



COLLEAGUE VOLUNTEERING BACKS UP SOCIETY'S COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' (NCVO) most recent figures, a massive 16.3m people - over a quarter of the UK's population - volunteered through a group, club or organisation in 2020/21.

Almost one in five (17%) people reported volunteering at least once a month, while if informal volunteering is included, which covers a wider range of activities including unpaid help for someone who is not a relative, that monthly figure goes up to 33%.

NCVO organises the annual Volunteers' Week, which this year runs from 1-7 June and celebrates the fantastic contribution volunteers make to their communities, the wider voluntary sector and society as a whole.

For one large North East employer, volunteering is embedded in its culture all year round - and the benefits of its proactive work in this area are felt both through its organisation and right across the region.

Newcastle Building Society has a range of long-term volunteer-friendly policies in place, including giving each one of its 1,600-strong workforce two paid volunteering days a year that they can spend supporting community groups and good causes of their choice.

Colleagues get involved in a wide range of activities right across the Society's heartland area, ranging from mentoring, befriending, environmental improvement projects and sports coaching through to supporting dozens of food banks, charities and community groups in their respective local areas.

During 2022, more than 900 days of volunteering were delivered by members of the Society team, either as individuals or with colleagues from their different departments.

Much of the volunteering work is coordinated through a 20-strong team of community ambassadors, who work across the Society's branch network and head office, and take on the role alongside their day-to-day work.

One such ambassador is Neil Edmondson, who is the Society's head of IT Customer & Compliance, but who has also worked on a number of different volunteering projects with colleagues.

Neil has organised three volunteer takeovers of the weekly Parkrun on Newcastle's Town Moor, the most recent one of which tied in with the Society's own annual fundraising 'Our Society Our 5K' event.

He has also led departmental volunteering visits to the Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter, to Leazes Park during Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean and to St Lawrence Park in Byker to help Urban Green Newcastle, the independent charity responsible for the management and upkeep of the city's 33 parks, undertake a major clean-up operation.

Neil Edmondson says: "Community is absolutely at the centre of everything that the Society does, and giving back in practical ways to the places in which we're based is extremely important to all of us.

"When we arrived at St Lawrence Park and were briefed by Urban Green Newcastle on the various different tasks with which they wanted our help, it was all a bit overawing, but by the end of the morning, we were amazed at how much we'd got done and what a difference it had made to the park environment.

"One person spending three hours on a project makes a difference, but get 25 people involved for the same length of time and you can achieve a huge amount.

"It's not just the groups that we work with that benefit from our volunteering projects. Spending time connecting with colleagues from your own and other teams really helps to build relationships across the business, and on a personal level, seeing how your work has made a difference in the community is very satisfying."

The Society's colleague volunteering programme is part of its wider suite of community-focused activities, which includes developing long-term projects with charities including The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, Walking With The Wounded and The Prince's Trust, and providing essential funding to dozens of other smaller regional organisations.

Since 2016, the Society's Community Fund at the Community Foundation has contributed over £2.3m in grants and partnerships to a wide variety of charities and projects, which are estimated to have so far had a positive impact on over 151,000 people.

Donna Stubbs, community manager at Newcastle Building Society, adds: "As the region's largest building society, our role has to be about much more than financial products and services.

"We aim to help make positive change happen in our region in lots of ways, which in turn contributes to building stronger, more vibrant communities that benefit us all.

“With so many colleagues taking part in volunteering activities over the last year, and many going on to become regular long-term volunteers with their chosen charities, it’s clear that this passion is shared right across the business and it’s great to be able to celebrate the contributions that they are making to the well-being of the region during Volunteers’ Week.”