

Raising the bar

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council takes safety seriously. After contracting AJF Waste Management to induct Future Jobs Fund trainees and permanent staff, the authority took advantage of the innovative Train the Trainer programme to create a specialist, on-site health and safety role.

In 2010, Blaenau Gwent introduced a new recycling service, including weekly food and fortnightly residual waste collections. Recognising the increasing importance of health and safety issues, it also raised the bar by providing training for all new Future Jobs trainees and the 40 staff in its cleansing department.

Waste and Recycling Manager Matthew Perry said: "We wanted to cover every scenario that staff might come up against, from sharps to dealing with violent members of the public. Andy Firman at AJF Waste Management was very flexible. He listened to our aims and needs and built the course around them."

The authority then set its sights on a more ambitious training programme. Chief Neighbourhood Services Officer Alan Reed explains: "In the industry we all know that there are increasing incidents resulting from activities around waste, and as local authorities we need to make sure that we have the appropriate systems and training in place. We had training in place but we needed more regular control of health and safety to make sure staff were following risk assessments. The Train the Trainer scheme gave us that opportunity."

Justin Hodges, Environment and Neighbourhood Services Health and Safety Advisor, has worked at the council for over 25 years in roles ranging from litter picker to supervisor and jumped at the chance to broaden his skills by taking on a dedicated health and safety role. In just six months he has trained 63 men at Blaenau Gwent and, working directly for AJF Waste Management, he has also trained a further 30 at other authorities in Wales.

Justin says that at first he was apprehensive of standing in front of a class, but quickly overcame his nerves. "At first I shadowed Andy as he went through the various slides

and videos showing regulations, guidance, and safe working practice. He is incredibly knowledgeable and easy to speak to; he has all the answers. Basically, if you want to be serious on safety, you need to have links with someone like Andy."

Alan Reed agrees: "The benefits are widespread. Customers are more likely to go directly to operatives with complaints now, so we're providing a more professional service – and staff also feel part of an overall service. They don't just come to work now and do their job, they feel more in control of what they do."

