

## **BLYTH ADULT LEARNERS GETTING BASIC SKILLS BOOST THANKS TO CHARITY'S FOUR-FIGURE GRANT**

Dozens of jobseekers in South East Northumberland are set to get a boost to their basic skills after a local charity received a four-figure grant from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation.

Blyth Resource & Initiative Centre (BRIC) provides a wide range of training courses and employability services to people living in Blyth and its surrounding communities with the aim of helping them gain the skills and knowledge needed to enter the world of work.

The charity, which celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year, launched a new functional skills project last autumn after being accredited to deliver courses in maths and English.

The course, which takes around four months to complete and involves online and in-person sessions, has so far been successfully completed by 14 local people, with several others currently at different stages of their studies.

And with more 20 people on its waiting list, BRIC is now using a £2,250 grant from the Newcastle Building Society's Community Fund at the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland to extend its provision of the courses, with the next ones due to start in September.

Each part of the five-stage course is passed by taking an exam, with students allowed to work at their own pace with the support of a tutor and able to decide when they're ready to take the exams.

Job interviews, paid employment and volunteering roles have already been secured by several of the first students to complete the course.

Based at the Blyth Community Enterprise Centre on Ridley Street, BRIC also offers a range of digital skills development course and more than 20 years' experience in providing IT support for computer users of all ages and skill levels

Centre manager Sharron Fawcett says: “Our aim is to upskill local people who don’t have any qualifications, which is around one third of Blyth’s population, so that they have a better chance of catching a potential employer’s eye and getting on their interview list.

“With the first stage of the interview process often being streamlined down to an online assessment, candidates without formal qualifications often don’t get a look in, no matter how well suited they might be as a person to the job in question.

“Each of our students starts to learn from their own individual position and at a speed that suits them - there’s no time limit for completing the course and each person can take the exam for the stage they’re on whenever they feel ready.

“We’re already seeing positive outcomes for our first batch of students, with several of them going on to secure interviews, get volunteering positions and find employment, and we’re keen to get even more local people learning with us in the coming months.

“Any funding is invaluable for a small charity like ours, but in this case, we simply wouldn’t be able to be running this course without Newcastle Building Society’s generous support.”

Stephen Burt, manager at Newcastle Building Society’s Station Road branch in Ashington, adds: “Developing employability skills and helping people across our heartland area has been one of the core focuses for our charitable giving over the last couple of years.

“The BRIC team has developed a practical way in which dozens of local people can develop the skills they need to move towards the jobs that they want and it’s great for us to be able to support their inspiring work.”

Since its launch in 2016, Newcastle Building Society’s Community Fund at the Community Foundation has 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.

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### **About Newcastle Building Society**

Newcastle Building Society\* is the biggest building society in the North East, with a network of 30 branches and assets of more than £4.9bn. We've been here for our members for over 150 years.

As a leading local employer, we're committed to growing our region's talent and being a great place to work where people can realise their potential. We hold Platinum IIP and won the Excellence and Positive Impact Award at the 2022 CIPD North East of England HR&D Awards. We were named Company of the Year in the Northumberland and Tyneside category of the North East Business Awards 2022.

We help people to own their home, to save and to plan their finances through our range of products and services. We believe in the role of the high street at the heart of our communities and are proactive in making financial information and financial advice accessible across our region.

Our Financial Advice is provided through our Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited division\*\*.

We're dedicated to helping our North East communities make positive changes; since 2016 the financial support through grants and donations from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation to benefit local causes has surpassed £2.1m

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