

Partnership offers a second chance at work

By VANITA PRASAD

Four west Auckland men have enjoyed a boost to their career prospects thanks to a partnership between two local organisations.

The Walsh Trust and Ecomatters Environment Trust run a programme that helps injured or mentally challenged people into paid work.

Walsh Trust employment manager Paul Revill says it's not an easy task.

"It's hard enough for most people to get a job right now."

However he says Ecomatters is a good fit because of its social conscience.

"They just get it. They understand that there's a place for people that have become sick or injured to be included in society."

He says the programme gives people work experience and gets them out of the house.

"There is a tendency for

mentally challenged people to isolate themselves."

The four men work part-time for Ecomatters' Hobsonville Plant Network.

Network manager Darren Millington says they spend two days a week cultivating seedlings.

"We go around the area finding plants that need a boost in numbers and propagate them in the nursery.

"As well as growing native plants for the area we grow some to sell and do edible demonstration gardens where the public can learn how to grow natives and veggies."

Many are being used in plantings at the Hobsonville Point development.

Mr Millington says the six-month employment period includes work-based training where the men work towards an NZQA qualification.

One of the workers, Manny Apiata, says the experience has been rejuvenating.

"It puts a bit of structure back into our lives and makes you really appreciate the weekends more.

"What appeals to me is the native plants - I've worked with horticulture before but this is the first time I've worked with native plants."

Kevin Lauder is also enjoying the work.

"After going through bouts of depression it's good to be working with a supportive team. I like the pace of the work and working in nature."

Mr Lauder hopes Ecomatters will continue to get funding so that the programme can continue.

"We are hoping that we can stay on and continue what we've started here."

The project began in 2009 and is funded until the end of the financial year through the Waitakere City Council.

■ See P8 for more on funding for community groups.



Stuck in: From left: Kevin Lauder, Manny Apiata, Mathew Hepburn and Eric Pook have found part-time work through a partnership between Ecomatters Trust and Walsh Trust.
Photo: VANITA PRASAD