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DURHAM MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY'S ARTISTIC APPROACH WINS FOUR-FIGURE GRANT

A Durham charity which uses art therapies to help local people manage and overcome mental health issues has received a four-figure boost from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

RTProjects works alongside people affected by depression, anxiety and those at risk of suicide and aims to help them to develop emotional resilience and coping strategies which enable them to live a full life.

Based in Gilesgate in the centre of Durham City, the charity provides a mixture of group art therapy sessions and one-to-one support, and has helped more than 700 people since it was set up 14 years ago.

Around 40 people currently take part in sessions every week, most from around the local area, but sometime from as far afield as Stanley and Hartlepool.

Each service user, who can be referred to RTProjects from a variety of backgrounds, has an initial assessment period before an individual programme is developed which reflects their needs, talents and interests.

Artistic opportunities range from print making, clay modelling and painting through to photography, music, writing and film making.

Each service user has access to the project for as long as they need, with twice-weekly 'open art surgeries' being made available to anyone in addition to their regular sessions.

Help from outside agencies will also be accessed if the RT team believes a particular individual needs a greater range of support and intervention.

RTProjects is almost entirely funded by grants and donations, with all of its services being free at the point of use.

The £2,000 grant, which was awarded after the charity was nominated by a Newcastle Building Society member, is now being used to help it cover its running costs.

Beano, who set up RT Projects in 2009 with co-founder Emma Beattie, says: “RTProjects grew out of my own experience of how using art for therapeutic reasons helped my recovery from a very challenging period in my life, and from realising the huge impact that it could also have for others in a similar situation.

“We provide people with the opportunity for creative expression in a safe, supportive environment, and look to show each individual that their mental health problems aren’t permanent and that, no matter how difficult their situations might be, they can get through them.

“For many of our service users, their visits to us can be the first time they’ve ever talked openly about the problems they’re facing and the impact they’re having on their lives.

“We let each service user decide which activities they want to try, depending on their interests and aptitudes, and it’s fascinating to watch artists emerging from people who’ve never previously thought of trying these sorts of creative activities.

“It’s also amazing to see them recognising the progress they’re making towards finding a more positive, long-term way forward.

“Support such as Newcastle Building Society’s is an absolute lifeline for us and we’re really grateful to have them on our side.”

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

Lizzie Cummings head of operational resilience at Newcastle Building Society, adds: “The importance of looking after your mental health has become very clear to everyone over recent years, and sometimes we all need a bit of help to stay in a good place.

“The innovative work that RTProjects has been doing over more than a decade has made a real difference to the lives and future prospects of hundreds of people, and we’re very pleased to be helping it continue to improve the well-being of the Durham community.”

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 £5.3bn. We’ve been here for our members for over 160 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

*Newcastle Building Society Principal Office: 1 Cobalt Park Way, Cobalt Business Park, NE28 9EJ. Newcastle Building Society is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Newcastle Building Society is entered in the Financial Services Register under number 156058. You can check this on the Financial Services Register or by contacting the Financial Conduct Authority on 0800 111 6768. Call 0845 734 4345 or visit us online at <https://www.newcastle.co.uk/>

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