

# WMCA helps homeless people to start a new career in construction

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Five people have landed new jobs to escape the downward spiral of homelessness and unemployment, thanks to a training programme funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The WMCA has joined forces with homelessness charity Crisis, training provider RMF Construction and employer L Lynch Plant Hire & Haulage (Lynch) in a pilot scheme to help some of the most vulnerable people in society.

All the learners, who are being supported in temporary accommodation in Birmingham after becoming homeless, were referred by Crisis to the WMCA's innovative Construction Gateway programme, which is delivered by local training companies.

After an intensive six-week course at RMF Construction's academy in Hollywood, Birmingham, covering topics such as site safety and how to operate a range of machinery, the group have secured new jobs at Lynch and will be working on major projects across the region, including the HS2 station site at Curzon Street.

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said: "The construction industry in the West Midlands will

need 50,000 more trained staff by 2030, and so we must make sure local people have the skills to fill these jobs.

“I’m delighted that we’ve been able to take five people out of the vicious circle of homelessness and unemployment by giving them a new start in construction. The Construction Gateway is a great example of the WMCA working in partnership with the industry and Crisis to give some of our most disadvantaged local people the opportunity of a worthwhile job and a good home.

“I’d like to thank Lynch for offering these fantastic opportunities to improve people’s lives, and I hope many more employers will follow their example.”

Rob Lynch, director of Lynch, said: “We work on very large public infrastructure projects and we believe it’s vital that local people from underprivileged backgrounds, like the homeless, have as many opportunities as possible to work on these amazing programmes. I’m very pleased to welcome our four new team members and look forward to working with them.”

Akiel Treasure, one of the participants, said: “I found out about the training from Crisis and went for it. I’d like to stay with Lynch, master the craft and maybe become a team leader.”

Dara McCarthy, operations manager at RMF Construction, said: “We’ve been working with Lynch to give the learners the best training to start their new careers. I’ve been very impressed by their enthusiasm and I wish them all the best for the future.”

The Construction Gateway provides learners with an introduction to construction skills – giving them the ‘tickets’ they need to be site-ready for work – and, crucially, guarantees them a job interview on completion of the course. They also get help with interview techniques, CV writing and employability skills.

Adults who are unemployed, or on short-hours contracts or low-skilled jobs, are eligible to join the programme.

After completing the course, they are supported on their journey to work through the National Careers Service for as long as they need, regardless of whether their first interview is a success.

Those who are not offered a job immediately are added to the West Midlands “site-ready talent pool” – which is shared with construction recruiters and provides a list of people who are ready for work immediately.

So far, 1,403 people have been through Construction Gateway training since summer 2018, with 627 people having successfully moved into employment after completing the course.

Cllr George Duggins, WMCA portfolio holder for productivity and skills and leader of Coventry City Council, said: “The construction industry is facing a critical skills shortage. We need to help more people learn the right skills to work in the sector, and the Construction Gateway is doing exactly that. It’s great to see homeless people benefiting from these new opportunities.”

Matthew Green, director of Crisis' Skylight Centre in Birmingham, said: "As a society, we must make sure people have the right tools to be able to end their homelessness, and employment is an important aspect of this. Our Crisis Employment Services help people prepare for, find and sustain work.

"We would like to thank Lynch for providing sustainable training and employment opportunities to our members that will allow them to become financially secure. This initiative shows what collaborative working can do for some of the most vulnerable people in society and how it can change lives for the better.

"We hope this is the beginning of a successful partnership and that we can continue to work together to provide more opportunities to help people leave homelessness for good."