

AWARD: Praise for team who totally changed shabby block of flats

Towering success brings an 'Oscar'



WINNING PROJECT:

Carol Bridges, Andrew Wilkinson, John Doran and Geraldine Honley outside the once shabby Haselbury House

by OLWEN VASEY

City Hall Reporter

A ground-breaking scheme in which young people turned a shabby tower block of flats into comfortable apartments has won a housing "Oscar".

The scheme off Park Road, Bradford, was given the top national award in its category in a glitzy ceremony at the Hilton Hotel, London.

Now it could be seen as a role model by councils and organisations across Britain.

John Doran, 18, who helped to transform shabby Haselbury House and went to the ceremony, said: "It was overwhelming. I never thought this could happen."

The project - which won the category for good practice in social exclusion in the Chartered Institute of Housing and Inside Housing national awards - is the home of 40 young people.

It is jointly operated by the Christian charity Impact and Integra, the European-funded youth training scheme.

Andrew Wilkinson, 21, who now works with Impact and lives in the block said: "We feel very proud. From the moment you walk into the block you feel it is yours."

He described the misery of living in a bed sitter at the age of 16 when his family split up. "I didn't know how to budget for bills and look after myself until Impact helped me."

City Housing Officer Geraldine Howley said just 21 months ago that the five-storey block had become almost impossible to let. Stairwells were being used as toilets, flats had been burned out and the building was a haunt for young drug users and dealers.

Residents in nearby flats were horrified when they heard vulnerable young people would be the neighbours - but Mrs Howley says they soon changed

their minds. The young people decorated, furnished and carpeted the building and there are now offices and training facilities on the ground floor.

Impact leases the flats from the Council and sublets them to the young people.

The Council made a one-off payment of £5,000 for the improvements to communal areas and pays Impact an annual management fee of £300.

Mrs Howley said they were attracting the right sort of person and giving them responsibility.

She added: "They put up a Christmas tree and everyone said it would last a couple of days if they were lucky. In fact it stayed right the way through."

Chairman of the Housing and Public Protection Committee Councillor Jim O'Neill said: "We are absolutely delighted."

"This scheme will now be a role model for the rest of Britain. We are leading the field."