2013 and became operational in February 2014.

The programme has four main objectives:

- reducing re-offending
- job creation
- flood risk reduction
- natural habitat protection

Furthermore it is designed to challenge discrimination by employers and the wider community of young ex-offenders.

Key features of the programme:

- Every young person who completes six month's experience with The Skill Mill is then offered a 'next step' job with one of the private partners engaged in the programme. These partners are private companies identified by The Skill Mill or by other labour market intermediaries. 'Next step' jobs are usually supported by complementary incentives covering health costs or apprenticeship funding.

- Beneficiaries are also offered the chance to complete a nationally recognised qualification 'City and Guilds Level I Land Based Operations'.
- The programme also aims to tackle misconceptions and negative attitude towards young ex-offenders and promote their labour insertion by implementing public relations and marketing strategies.
- One of the strengths of the programme is that it brings together many partners both within the city council, the national level, business and education sectors.



**VULNERABLE YOUNG EX-OFFENDERS HAVE BEEN EMPLOYED**

TEMPORARILY AT THE SKILL MILL



**200 HOMES**  
HAVE BEEN PROTECTED FROM FLOODING



**THE SKILL MILL HAS WON THREE MAJOR NATIONAL AWARDS**

- The young people act as a role model for their peers raising aspirations and demonstrating that social integration is possible through the programme.
- The programme is being implemented in other cities such as in Carlisle in Cumbria, Leeds, and Manchester. The regional Youth Justice Board, the Ministry of Justice and the National

Department of Environment and Rural Affairs are all supporting the programme.

- The Skill Mill provides support to other social entrepreneurs who are seeking to develop programmes which tackle social justice issues. This is done with the support of the Environmental Agency which creates opportunities

specifically for the social enterprises through public procurement.

- The approach maximises the opportunities within the ‘green economy’ for low skilled youths.

**SUCCESS FACTORS AND RESULTS**

The programme demonstrates that low skilled environmental work both engages and motivates young people who are most marginalised, succeeds in inserting them into the labour market and makes them positive role models for the wider community.

- Since The Skill Mill was established 12 vulnerable young ex-offenders have been employed temporarily at The Skill Mill and eight of them have gone on to further job opportunities with one of the programme partners.
- To date over 200 homes have been protected from flooding as a result of the work undertaken by these young people.

- The Skill Mill has won three major national awards from both the youth justice and environmental management sectors.

There is evidence that providing some of the most disadvantaged youths with education and employment opportunities has a positive impact on their peers, families and communities.

The Skill Mill is connected to the academic community who are engaged in further research into the outcomes of this programme especially in terms of desistance from offending and the potential for social enterprises in public service delivery.

**INNOVATION**

The programme is innovative in many ways:

- It provides a specific programme for young ex-offenders that is tailored to users needs and is more effective compared to mainstream employability programmes.
- It increases corporate social responsibility for private sector partners engaging in the programme.
- The partnership brings together, for the first time in the UK, statutory environmental regulatory services and youth justice professionals with commercial businesses and third sector organisations. They work together to develop a new approach to reduce crime, increase community safety, and maintain the public green areas including watercourse management to reduce flood risk.

**CHALLENGES, RECOMMENDATIONS & WORK FOR THE FUTURE**

The programme requires considerable time investment to develop the approach, the business plan and put the necessary infrastructure in place.

The Skill Mill is designed to be self-sustaining, not relying on grant funding but tendering for and winning contracts in a competitive marketplace and also through lower overheads but without compromising the overall quality.

Another challenge was training public sector personnel on more commercial working practices. These challenges were overcome primarily because of Newcastle City Council’s commitment to innovation and the development of new approaches to addressing societal problems.

