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GATESHEAD CHARITY'S HOT MEALS SERVICE STAYS ON THE MENU THANKS TO NEWCASTLE BUILDING SOCIETY GRANT

A food delivery service, which reaches dozens of vulnerable households every week is set to continue after the Gateshead community charity behind it received new funding from Newcastle Building Society.

Bensham & Saltwell Alive set up its weekly hot meal delivery service in July 2020 to ensure vulnerable individuals, older people and families that were shielding during the first stages of the pandemic could still get the food they needed.

Despite the easing of lockdown restrictions, the project has continued to run to meet an enduring need across the local community, with meals being cooked and delivered by a team of volunteers to more than 50 households every week.

The project was due to be suspended as the funding that was used to set it up was about to run out, but now, a £3,000 Newcastle Building Society grant is enabling Bensham & Saltwell Alive to keep it going.

The funding is being provided through the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation, which offers grants to charities and community groups located in or around the communities served by the Society's branch network.

Set up in 2014, Bensham & Saltwell Alive is the catalyst for a wide range of community improvement and support projects, and aims to give residents a chance to share their skills, help each other, and work together for the benefit of all.

During the pandemic, it has also offered a variety of other help and support to communities in the Bensham and Saltwell area, including food parcels, children's Christmas gifts, supporting food co-operatives, providing mental health support and creating children's activity resources.

Jayne Hopkins at Bensham & Saltwell Alive says: “Our focus is always on the assets that we have within the community and how we can make the most of them to build on everything that makes strong, exciting, healthy and a place that we’re all proud to call home.

“Everything we do, from gardening and allotment projects to creative and artistic initiatives and youth work, is designed to underpin our holistic approach to helping residents make the best of their collective skills and knowledge for the benefit of everyone that lives here.

“The hot meals service was originally set up during the pandemic for a specific purpose, but with food bank use rising significantly across our community, it became very clear that the need for it would be enduring.

“We get so much positive feedback from the people we visit, with many of them telling us how much they look forward to what they call their ‘weekly treat’ and how much of a difference it makes to their day.

“With our funding running out and many other costs to cover, we were faced with having to suspend the hot meals service, even though we know how valuable it is, so to be able to carry it on thanks to Newcastle Building Society’s generous support is a wonderful boost for us all.”

Stephen Pattinson, manager at Newcastle Building Society’s Front Street branch in Whickham, adds: “Bensham & Saltwell Alive brings together local people to make great things happen and the long-term impact it has on the community is immense.

“Much of our grant-giving during the pandemic has focused on food poverty projects like this and it’s great to see the impact that our funding is having right across our heartland area.”

Since its launch in 2016, Newcastle Building Society’s Community Fund has also contributed over £2.1m in grants and partnerships to a wide variety of charities and projects across the region, including the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation and the Prince’s Trust.

The grants are so far estimated to have had a positive impact on more than 151,000 people.

The Newcastle Building Society Community Fund is run in association with the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

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