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■ ROSE BURGESS: Manager of Slough Youth Offending Team.

Jobs plea for young offenders

TJ HAS paid the price to society – two years under lock and key for a series of offences he committed as a young teenager.

As a more mature 17-year-old he's now facing the future, determined to leave crime in the past, equally determined to get, keep and work hard at a job. It won't be easy – no-one seems to trust him. But TJ's is not an isolated case. Most young offenders face the same barriers.

The Slough Youth Offending Team is a multi-disciplinary group of professionals dedicated to supporting young offenders in their pursuit to move their life forward in a positive direction.

It's not easy. Kim Pritchard is a Youth Offending Worker who has been working closely with TJ since he was released from prison.

The best chance he has to turn his life around is to get a job.

Kim explains the difficulty: "TJ works extremely well with us, acknowledging that he does need help. He's desperately trying to

Seventeen-year-old TJ is bright, articulate and intelligent – but he can't get a job. Why? Because he has a prison record. Richard Hill explores positive ways in which employers can give genuinely repentant young offenders that crucial break.

stay on the straight and narrow, but it's extremely difficult. It's a huge stumbling block when you have to reveal that you have a criminal record. TJ's paid his price to the community and he does deserve a second chance."

TJ knows the barriers in his path; he experiences them every day that he's out looking for work. Whereas he understands the reluctance of employers to trust him, he nevertheless, like other young offenders, needs the opportunity to put forward his case.

"If you've got a criminal record," he says, "you're likely to work harder at doing and keeping your job."

The hardest thing for people like TJ to bear can be the false promises. "They say they'll give you a call. They don't. They say they'll give you an interview. They don't. I can't even get past the application stage."

Rose Burgess is the manager of the Youth Offending Team.

"We are a team that looks to re-integrate young people back into the community," she says. "To do that, they need the opportunities that exist in that community. We have a whole section of the community that is excluded from the employment arena. Without that inclusion, it will be more difficult for us to do our job."

Young offenders who genuinely want to turn their lives around are stuck in a Catch-22 situation. Their criminal record makes it difficult for them to get a job – the very job that could enable them to prove their value, commitment and trustworthiness.

Employers who would like to find out more should call Lyn Ayres at Thames Career Guidance on 01753 576136.