



Essex Probation: reaching out to the community

Probation's work in punishing and rehabilitating offenders is appreciated both for its effect on supervisees and for the help it gives locally.

The Community Payback team in Chelmsford set about creating an allotment which would provide food for a local Nightshelter, while improving life for neighbouring allotment users.

They put together a group of offenders sentenced by the courts to work for the community, and took on an overgrown field, strimming, raking, digging, and mowing it until it was useable, creating several new plots. The offenders then built a shed and a greenhouse. At the end of their allotment plot, they created a 'Sit-Around' for local allotment users.

They have so far grown produce for the Chelmsford Nightshelter, including produce such as beans, potatoes and sprouts. In exchange, they receive seeds, and growbags: the Nightshelter's investment in further crops.

"In a real demonstration of acceptance and respect for what we are doing, other allotment users have donated plum trees, rhubarb, etc. In return, offenders have helped with digging up other patches," said Jill Richardson, who leads the team of Unpaid Work Supervisors in the Chelmsford area. "This interchange creates a sense of responsibility for others in their community, and acceptance by other allotment users produces a boost in these lads' self-respect, which can only improve the likelihood of success in preventing more crime."