

29 May, 2024

## Celebrating the mutual benefits of volunteering

Colleagues from the region's largest building society have been sharing their positive experiences from volunteering their time and skills to help others, in the lead up to Volunteers' Week 2024 (3<sup>rd</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> June).

Volunteers' Week celebrates the amazing contributions volunteers make to communities across the UK, and is a chance to recognise, celebrate and thank the UK's incredible volunteers for all they contribute to our local communities, the voluntary sector, and society as a whole.

Newcastle Building Society offers all colleagues two paid volunteering days per year to support good causes in their community. By embedding volunteering-friendly policies into the culture of the business, its team of dedicated colleagues spent over 10,500 hours or 1,502 working days volunteering their time to make positive changes to their communities in 2023.

Donna Stubbs, community manager at Newcastle Building Society, is responsible for engaging colleagues in volunteering and ensuring the Society meets its ambitious annual volunteering targets. As a regular volunteer herself, Donna lends her time as a way of deepening relationships between charities and the Society. Donna said: "One of the best things about volunteering is that it's for everyone. The range of volunteering opportunities that people can get involved in is so broad, and you can find a good cause to support based on your interests, skills and experience."

"Since joining the Society I've prepared and delivered hot meals to vulnerable members of the community, helped protect green spaces and lent my time to support fundraising events. I also recently volunteered with the Prince's Trust, supporting young people with employability skills by running mock interviews, and one of the strangest volunteering activities I ever took part in had to be cleaning oysters for a biodiversity project!"

There is a growing body of research on the links between volunteering and wellbeing. Lending our time and skills to help others can have several positive impacts on us as individuals. Not

only are we rewarded with the feeling that we're making a positive difference to people's lives, but volunteering can improve our self esteem and confidence, offer valuable work experience and help us feel valued as part of a team.

Donna continued: "We're keen to align with the findings of the Community Foundation's Vital Signs reports, which provide a pulse check on the region's priorities, and show how charitable giving can have an impact on making the North East a great place to live. Volunteering is one of the ways in which we can all support the region and I'm proud that so many colleagues are engaged in volunteering activities.

"Every volunteer gets something different from their experience. I find it so rewarding to support people in our region suffering from food poverty, as well as those who have needed help with their employability skills. I have seen first-hand the impact of a warm meal for someone who is homeless, or the pride on a young person's face when completing a mock interview successfully.

"However volunteering doesn't just have an impact on the beneficiary, but also on the volunteer, and I've also seen a change in my own confidence since I started lending my time to help others. Although I am a 'people person', I often feel nervous when in new situations for the first time, but if I hadn't left my comfort zone I would have never met some of the most inspirational people I have ever come across."

With over 670 colleagues volunteering in 2023, Donna has heard countless stories from staff of the impact volunteering has had on their own lives, as well as the teachable moments provided by spending time doing something for somebody else.

Donna added: "So often I hear from colleagues that they didn't fully understand how important the services are that charities are providing. They're surprised to see the wide range of individuals from all walks of life that access support from these charities and they come back with a better awareness of the key challenges at play within our communities.

"As individuals leading busy lives, we don't always appreciate the value we can offer as volunteers, but once you've have helped out once, you often have the desire to do more."

Recently, as the Society continues to look at how it can deliver greater impact through its colleagues' volunteering efforts it has made changes to its areas of focus.

Donna continued: “Over the last few years as colleague volunteering has increased, the number of activities they have been involved in has been so wide-ranging it has been difficult to measure the impact we were having.

“When looking at the Vital Signs data that the Community Foundation Tyne and Wear, Northumberland have recently published, it was clear there are some key issues affecting our communities. When considering this data and insight, we felt that focusing our volunteering efforts on the following themes would be more impactful:

- Food Poverty
- Work and Opportunity
- Debt Management
- Homelessness and Insecure Housing
- Environment/sustainability

“These themes are not just for volunteering but help guide everything we do from a community point of view, providing us with a framework for supporting our communities. Since focussing on these key themes we have seen an increase in colleagues utilising their professional skills to support good causes, with over 230 working days dedicated to supporting our strategic themes in 2024.”

### **YMCA North Tyneside case study**

One local charity Newcastle Building Society have built a long-standing relationship with is the YMCA North Tyneside, with colleagues from across the Society having volunteered their time and skills to many YMCA North Tyneside projects over the years.

These include volunteering at the YMCA café, community meals and allotment, and fundraising for several events that support the vulnerable young people in YMCA-supported accommodation, youth groups and nursery.

Newcastle Building Society’s Property Services team have been working with the YMCA North Tyneside for a number of years. As a strategic partner with a purpose aligned to its strategic volunteering ambitions, the opportunity to support the YMCA North Tyneside is something its colleagues see the value in being involved in.

Recently seven colleagues from the Society's Property Services team visited the YMCA North Tyneside's Patterdale estate in the Lake District to support the charity with its ongoing estate management . This included cutting back invasive rhododendron in some of the woodland on the estate which would have damaging impacts on the estate's biodiversity if not controlled. Volunteering in this way enables the self-catering accommodation on-site at the estate to continue to be income generating providing funds to support the ongoing work and purpose of YMCA North Tyneside

Craig Garbutt, Head of Property Services at Newcastle Building Society, said: "Not only was the work highly rewarding, but colleagues also benefitted from what was a great team building exercise. Our challenge now is how we can ensure our approach to volunteering work with the YMCA is coordinated, and that as many colleagues as possible from across our Society can get involved to maximise our impact."

Volunteering highlights from Newcastle Building Society's colleagues in 2023 included:

- A Society-wide effort to transform an old boys club in Wallsend into a brand new performing arts school for True Colours Theatre - who were later awarded a grant from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland
- IT colleagues inspiring local schoolchildren to explore digital and technology careers through 'Coding Club' after they supported Newcastle United Foundation to deliver a series of science and engineering workshops
- Paul Edwards, Head of Enterprise Risk and qualified rugby coach, using his volunteering time to give schoolchildren the opportunity to try rugby, after their middle school struggled to access a qualified coach to teach the sport

**-ENDS-**

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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 £6.2bn. 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 have been named Regional Building Society of the Year for seven consecutive years from 2017 – 2023 by What Mortgage? and also won Best Overall Personal Finance Brand at the Personal Finance Awards 2023/24. In 2024 Newcastle Building Society became the first UK business to receive international accreditation for mutual value measurement, recognising our ongoing commitment to creating value for its members and communities.

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, as our branch network grows, we are increasingly proactive in making financial information and financial advice accessible across our regions.

Our Financial Advice is provided through our Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited subsidiary. Face-to-face financial advice is available at each of the Society's 31 branches plus a financial advice-only location in Pickering, North Yorkshire. For the third year running, Newcastle Financial Advisers has been awarded Top Rated Firm status by VouchedFor - the UK's leading review site for Financial Advisers.

We're dedicated to helping our communities make positive changes; since 1995 the financial support through grants and donations from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation to benefit local causes has surpassed £1.7m. Our total community contributions in 2022, made up of grants, match funding, and our ongoing partnership donations, was more than £544,000.

Newcastle Building Society is committed to creating a culture of belonging, where people can bring their whole self to work and be respected and valued for who they are. Our colleague-run networks include the Race Network, LGBTQ+ Network the Disability and Awareness Network, Women in Leadership Network, Menopause Network and Parent and Carers Network, all of which help steer Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy within the organisation.

[www.newcastle.co.uk](http://www.newcastle.co.uk)

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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.