

## **Courier Article, 29 September 2012**

MORE than a million young people are unemployed, but school-leavers in Heathfield are bucking the national trend and landing work thanks to an innovative programme.

Heathfield Works! has achieved a 100 per cent success rate of getting teenagers into work or into full-time education since it started a year ago.

It differs from the national picture where one in five young people aged 16 to 24, who are fit and able to work, are still struggling to find work.

Heathfield Works! graduate Dale Chapman, 19, was offered a full-time job at Crusader Vans while taking part in the ten-week course.

He is now the head of social media of the Station Road-based company.

"Before I did Heathfield Works! I was out of work and I was not doing anything," he said. "It's an amazing programme. I have got two of my friends doing it now. I would recommend it 100 per cent. I would not be where I am without it."

There was a special ceremony on Friday for the latest batch of graduates, which was attended by proud parents and local businesses involved in the programme.

Heathfield Partnership Trust chairman Rupert Simmons told the audience: "This is our anniversary celebration for an extraordinary project. When it was first started nobody believed we could pull it off and now we are celebrating 40 graduates who have either gone into full time education or full employment."

Among the businesses to have stepped forward to help graduates include retail firm Trading4U, which has offered work to 19-year-old Jason Private.

Mr Simmons added: "I have been amazingly impressed with the spirit of cooperation by the businesses in the area. They are now coming to us for opportunities for young people."

Recent graduate Gabby Short now has an apprenticeship with Candlelight Home Care Services in Heathfield High Street.

The 17-year-old, who lives in Burwash Road, said: "Heathfield Works! has given me so much confidence. It has really sorted me out."

Mr Chapman added: "Even if you don't get good grades, Heathfield Works! will help you out. It's not like Brighton and Eastbourne with a lot of shopping malls. It is hard to get work around here."

Heathfield Works! and the Heathfield Partnership Trust, made up of businesses, the parish council, and various organisations, now hopes to secure funding for the project for the next three years.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the scheme should call Frances Conway on 07795 174055.