

Now he prevents problems

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Wrong Path Turns Ugly

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A privileged upbringing didn't prevent Glenn Flett's life from unravelling quickly. He was operating a cigarette theft ring at the age of 11, carrying a loaded .38 revolver to high school and was knocking off stores and banks by the time he was 20.

In 1981, Flett was convicted of the murder of a Hudson's Bay manager he shot during a botched robbery. "Looking back, it's like a nightmare," Flett told The Abbotsford News on Friday. "At the time, I thought I was being cool." But the ex-con, who now lives in Mission, is a criminal success story - and he recently won the Betty Urquhart Community Service Award for a program he founded that helps high-risk kids get their lives on track.

In the program, called Partners in Learning, low-risk offenders serving time at Ferndale Institution work with kids attending four alternative schools in Abbotsford and Mission.

"Statistically, about 80 per cent of these kids will end up in the justice system," said Flett, who is currently on parole, of the kids participating in the program. "We're trying to avert that." In addition to talking to the students one-on-one about life choices, the prisoners also help them with literacy training. Flett said the program is a god-send for both the kids and the offenders who help out.

"Kids need to hear the goods from people who've had these experiences," he said. "It's also extremely good for the guys, because it makes them accountable and gives them a sense of being forgiven

and accepted." Heather Hausch, a youth worker at the alternative Abbotsford Continuing Education School, said Flett's work has made a big difference in many lives.

"He's showed (the students) you can have done time and made mistakes, but that you can take control and make changes," said Hausch. As for the award, Flett said his work is not unique among the ranks of ex-prisoners.

"Ex-offenders do a lot of good things, but most of them don't want the publicity," he said.