

Comfrey Project Meeting Growing Community Needs With Newcastle Building Society Backing

A longstanding North East charity which helps refugees and people seeking asylum gain practical skills in the garden has received a four-figure funding boost from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation.

The Comfrey Project runs a community garden at its Windmill Hills Centre headquarters in Gateshead and allotment sites in Fenham and Walkergate which provide its volunteers with a chance to undertake a range of meaningful work at its weekly sessions, including gardening, cookery and housekeeping.

The charity, which celebrates its 21st anniversary this year, encourages its volunteers to share their own skills and build new connections in the community while also developing their confidence and enhancing their personal well-being.

The Comfrey Project has used the £3,000 Newcastle Building Society grant to help meet the growing costs of delivering its services and ensure it can provide all the equipment and support that its volunteers need.

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

The Comfrey Project supported around 680 volunteers during 2021, with around 200 children taking part in the family sessions that it runs during half-term and end of term school holidays.

As well as working on the charity's own site, it also works with other groups and good causes to find projects elsewhere with which its volunteers can get involved.

The charity has also developed a crisis response service which was set up during the pandemic and which continues to provide support around food, housing and general advice to a growing number of local people.

Eleni Venaki, director at the Comfrey Project, says: “The activities we offer allow our volunteers to make new connections in the community, both with the people that they’re working with and further afield, and to develop new workplace and life skills that will help them build better futures for themselves.

“We also strongly encourage them to share their own skills and knowledge with the wider group, and our experience is that the whole package we support helps participants build up their confidence and self-esteem in the face of often challenging personal and family situations.

“The need for our crisis support service hasn’t diminished with the passing of the pandemic and we’re helping more and more people navigate a growing range of difficult challenges.

“We spend a great deal of time on raising the money we need to cover our costs, so this sort of funding from Newcastle Building Society allows us to spend more time on planning and delivering the best possible services we can provide.”

Donna Stubbs, community manager at Newcastle Building Society, adds: “The Comfrey Project has been supporting some of the most vulnerable members of our community for more than two decades and continues to provide invaluable opportunities for developing new skills, self-confidence and local links.”

Since its launch in 2016, Newcastle Building Society’s Community Fund at the Community Foundation has also contributed over £2.3m 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 31 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 £2.3m

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