

Approved - 24 November 2022

CUSTOMS HOUSE VIDEO PROJECT ENCOURAGING SOUTH TYNESIDE ASYLUM SEEKERS TO TELL THEIR STORIES

Asylum seekers and migrants in South Tyneside are getting a chance to express their creativity thanks to a new project at the area's leading arts venue, which is being funded by a four-figure grant from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation.

Earlier this year, The Customs House in South Shields set up a weekly Chill & Chat session to encourage mental and emotional well-being through the arts, as part of its work towards widening access to artistic and cultural experiences for people across all its local communities.

The venue has worked with the Compact for Racial Equality South Tyneside (CREST) to bring around a dozen men living across the area together to create photography and videography projects which tell their different stories, while helping to tackle social isolation and promote positive mental health

The completed works will eventually be publicly shared, while a series of drama sessions are also now being planned.

The charity has used the £2,400 Newcastle Building Society grant to pay for the materials and equipment required to run the sessions, as well as the room hire and refreshments, and a professional tutor to guide the participants on their creative journeys.

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 Customs House offers arts and entertainment for all, serving the residents of South Tyneside and beyond with a varied programme of live performance, cinema, visual arts and projects for children and young people.

Its Learning and Participation Team engages diverse local communities in a range of creative experiences and projects, both in the venue and across South Tyneside, and also runs The Takeover, an annual week-long festival that is produced by, with and for local young people to help develop and showcase their leadership skills.

Margarita Rebolledo, community engagement officer at The Customs House, says: “We work to provide opportunities for everyone in our area to experience and participate in the arts, and when we looked at the provision for male asylum seekers and migrants living in South Tyneside, we found that there was very little available to them.

“Many of our participants have had a very tough time in getting to our community, and in their present situations, they don’t have much time or opportunity to think about much more than their everyday existence in a strange new place.

“As well as providing the chance to express their creativity and take on new ideas, our sessions have a positive benefit to participants’ well-being and mental health, give them a chance to socialise in a supporting environment and make new connections with people who may have had similar experiences to them.

“The feedback we’ve had so far has been very encouraging, with participants telling us how much they look forward to coming to their ‘art haven,’ and we’re looking forward to seeing the results of their work in the future.

“With so many different community projects to fund, we simply couldn’t have made this one happen without Newcastle Building Society’s help and we’re very grateful for their generous support.”

Michael Conville, Head of mortgage operations at Newcastle Building Society who recently visited the charity, adds: “The Customs House is right at the heart of South Tyneside’s cultural life and recognises the importance of giving the whole community chances to get involved.

“We’re delighted to be able to support its Chill & Chat group and its members who clearly benefit from the opportunity to get together and create something meaningful based on their experiences.”

Since its launch in 2016, Newcastle Building Society’s Community Fund at the Community Foundation has also contributed over £2.1m 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.

- ends -

For further information on Newcastle Building Society, please contact:

Julian Christopher
Footprint Public Relations
07891 005034

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 £2.1m

*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/>

**Newcastle Building Society introduces to Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited for investments, pensions, inheritance tax planning, financial advice and life cover. Newcastle Financial Advisers Limited is an appointed representative of Openwork Limited which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.