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# The law firm giving criminals a chance

AROUND nine million people in the UK have criminal convictions or spent convictions and it often bars them from finding work, with three-quarters of employers using a criminal conviction to discount applicants looking for jobs.

Yet finding a job is the best way to ensure rehabilitation as a work experience programme run by law firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP has proved.

Its Ready for Work scheme, which

won a Lord Mayor's Dragon Award last night, has managed to get 83 per cent into sustained employment for at least six months.

Set up with Business in the Community, it gives work experience opportunities to ex-offenders in the clerical, administration and IT departments of the law firm, with Freshfields' staff involved in mentoring and job coaching.

Some of the placements have resulted in ex-offenders being

recruited by Freshfields, which was the first law firm to sign up to the Ban the Box campaign, meaning that job seekers do not have to declare convictions at the first stage of the recruitment process.

This year, the applicants for the Lord Mayor's Dragon Awards volunteered a combined 92,000 hours, helped almost 300,000 people in London and created 5,000 training placements as a result of their community engagement.

