



Press Release

27 March 2008

For release following launch date of 2 April 2008

Local author launches new Probation Trust

Probation staff at Kidderminster were today celebrating the launch of the new West Mercia Probation Trust.

Mark Johnson, ex-offender from Kidderminster and now best selling author of 'Wasted', was invited to join the celebrations and cut the official Trust cake.

Since West Mercia Probation was formed in 2001 it has been part of the National Probation Service responsible to the National Probation Directorate in London. This new move will mean that West Mercia is released from that arrangement and will be given more freedoms.

David Chantler, Trust Chief Executive, said, " Whilst we will still work to the national agenda on 'what' we do, Trust status will give us the opportunity to think more about 'how' we do things locally to reflect the needs of our communities".

"We intend to take maximum advantage of this change and want to work with our stakeholders and staff on designing the best approaches to delivering probation locally. The whole point of becoming an independent trust is for it to be sensitive to local needs".

West Mercia is one of six probation areas to be selected to become a Trust in the first wave of 'pathfinder' Trusts under the Offender Management Act. It is hoped that all of the 42 probation areas in England and Wales will become a Trust by April 2011.

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- **PHOTO OPPORTUNITY**

Wednesday 2 April 2008, 12.45 pm-1.00 pm at 36 Leswell Street, Kidderminster.

Mark Johnson, ex-offender from Kidderminster and author of 'Wasted' will be officially launching the Trust with the cutting of the Trust cake. Chief Executive, David Chantler, Trust Chair, James Kelly, Trust members and staff will be present.

You are welcome to come along to come along to take a photograph or interview those present. Please contact Jackie Bell in the first instance.

- Please find summary information relating to Mark Johnson, overleaf.
- Mark Johnson's book 'Wasted' is being re-published in paperback from 2 April 2008.

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Mark Johnson

Mark Johnson was born in 1970. He spent much of his childhood roaming the streets of Kidderminster to escape violence and abuse at home. He first got drunk at the age of 8, and by 11 he was sharing heroin in a squat. His mother, a Jehovah's Witness, attempted suicide when he was 13, and his father, who worked away most of the time, would terrorise his family when he returned.

He briefly attended art college at 16, but he was already hooked on drugs. At 17 he was in borstal where, after a riot, he was subjected to treatment of inhumane cruelty. Over the next fourteen years he lived a helter-skelter life ricocheting between his mother's home in Kendal (where he learned tree surgery), Birmingham, Nottingham, USA and Dublin.

He moved to London and worked as a tree surgeon, but his drug habit made him unreliable, and when he lost his job, the streets of Soho became his home. Begging, stealing and drug dealing to get his huge daily fix. The drugs no longer worked and his entanglement with powerful drug dealers nearly killed him.

Mark was saved by an old friend working for Turning Point who persuaded him into a detox centre. His recovery was slow and remarkable.

Mark applied for a Prince's Trust loan, and now runs a successful tree surgery business where he mostly employs recovering addicts and ex-offenders. He was made **Young Achiever of the Year** by The Prince's Trust in 2005 and went on to receive the *Daily Mirror's Pride of Britain Award*. He is currently piloting a scheme which involves the mentoring of young offenders by ex-offenders.