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Grant funding provides essential boost to employability in the North East

Grant funding from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation North East is helping three North East-based charities; The Recruitment Junction, MyBigCareer and The Hope Foundation to deliver life-changing projects that help people overcome barriers to work, build skills and access employment across the region.

In the last 18 months the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund has donated a total of almost £50,000 in grant funding to ten charities tackle issues linked to work and employability.

The grants will provide practical job search assistance, creative learning and careers coaching for young people and adults, including by three charities focusing their efforts in County Durham, Newcastle and Middlesbrough.

Newcastle Building Society members are entitled to support local charities by nominating them for a grant from the [Newcastle Building Society Community Fund](#), proving vital support to causes across the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

The Recruitment Junction: expanding specialist job-finding for ex-offenders into County Durham (Grant: £5,000)

The Recruitment Junction specialises in finding paid work for people leaving prison, and is one of only a handful of charities in the UK doing this work and the only one to support residents of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and now County Durham. In five years the charity has placed over 800 ex-offenders into paid employment, achieving a job-entry rate of around 70% (government-run schemes typically achieve 5-20%), with two-thirds of those placed still in work beyond six months. Their model includes prison-facing activity such as the 'Inside Job' project, where prisoners are trained as peer recruiters so that clients are already linked into post-release support and job opportunities before leaving custody, as well as long-term wraparound support for ex-offenders in the community.

Newcastle Building Society's grant will help Recruitment Junction open and staff a second office in County Durham, filling a crucial geographic gap in services between Northumberland/Tyne & Wear and the areas further south where demand is high. The investment will support the Job Finder programme and enable the charity to scale up from placing hundreds of people into employment to placing thousands as they expand first regionally, and then nationally over the next five years. The charity's work not only helps lift individuals and their families out of poverty, but also reduces re-offending (the charity observes that re-offending rates amongst clients they place falls to around 5% compared with up to 60% without a job), creating safer communities and breaking the generational cycle linked to prison.

Adderstone Group has partnered with the Recruitment Junction for the past 5 years to recruit the charity's service users into full-time employment and training. Ian Baggett, Founder-CEO, said "We've recruited labour and skilled tradespeople via The Recruitment Junction from 2020 right up to now. They find us well-vetted lads, who hold their own on site with any of our other workers. We would definitely recommend this as a reliable recruitment pathway."

MyBigCareer: raising aspirations and introducing young people to work across the North East (Grant: £5,000)

MyBigCareer delivers a suite of North East programmes that bring the world of work into schools and colleges. The grant will fund Working World classroom workshops for 11-year-olds, online one-to-one career coaching for 13-16 year-olds, and Insight and Skills Days that introduce older students to employers and workplaces. The North East programme has expanded rapidly, working with over 20 schools and supporting thousands of young people from the least advantaged backgrounds to broaden horizons, raise aspirations and thrive in their future world of work.

Newcastle Building Society's support will help MyBigCareer sustain and grow these activities so more pupils can access practical careers information, coaching and employer encounters. Evidence shows that nine in 10 young people supported by MyBigCareer gain new skills and knowledge to support their future career and help close opportunity gaps, increasing the likelihood of young people making informed choices about education, training and work.

A local young person who took part in the programme said: "My Career Coach gave me advice that I will carry through my whole career with me."

The Hope Foundation: Hope2Work employability support in Middlesbrough (Grant: £5,000)

The Hope Foundation's Hope2Work programme provides one-to-one support to long-term unemployed people, refugees and asylum seekers in Middlesbrough. Services include CV workshops, interview preparation, mock interviews run with volunteers from Newcastle Building Society's Middlesbrough branch, access to IT and one-to-one careers guidance. The grant will support the employment of a careers adviser who runs the charity's Hope2Work programme helping people navigate applications, secure interviews and build the confidence needed to move into training and employment.

One Hope2Work service user, Jabar Hussain Ibrahim, said: "The Hope Foundation has been with me step-by-step through the job application process. The careers adviser has provided me with so much employment support and I now feel more confident that I'll soon find a job that I love. I'm more hopeful for my future thanks to the charity." The Society's grant will help the Hope Foundation continue to deliver these practical, local services and increase the number of people who successfully move into work.

Donna Stubbs, Community Manager at Newcastle Building Society, said: "Newcastle Building Society exists to connect people to a better financial future, and that purpose is at the heart of our Community Fund. Work and employability are transformational, they change lives, strengthen families and build safer, more prosperous communities. That's why we're proud to back The Recruitment Junction, MyBigCareer and The Hope Foundation.

"Each charity tackles a different barrier to work, from helping young people discover career pathways, to practical interview and CV support for adults, to specialist job-finding for people leaving prison. This funding will deliver measurable outcomes including placing more people into training, volunteering and employment across the North East."

Since 2016 the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation North East has contributed more than £1.8m in grants and partnerships to regional charities and projects, with a current focus on the outcomes identified in the Vital Signs report, including the theme of work and employability.

For more information about the Community Fund, visit: <https://newcastle.co.uk/powering-communities/community-grants>

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For further information on Newcastle Building Society, please contact:

Chris Hoy – Corporate Affairs Manager

M: 07483 452 461

E: chris.hoy@newcastle.co.uk

Jeremy Mountain – External Communications Lead

M: 07977 290 598

E: jeremy.mountain@newcastle.co.uk

About us

Newcastle Building Society is the UK's 7th largest building society with 32 branches across the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire. A branch in Manchester city centre opened earlier this year under the Manchester Building Society brand. The Society has assets of more than £6.5bn. It has been there for its members for over 160 years. Financial Advice is provided through its Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited subsidiary. Newcastle Financial Advisers has consistently been awarded Top Rated Firm status by VouchedFor - the UK's leading review site for Financial Advisers.

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 we're proactive in making financial information and financial advice accessible across our regions.

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 North East to benefit local causes has surpassed £1.8m.

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. We are a Real Living Wage employer and were the first building society in the UK to become an accredited Living Pension employer in 2024. Newcastle Building Society is ranked 65th in the 2025 Social Mobility Employer Index, and we have been named Regional Building Society of the Year for eight consecutive years (2017–2024) by What Mortgage? and Best Overall Personal Finance Brand at the Personal Finance Awards 2023/24 and 2024/25. 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 our members and communities.