

Press release

500 offenders on community service 'Keep Scotland Beautiful'

As a result of a collaboration between the Association of Directors of Social Work, community service teams and Keep Scotland Beautiful, 500 offenders will spend this weekend cleaning beaches, riversides and woodlands across Scotland. The event, involving all 32 local authority community service teams, falls on the last weekend of Keep Scotland Beautiful's National Spring Clean campaign.

Chair of ADSW's Criminal justice Standing Committee, Sandy Riddell said: "Community service offers huge benefits to offenders, their families and the communities they come from. It allows offenders to give something back to the communities they have offended in and allows them to maintain links with their families and their communities, links that are so important in stopping them offending in the future.

"The evidence is clear: short term prison sentences don't work, community service does, which is why we are delighted to collaborate with Keep Scotland Beautiful and use the opportunity of this weekend's event to raise the profile of the benefits of community service and to give something back to communities across Scotland.

"Across Scotland last year Courts made just short of 10, 000 orders of community service which amounted to over 1.25 million hours of work available to the community. This work, which often goes unseen and uncelebrated, makes a huge and positive impact in our communities.

Inverclyde Council's Community Service team were recently involved in a project involving extensive a local church and church manse. The Session Clerk of the United Reform Church, Greenock, was delighted with the work carried out and said he very likely to use the service again, further commenting, "the supervisors were excellent. The Community Service workers were both helpful and hard working and respectful of the church premises. I also felt that most of the workers had a positive attitude with this type of disposal from the Courts".

Donna Niven, Programme Manager of Keep Scotland Beautiful said: "we welcome the involvement of Criminal Justice Community Service Schemes in our 2010 Spring Clean. Their efforts during the campaign have made a real difference in local communities across the country. Community Service Schemes are committed and already undertake a huge amount of environmental and cleanup work and we look forward to further developing this partnership in our joint determination to Keep Scotland Beautiful."

This event follows on from a successful collaboration between ADSW and the marine Conservation Society in September 2009 where community service teams in the North East

helped remove tonnes of rubbish from beaches in Moray, Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Angus and Dundee.

Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill said:

"These are low level offenders being sent out to repay their dues to the community. Whether it is getting rid of unsightly graffiti from the streets, renovating elderly care homes, or as we'll be seeing this weekend, clearing beaches and woodlands of rubbish, these offenders are making improvements to communities through tough manual labour.

"They are paying back society for their wrong-doings, taking responsibility for their actions, and learning new skills which will help them break free from the grasp of crime and into employment. People will see the benefits of their work in the community this weekend.

"Prison will always be the right place for serious and dangerous offenders, but for low level offenders who've perhaps committed breach of the peace or petty theft, sending them to jail for six months isn't working, they just learn new criminal skills, and end up back in prison time and time again.

"The stats show us that community service works for these minor offenders with three quarters sentenced to a short prison sentence of six months or less going on to reoffend within two years of getting out, but in comparison, three out of five given community service do not reoffend. That is three out of five communities safer because of this approach. Crime is at its lowest level in Scotland for nearly 30 years, we have a record number of police officers on our streets making communities safer, and we want that to continue."

Angela Constance MSP and former criminal justice social worker lodged the following motion in Parliament: That the Scottish Parliament congratulates the Association of Directors of Social Work and Keep Scotland Beautiful in their collaboration on a national weekend of community service; notes that this event will take place on 24 and 25 of April, the final weekend of Keep Scotland Beautiful's National Spring Clean campaign and will involve all 32 local authority criminal justice social work teams and upwards of 500 offenders on community service cleaning up beaches, canals, riversides and other community areas; and celebrates the very significant and positive impact that the 1.25 million hours of community service that takes place annually across Scotland has on offenders, their families and the communities they live in.

Notes:

The Association of Directors of Social Work is the professional association for senior social work managers in local authorities in Scotland.

For further information on criminal justice social work please see our media briefing at www.adsw.org.uk/News/Media-Briefings/

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