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## **Apprentice Fever: It takes me over one hour to get to work... by bus**

In August 2009, 13 youngsters from the local community set out on a new adventure and began their apprenticeship with Wakefield and District Housing (WDH). Now, six months on, we report on commitment, enthusiasm and dedication.

The apprentices are taken on by WDH for a three-year program to learn new skills to take into future work. Jade Whitlam, 19, is one of the seven office-based apprentices and is now working as part of the Human Resources team.

“I’m really enjoying my apprenticeship and it’s really good fun,” says Jade, from South Hiendley. “I’m looking forward to learning more and there’s a lot to get into. I feel I’m treated as an equal in the office, not as an apprentice.”

Because Jade works in Human Resources, she will be part of the recruitment team when the new apprentices apply this year – which means she will know how her application was processed when she applied last year.

Jade’s tasks include supporting colleagues and promoting employee engagement.

“There are a lot of different sections so I get to work with a lot of different people,” explains Jade. “I’m working with Health and Safety soon which should be fun.

“I’ve also been working on our IT system, which is central to WDH and manages information about employees. It’s important work.”

Another new apprentice, dedicated Ben Hutchinson, works in the office that serves Normanton, Airedale and Castleford, His dedication to the job sees him have to travel over one hour to get to work... by bus.

“I live in Horbury and during the bad weather at the start of January my journey to and from work was horrendous – but I didn’t miss a day. If I couldn’t get to Airedale I would go and work from a Wakefield office.”

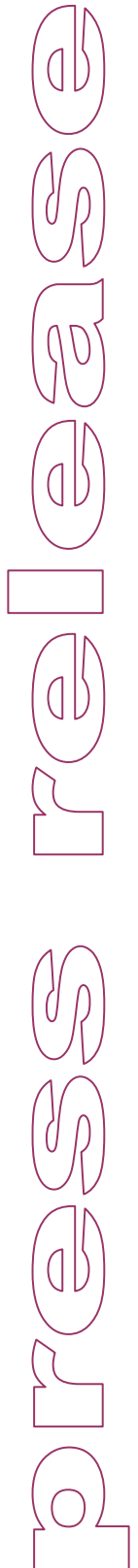
It takes him over an hour each way to get to work and it means he has to catch two (sometimes three) buses to the office.

Ben has also been acquiring new skills over the six months that he has been working at WDH in IT, teamwork and communications. Ben has also had experience in going out onto the estates to see tenants.

“This range of skills has given me the confidence to be more assertive. I can be more positive on the phone with tenants – and face-to-face.

“I’ve worked in all departments at the office. I’m currently working in allocations but I’ve got experience in customer service, estate management and repairs.”

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Ben, 17, has commented on how much he has been enjoying his apprenticeship with WDH and how many new skills he has learnt that can take him into future employment. He has said that he believes that the skills he is going to learn over the next three years are going to make him more employable in the future.

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He added: "It's been great – I feel I've learnt a lot in a relatively short space of time and I'm looking forward to developing my knowledge and putting my skills into practice during the remainder of my time with WDH."

**ENDS**

### **Notes To News Editors**

1. Photo caption: Jade Whitelam and Ben Hutchinson – six months into a three-year apprenticeship with WDH and both are acquiring valuable skills that employers will be looking for in the future.
2. WDH was established in April 2005 and became the largest single transfer housing organisation in the country when it took ownership of homes from Wakefield Council. It manages 31,000 properties occupied by 100,000 tenants and has a workforce of over 1,400 people, making it one of the largest local employers. WDH became the first housing organisation in the north, and the third in the UK to achieve the top rating of three stars from the Audit Commission in October 2007. The rating was awarded in particular for WDH's progress in delivering major repairs, the range of ways tenants can access services, and the high standards of customer care. WDH were also commended for their clear focus on delivering value for money services, catering for vulnerable people and impacting on the regeneration of the area.
3. WDH has been awarded Silver Band status by Sustainable Homes Index For Tomorrow (SHIFT), which recognises housing organisations' environmental sustainability and commitment to preventing climate change.

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