

On average absence from work costs UK employers £522 per person per year.

Research into the world of work is a preoccupation of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). In a study with KPMG, the CIPD also found employers report that overall ex-offenders are more loyal and reliable than other workers. In its 2015/16 strategic plan the Liverpool City Region Local Economic Partnership highlighted ongoing skills gaps at every level and pinpointed the single most important sector to the Region being the Visitor Economy: a sector which has relied heavily upon migrant labour that is currently uncertain.

There are over 10 million people in the UK with a criminal record. Employing ex-offenders makes sense now more than ever, something that the team at Apex Trust can see only too well. The charity began in St Helens in 1996 and spread its wings into the rest of Merseyside just three years later. Today the team numbers 7 staff, 3 of whom first came to Apex as service users, and 8 volunteers, many of whom also know the services from the other side.

In the last 12 months Apex Trust's ACT 4 Women project has received referrals of 120 women from across the region. When someone first encounters Apex things start with a detailed initial assessment. Through this the team develops a sense of the particular barriers to employment that an individual is facing. A solid baseline assessment is key to tailoring a programme of support that enables someone to move out of dependency on welfare and crime into independent economically active membership of their community.

It is rarely a simple life story that leads to a local woman living with a conviction and feeling that she has few, if any, prospects.

Apex regularly listens to people who have been caught in the eye of a perfect storm of a combination of circumstances ranging across poor mental health, physical and psychological domestic abuse, debt, drug and alcohol problems, and disrupted education. With the right support positive change can start to happen fast.

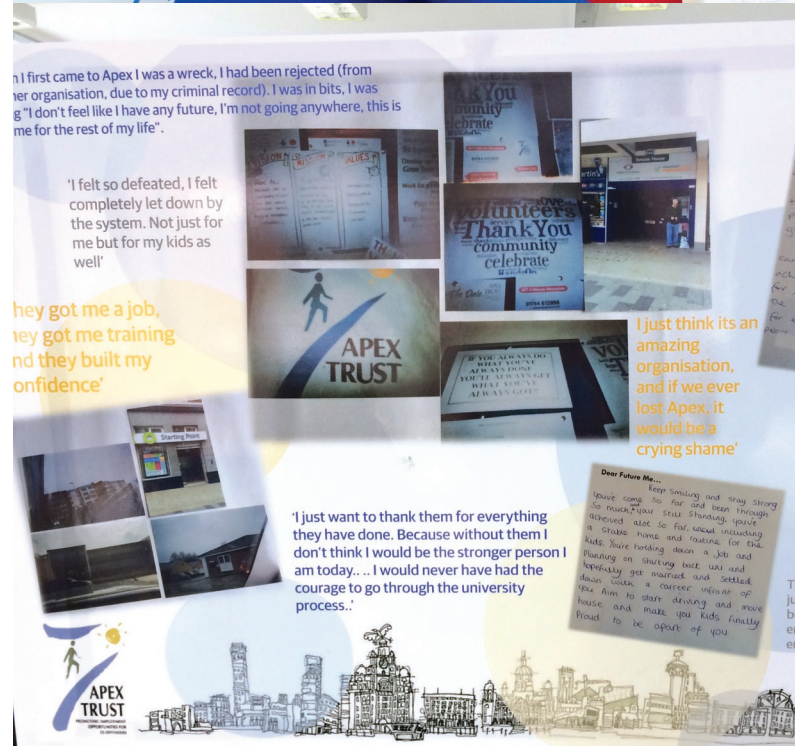
When she first arrived one young woman rarely made eye contact with others and barely spoke. Joining the accredited training programme, which runs one day a week for just six weeks, by the final session she was speaking up and leading discussions. A while after that a maternity leave contract came up with a local employer. She got that job. She did so well that after the expiry of that contract the employer offered her a permanent position and she took it. That was 6 months ago and she is still there now.

That Apex Trust works across Merseyside is good for St Helens: good for people from the borough who want the chance to work somewhere new to begin their professional life again; and good for local employers needing dependable talent and skills from across the region.

Women coming to Apex build their confidence and communication skills and many also gain qualifications.

One woman used her PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University to explore how Apex impacted upon the lives of fellow service users. Successfully completing the Level 2 accredited Peer Mentoring programme offered by Apex often whets the appetite for higher things and can lead to employment as a Health or Learning Mentor.

Apex has a mission to: deliver services that enable offenders and those at risk of offending to be the best that they can be and inspire breakthroughs in the way society treats them: making sure that it can continue to do this is of value to everyone.



“Most of the solutions to women’s offending lie outside the justice system”

Prison Reform Trust; Association of Directors of Adult Social Services; Centre for Mental Health

At any one time up to **70%** of those supported through ACT 4 Women Merseyside **have children**

Value achieving ambition