

Ex-Offenders Find Second Chance Through Habitat For Humanity

DALLAS (CBS11)

A new program spearheaded by Dallas' Habitat For Humanity is giving ex-offenders and others down on their luck, a second chance at making an honest living.

The Habitat Apprentice Training or "HAT" program currently has about 50 people participating.

Most all of them have never had a career in construction, but through training and mentorship, the two-year program offers them a certifiable specialty in residential construction when completed.

"It is certainly a feeling of satisfaction when we take somebody who had nothing last week and we put them to work and they learn new skills," said Habitat's Vice President of Construction, Ed Wiesner.

Wiesner said about 65 percent of those enrolled in the program are ex-convicts who were having a hard time finding gainful employment and training.

"We can employ folks like that if they don't have any violent offenses in their background," said Wiesner.

Shelvin Mason is one of the apprentices in the program.

He was convicted on a felony drug charge and recently served a seven-year probation sentence.

"You don't really find that these days when people are actually willing to invest in you to make you better person in the community and doing work for the community," said Mason.

The program is growing in popularity and organizers hope to continue to expand it throughout Dallas County.