Volunteering Voice and Engagement Programme, Newcastle, End of Year Report

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Introduction

This report comes after one year of the Volunteering Voice and Engagement Project's delivery and will serve as an end of year review of the achievements, challenges and future scope of this area of work. This project has been capturing the voices of volunteer-involving organisations from across Newcastle and using their insights and experiences to inform conversations with local decision-makers who can support in the generation of new initiatives to raise the impact and profile of volunteering across the city. The Volunteering Voice and Engagement Project for Newcastle forms part of a wider North of Tyne Volunteering Development and Social Action Programme which was originally funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, now administered by the North East Combined Authority (NECA), and is due to come to a project end on 31st March 2025. It is anticipated that there will be renewed funding to continue and build up the essential work of this programme.

The Volunteering Voice and Engagement project has, to date, engaged with 80 volunteer-involving organisations in the city across a broad range of organisational aims, sizes and locations. This report will discuss any new themes and issues that have arisen from organisational consultations and will summarise the ongoing

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activities and impact of the Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators and Managers Network. We will also explore the continued work towards influencing local decision makers to generate new initiatives to support volunteering across the city, with a particular focus on the Work and Thrive Partnership. Finally, this report will discuss wider opportunities of influence that can be explored further through the next quarter.

Continuing consultations with volunteer-involving organisations

Since the last report, the project has engaged with a further 17 organisations this quarter, including larger organisations such as Urban Green and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), Newcastle City Council based volunteering through Get Online Newcastle, the Go Volunteer Programme run by Newcastle University Student's Union, medium sized VCSEs such as Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter, Newcastle Street Pastors and Disability North, one sports based organisation in the form of Newcastle Benfield FC and one arts based organisation: The Alphabetti Theatre. The Volunteering Voice and Engagement project has also taken a closer look at the West End of Newcastle to explore the community organising that takes place around grassroots projects and the specific ways that communities of faith volunteer. This West End focus comes in the wake of anti-immigration protests and violence that occurred across the UK and this report will also explore the use of volunteering in the community response. Organisations consulted in this focus include Imam Ali from Newcastle Madina Masjid, Diversity Hub and Newcastle Central Gurdwara, The Patchwork Project, St James' Environment and Heritage Group. Connected Voice's Haref Network, a network of over 80 voluntary sector organisations that works towards improving health equity for ethnically marginalised communities, was also consulted in this focus.

Insights from consultations this quarter

Consultations this quarter have echoed the challenges and concerns that organisations have been raising throughout this Voice and Engagement project: the **need for capacity building in volunteer coordination and management** and **recruitment and retention** of volunteers being the most discussed challenges. **Funding for Volunteer Coordinator roles remains a key area of concern**, with many organisations identifying the lack of funding streams that are open to funding the staffing costs of a volunteer coordinator. **Volunteer wellbeing** has been raised by several organisations this quarter, with volunteer coordinators and managers wanting to be guided and upskilled to better support the positive wellbeing of their volunteers. In response to this the next Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' and Managers' network meeting, scheduled for January 2025, will be themed on volunteer wellbeing.

This quarter's consultation has gathered insights from several organisations and while it will not be possible to cover all the projects spoken to in this report, we will discuss a few spotlighted organisations that are doing some interesting work below, including success stories and areas of positive impact. This section will end with a spotlight on the West End of Newcastle focus.

Search Newcastle

Alongside the challenges and areas of concern were some positive success stories. Search Newcastle, a charity that supports people over the age of 50 with their health and wellbeing, highlighted some great successes in developing supported volunteering opportunities for Autistic adults and those with mental health disabilities and barriers. Their Volunteer Coordinator, Ami Corbett, and Kat Poland, a Talking Therapies Community Link Worker with the charity, talked about modifying roles at the start of a volunteer's experience to help them "ease in" in a way that was less daunting. They mentioned the client to volunteer journey and pointed out that with a small amount of coaching and confidence building, clients do successful step up to become volunteers. Many of the older clients that Search works with describe feeling out of touch with modern working environments and that their skills are not relevant anymore.

Volunteering opens new possibilities to these clients, allows them to develop new skills and provides reassurance that many of their skills, particular in spoken communication and interpersonal skills are very much still needed in the workforce today. They both talked about the importance of organisational mindset when approaching supported volunteering; adjusting roles to make them more accessible can be seen as impossible by organisations but often just small manageable changes can make a big difference with accessibility. For example, Ami described how they adapted health and safety training by delivering it in a 1:1 with a nervous new volunteer rather than in a large group setting. Both colleagues did caveat this with the need for increased volunteer coordinator capacity to scale this up, however.

Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter

Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter are in a process of re-visioning and improving their volunteer programme. We spoke to Volunteer Coordinator Wendy McGauley who had not long been in post. Wendy is undertaking a transformational shift in the way that volunteers are onboarded, trained and managed at the organisation but was able to reflect on some of the positives from the previous iteration of the programme. She spoke about a volunteer who has come to the role after a period of social isolation following a relationship breakdown. This individual was suffering with his mental wellbeing; after taking on a volunteer role in maintenance at the shelter the organisational staff noticed a shift in his demeanour, he become more talkative, outgoing and talked about finally enjoying life again. This is a wonderful case study into the positive impacts on wellbeing that volunteering brings and is echoed in lots of avenues research into the benefits of volunteering, such as the NCVO Time Well Spent: A national survey on the volunteer experience report (2023).

Urban Green

Urban Green are a large charity that oversee the management of 33 parks and 60 allotment sites across Newcastle. Their volunteer coordinator, Emma Bromley, has been in role for a few months and is busily reviewing how their volunteer programme can be developed, with a particular focus on becoming more inclusive. Emma talked

about challenges with gaining staff buy-in for volunteer training and supervision, particularly where this represents a change in the responsibilities that long standing staff members were being asked to take on. This reflects the importance of managing change well in an organisation when developing or modifying a volunteer programme. This is important as establishing a positive volunteer experience is critical in ensuring volunteer retention. Emma discussed that disability inclusion was an ongoing area of development for the volunteer programme and that the organisation had made some positive steps in working with Percy Hedley School to create a pathway for young disabled volunteers to support their Pets Corner site in Jesmond Dene by using the student's own one to one support assistant as a way of creating a supported volunteering experience, an innovative way of developing supported volunteering by utilising existing resources in education.

Newcastle University Student Union: Go Volunteer Programme

Newcastle University's Student Union are a large charity that support students at the university by providing sporting activities, social groups and spaces, welfare guidance, employability support and supporting students to have a positive relationship with their local community. They offer an extensive volunteer programme called Go Volunteer that was born out of "Student Community Action Newcastle" (SCAN); a student-led initiative to create social action projects in their local community. We spoke to Go Volunteer Coordinator, Philip Hay to find out more about the history, scale and impact of the programme. Since its beginnings as SCAN, the programme has remained a largely student-led endeavour but is supported by a team of paid coordinators. The programme offers volunteer opportunities on student-lead projects such as the North East Solidarity and Teaching project (NEST) that matches student volunteers with school pupils from refugee an asylum seeker backgrounds looking to be better connected with their community in Newcastle. Other student-led projects include a mental health and wellbeing hotline for university students called Nightline, several micro-volunteering opportunities for those not wanting to commit to a large project and the "Procrastiknitting" group that meet to knit and crochet items for charitable causes.

The programme also brokers student volunteers into roles with wider volunteer-involving organisations.

The project is massive in scale and sees over 2500 student volunteers on average each year, roughly 1500 of which are part of the student-lead projects and roughly 1000 through brokerage to wider organisations. The demographic of student volunteers is mostly female, echoing wider community volunteering trends in that regard. Interestingly 40% of the student volunteers are international students, while only 10% of the general student body fall into this category. Philip suspects that international students are more likely to look for opportunities that can support them to make friends and connections to combat the social isolation associated with moving to new city and country for study. There may also be cultural reasons if international students are coming from backgrounds where volunteerism is more embedded into cultural ethos.

While the impact and scope of Go Volunteer's activities are already very broad, Philip discussed challenges associated with widening participation for students experiencing barriers to volunteering and working closer with more disadvantaged communities in Newcastle. A barrier that Philip would like to investigate addressing is the impact of socio-economic status and poverty on a student's access to volunteering. With the cost-of-living crisis continuing students from disadvantaged backgrounds are finding financial barriers preventing them from being able to experience volunteering. This in turn has a knock-on effect to their employment chances after their studies as they are missing out on the key employability benefits that volunteering brings that we have discussed in previous reports. Many of the internal and external volunteering opportunities offered through Go Volunteer require connections with the wider community. This is often through school and charity connections; Philip explained that these connections are often with organisations that serve wealthier communities in Newcastle such as Jesmond and Gosforth. The programme would like to widen their reach to ensure that their student volunteers are giving back to all communities in the city, and particularly those who are under-resourced and overlooked. Philip is keen to

widening their network of schools to include schools in more disadvantaged postcodes within the city.

West End Refugee Service and Dance City: Update on the Seven Bridges Café Project

In the last project report we spotlighted the launch of a new collaborative volunteer initiative between the West End Refugee Service and Dance City called the Seven Bridges Café. The project has now been running for a few months, so the Volunteer Voice and Engagement manager revisited the project to see how it was progressing. The project provides volunteering opportunities to WERS clients, who are Newcastle residents that are seeking sanctuary. The project gives clients a 6-week volunteer experience in the café, which is based at Dance City in Newcastle's city centre. The programme is designed to give clients an introduction to the hospitality and catering industry whilst also providing them with the wider social and wellbeing benefits of volunteering. The volunteers are supported by the Café's staff. We spoke to head chef, Ross, about how the project is working. Ross expressed that it has been a pleasure supporting the volunteers and saw this project as an excellent way to inspire new and diverse talent in the catering industry. We spoke to volunteer, Moriyam, who is coming to the end of her 6-week volunteer experience at the café. Moriyam said that she had enjoyed the placement and found volunteering in the kitchen an interesting new experience. As well as providing her with new skills that she can draw upon when she is able to take on paid work, Moriyam explained that volunteering supported her mental wellbeing greatly and provided a helpful distraction from the stress of going through the asylum process. The project is so far being positively received by both café staff and WERS clients but as yet is not seeing enough footfall of customers through the café to support the project's sustainability. Head Chef Ross said that knock-on effect of low customer numbers meant that volunteers were not getting the level of experience and interaction that they could be and the sustainability of the project could be impacted if funding was not obtained. More work needs to be done to support the marketing of the project to encourage more usage of the café.

Spotlight: West End Focus

The summer of 2024 saw an unfortunate wave of protest, rioting and violence in the name of anti-immigration campaigning across the country. Concerns about violent protests breaking out in Newcastle were high with uncorroborated social media reports of planned protests taking place. Newcastle's West End is an area of the city that has a large migrant population and was feared to be the focal point of any unrest in the city. The local community were understandably fearful, both of their lives and wellbeing but also their livelihoods; many local shops and businesses were run by families that felt that they could be targeted. In response to this, local anti-racist organisations drew together their community organising skills with the leadership of local West End religious leaders and their community to build a peaceful counter-protest outside the Beacon Centre on Westgate Road. The turn-out to this peaceful protest was large and represented a diverse range of people wanting to stand up in support of the West End community. There were no reports of violence or rioting taking place and many in the community felt that the scale of the counter protest sent a very clear message that violence and racism was not welcome here. The event has been cited by many community members as a symbol of community cohesion and the general anti-racist and peace-driven ethos shared by most throughout Newcastle.

In the wake of these events, the Volunteering Voice and Engagement manager sought to uncover how volunteering and volunteerism played a part in building the counter-protest movement, what the community now needed to build on this movement and how wider community volunteers were impacted by the unrest. To explore the building of this movement, we consulted with Connected Voice's Haref Network, getting specific insight from West End Religious Leaders, Imam Ali and Jaswinder Singh as well as further insights from Connected Voice's Haref Development Officer, Mehru-Nisa Shah. The counter-protest movement was born out concerns raised by young Muslim men in the west end that people in their community were afraid to leave their house. They expressed particular concern about the impact on the women and children in their community, who often felt most vulnerable. Imam Ali, a religious leader based at Madina Masjid (Mosque) saw the young men's drive to act as a potential risk

for violent counteraction, spurred on by the climate of fear that was building. To minimise this risk, he engaged with and influenced two of the young men who were quickly being seen as leaders of this movement. Through them he was able to ensure that the Islamic tenant of peace remained at the centre of their organising and supported the two young men to build the skills they needed to become lead volunteers in the movement.

Faith can play a big role in both encouraging a community to take up volunteering and in facilitating positive volunteer-involving activity. The counter-protest movement was joined by other faith groups within the West End community, including the Newcastle Central Gurdwara and the Divercity Hub. Jaswinder Singh is a local religious and community leader for the Sikh community and runs the Divercity Hub, a charity that provides community outreach, supports several volunteer lead social action and mutual aid groups and houses a community creche and nursery. Jaswinder discussed with us the importance of volunteering for one's community within Sikhism. Volunteering is known as Seva in Sikhism and is a key religious teaching within the faith. The Voice and Engagement Manager was invited to attend a celebration at Newcastle Central Gurdwara and used this space to ask the congregation what Seva means to them. The congregation told us that Seva is an important way for Sikhs to embody their religious beliefs of social harmony, kindness and service through their actions and that serving one's community is a powerful way to connect with what it means to be human. This later point sparked a conversation about how volunteering in our communities supports a positive sense of wellbeing and promotes good mental health through combating social isolation and lack of purpose.

We asked all the organisations consulted with on this West End focus what they felt was needed to build on the volunteer activity that had developed this summer and on volunteering that was already present in the locality. Representatives from faith groups that lead on the building of the counteraction to the threat of anti-immigration rioting have said that they need to harness the momentum of this event to keep engagement in community volunteering going. The event was organised using the instant messaging platform WhatsApp; large group chats were set up to organise volunteers

for the event. These group chats still exist, and volunteer members are keen to use this as a platform to generate more social action initiatives such as coffee mornings and wellbeing events themed on community cohesion and peace. Funding for small community events such as trips, picnics and coffee mornings would be welcomed as part of this.

The West End has long been served by a range of voluntary sector organisations, many of whom have been grassroots built and rely on the time, insights and connections of local volunteers. The Patchwork Project is a youth project based in the Elswick and Adelaide Terrace area of the West End. The project has been operating for roughly 30 years and although it now operates with paid staff and volunteers, it has its roots in an entirely volunteer-lead group that was set up by parents and community members in the early 2000s. The Patchwork Project serves children and young people from its local community and offers play and social groups. Their volunteer programme consists entirely of member volunteers who are young people who have spent most of their lives being served by the project. Three of these member-volunteers have later been supported by the project to study Youth Work, one of whom has recently completed their degree and become a full-time employee of the project. Another former member-volunteer is now a trustee of the organisation and is currently the youngest board member, being in his early 30s. The volunteering voice and engagement manager was able to speak to a group of member-volunteers at the project to hear their views of the volunteer programme at Patchwork. The volunteers said that moving to volunteering was a natural progression after being a part of the organisation as a member for most of their lives. Some volunteers talk about the empowerment they gained from their volunteering role and how it offered a vocational alternative to studying at college in an environment that they felt comfortable. All the volunteers said that their experiences had given them confidence and felt that volunteering had opened more opportunities to them and would allow them to become more socially mobile. Above all, the volunteers cited the support that they were given by Patchwork staff as being the biggest factor in the positive impact that volunteering had given them. Staff regularly check in with their volunteers in one-to-one catch ups and use this as an opportunity to support the young volunteers holistically, listen to

any concerns or feedback they might have and allow the volunteers space to suggest ideas for development and improvement of the project. Patchwork have taken this support one step further and have developed volunteer youth social action group, self-named the “Patchy Planners”. This group hope to plan social action projects to engage their local community, starting with informational displays in the Patchwork front window that will showcase culture and history from the local Elswick area.

In contrast to the faith-based volunteers that lead on the counteraction during the riots, the Patchwork volunteers are largely white working-class young people from families that have lived in the area for generations. The project has begun working with children and young people from ethnically minoritised backgrounds, particularly those from Roma communities and they expect that these children and young people will, in time, become volunteers themselves. When the volunteers were asked how the threat of violence and unrest this summer had affected them, they explained that they too were left in fear and that attendance to groups at the project were greatly diminished as parents did not feel comfortable sending their children out. The volunteers discussed that while they did not condone any violent actions, they wanted a safe forum to openly discuss their concerns about the impact of migration into their local area and that a lack of this type of outreach created a breeding ground for racist ideology to develop and be harnessed by far-right groups. They felt as though social discourse on the riots was blaming people like them and labelling their community as racist, without any focus on the underlying nuance to the concerns they their community had. There was an overwhelming consensus that funding towards community cohesion work, with volunteers from all backgrounds at the heart of it, was vital to prevent fragmentation of the west end community.

The St James’ Environment and Heritage Group is another volunteer-built organisation that has been researching and presenting the rich history of the Benwell and Elswick area. We spoke to the organisation’s Secretary, Judith Green, who explained that the organisation was first set up with the support of Connected Voice 15 years ago as a project to improve the environment around the very overgrown and disused St James’ Church Graveyard. Since its inception, the group have gone on to map the entire

graveyard into a digitised database, developed heritage walks of the church, graveyard and surrounding area and produced books, films and resources to help educate the public on local history. The group's work is preserving the history of the area and has helped many to trace their ancestors who are buried in the graveyard. The volunteers that support the group tend to be people who do not currently live in the local area but have a connection to Benwell through family who lived there up until the mass moving of families out of the area during the 1960s. Judith explained that they would like to better engage the newer migrant communities that now live in Benwell and to work together to build a shared heritage.

This focus on the West End has only scratched the surface of the role that volunteering plays in this complex. The events of this summer have shown that when faced with a crisis the local community are highly motivated to volunteer their time to social action work. It also highlights the role of community leaders in shaping how volunteerism happens, supporting volunteer leaders who, in turn, have the potential to become future community leaders themselves. The West End of Newcastle truly is a melting pot and speaking with the Patchwork Project and St James' Environment and Heritage Group have shown that while migrant communities are often front and centre in discourse on the West End, families with long histories in the area are also using volunteerism to carry out the social action that matters to them. Building bridges between the two may well be an important step in using volunteering to support social cohesion and anti-racism.

The Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' and Managers' Network Update:

The Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators' and Managers' network continues to be a well engaged initiative that was developed in response to the initial wave of consultations with volunteer-involving organisations. The second network meeting was held in September and was themed around "Inclusion" as this theme had a significant number

of requests in the feedback from the first meeting in April 2024. The meeting was well attended, with 19 organisations represented in the room, although 30 were registered to attend there were last minute drop-outs due to illness and changes to colleagues' availability after the summer holiday period.

In this meeting we allowed space for colleagues to discuss what motivates them to be inclusive as a volunteer programme, which groups and demographics are missing at their organisation and what support and training on inclusion they need. The meeting raised motivations such as the moral imperative to promote equity, diversity and inclusion and the fact that everyone should have the right to volunteer. We discussed the power that volunteering has to widen participation and bringing different groups of people together in a way that reflects our shared values and builds a bridge between our differences. The group pointed out the role of volunteering in the professional journeys of many colleagues in the voluntary sector, as well as most of the colleagues that were in the room for this meeting. Better diversity across groups of volunteers can therefore translate to better diversity within staff teams where volunteer experiences have supported individuals to gain paid employment.

When asked whose representation and voice was missing on volunteer teams, the answers were expectedly broad, reflecting the diversity of the organisations that we had in the room. A lot of organisations agreed that they did not have a good representation of volunteers from ethnically marginalised backgrounds, those who identify as disabled and openly LGBTQIA+ volunteers. The lack of men on volunteer teams was also raised, leading to problems with developing trust with male beneficiaries who do not see themselves in the teams providing them with a service. The Blue Sky Trust, an charity that supports people who are HIV Positive pointed out that they are missing the voice of heterosexual men on their volunteer teams because of the increased stigma, both from society and self-stigma, that this group experience around HIV. This point raised a conversation around the gender imbalance within volunteerism; leadership volunteer roles such as Trustees are more likely to be filled by men while volunteers delivering services are usually women in many organisations.

Other communities that were identified as missing were those from rural North East communities, Refugees and Asylum Seeks and the Transgender community.

In terms of further support and training, colleagues at the meeting identified that affordable inclusion training for their whole staff teams was needed. They also discussed wanting to hear more about how to better support Refugee and Asylum Seeker volunteers and to hear more stories of lived experience from across different identities and backgrounds. There was quite an innovative suggestion of looking into the knowledge and experience across the network and holding “training swap” events where colleagues from different volunteer-involving organisations could train each other on their area of expertise.

This network meeting was shortly followed by an LGBTQIA+ training session delivered by Curious Arts in Partnership with Northern Pride (both organisations are part of the network). This training session was made available through funding from the North of Tyne Volunteering Development and Social Action Programme and was organised in response to feedback from the first network meeting and through the Volunteer Health Checks that were being delivered to organisations as part of the wider project. The training was welcomed very positively by the 12 organisations that were in attendance and the trainers were able to hold a flexible space that allowed colleagues to discuss key concerns or issues that they had around LGBTQIA+ inclusion in a non-judgemental space. The positive impact of this space stimulated discussions on the need for an informal space for volunteer coordinators and managers to seek peer support from each other on issues that they are experiencing. In response to this we are going to trail an online Peer Support meeting in early December 2024. Whilst this meeting will be chaired by the Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager, it will be led by those in the room, centring the experience and knowledge of colleagues from across the network.

Looking forward to future meetings, attendees have asked for meeting themes on volunteer wellbeing, recruitment and retention, re-engaging disengaged volunteers and problem-solving processes for volunteers. The next network meeting is scheduled for January 2025 and will be themed on volunteer wellbeing.

Working with Local Decision Makers

We presented the Work and Thrive Network and its role in supporting Newcastle residents with employability and getting into good work for them in the second Volunteering Voice and Engagement Report, published in September 2024. The Network have become a significant supporter of the Volunteer Development work, and the Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager has a role on the network's strategy group as a lead for volunteering. In our last report, we discussed areas of development for the Work and Thrive Partnership offer that embeds specific volunteering engagement and pathways into the journey that residents take through work and thrive. A small task group was put together that consisted of Connected Voices' Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager, Work and Thrive representatives from Newcastle City Council (NCC) and representatives from Newcastle City Learning and Job Centre Plus Newcastle Central and East. This task group have set about developing 3 projects:

1. A skills and experience tracking resource to help job seeking volunteers better communicate the skills they have developed in their roles

2. A social action programme for ESOL learners that will engage them with volunteering to continue developing their language and communications skills and

3. A social media campaign to raise the profile of volunteering the opportunities that exist across the city.

Development of these projects are underway with conversations on available funding currently taking place. We hope to present further developments in the next quarterly report.

The project has engaged with other local networks, partnerships and decision makers over the course of the year. With each party we have raised the profile of volunteerism and the importance resourcing a volunteer programme well to see the full benefits that volunteering can bring to communities. Below is a list of the organisations, networks and partnerships that have been engaged with so far:

- West End Children's Community (WECC)
- West End Schools Trust (WEST)
- Inner West Play and Youth Network
- NCC's Public Health Department's Drug and Alcohol Partnership
- The Centre for Global Development, Northumbria University
- NECA; via consultation meetings on Skills and Employment strategies
- Open Door Programme Network; hosted by Newcastle College
- International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCO) Forum
- Newcastle Local Community Partnership

This report will not go into full details of the conversations with each of these organisations, networks and partnerships, but we will explore the last partnership on this list, the Newcastle Community Partnership in further detail.

The Newcastle Local Community Partnership administers grants to voluntary sector organisations in the Outer West and North of Newcastle. These two areas were chosen for the programme because they have been identified as having a less developed voluntary sector in terms of community outreach and the organisations that did exist were not well connected with each other. The partnership was awarded over £1000,000 in funding under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to provide grant funding to organisations across the partnership localities to support them with projects that aim to bring communities together and tackle local issues. 30 projects were awarded grants, out of which 5 were awarded capital funding for the development of buildings and infrastructure and 25 were awarded revenue funding that included volunteer development.

One of the projects supported was the Owl Tree Café, a charity that run a low cost stay and play café in the Kenton area. They provide an affordable and fun space for families to meet with each other, eat a low-cost nutritious meal and get support. We met with Project Support Worker and Volunteer Coordinator, Amelia Carr, to find out

how the Local Community Partnership fund has supported volunteering at the café. The fund has allowed an increase in Amelia's hours at the café to encompass Volunteer Coordination. This increase in capacity has meant the development of new volunteer roles. The café provides a unique supported volunteer experience where volunteers who have parental responsibilities can bring their young children along to be cared for in the cafe while they carry out their volunteer role. This facility offers a volunteer pathway for parents that is rarely seen in other projects and opens them up the benefits of volunteering, from health and wellbeing to reducing social isolation, confidence building and improving employment prospects to name a few.

As we have focused on the West End in this report, we will end with a spotlight into a community celebration event that was funded under UKSPF by Newcastle City Council as part of their Newcastle High Streets programme. This programme initially focused on high street development in Newcastle East but was extended to the west to include Adeliade Terrace in Benwell. The celebration event was held during the October 2024 half term school break and was to mark Halloween for the local community and was delivered by volunteer-involving organisations that are based in the area. The Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager was invited to the event by the Patchwork Project and was amazed to see the breadth of the partnership working that had made this event possible. The event was spread over several projects across the main shopping road, including the Patchwork Project, Search Newcastle, Healthwatch Newcastle and St James Church Benwell and was coordinated by Newcastle Council's Empowering People in Communities (EPiC) team. Inside each venue were stalls and activities hosted by an array of projects in the area, from larger organisations such as search to smaller entirely volunteer run projects such as the Pendower Good Neighbour Project. The street was a hub of activity and families who were out spoke very highly of the event. The organising team at EPiC attending an Inner West Play and Youth meeting shortly after the event and discussed wanting to repeat this at Christmas with more partner organisations involved. The Volunteering Voice and Engagement Officer mentioned the need to celebrate the role of volunteers in their projects at the next event and potentially in any end of project celebrations in spring.

This suggestion was welcomed warmly by EPiC staff, and we will keep in close contact with them to support in these volunteer celebrations.

Closing remarks

Newcastle is a volunteering city, and the vast body of insights gained from the consultation work with volunteer-involving organisations on this project has shown that our community not only value volunteers and enjoying volunteering, but volunteerism is also vital for the connectedness, wellbeing and prosperity of our communities. As we move forward into the second year of this work, we will seek to secure funding to allow us to build on the positive initiatives that have already been made, including the Newcastle Volunteer Coordinator's and Managers' Network. We will seek further insights from more volunteer-involving organisations, setting a target of reaching a further 80 organisations by November 2025. Above all we want to support the creation of more initiatives that provide a structure for those who are the furthest away from being able to experience volunteering as they are those who have the most to gain from its benefits. After building more cross-sector awareness of the importance of volunteering, our long-term aim is still to set up a steering committee that can support in the development of a volunteering strategy for Newcastle and a sustainable away to ensure that volunteers remain part of the local agenda.

With thanks to the 80 volunteer-involving organisations that have contributed to the consultation work on this project:

1. Diversity Role Models
2. Ouseburn Farm
3. Ouseburn Trust
4. Wild Roots
5. Unfolding Theatre

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6. Action for Children
7. Skimstone Arts
8. Albert Kennedy Trust
9. Oswin Project
10. Newcastle Carers
11. Wood Recycling Yard Newcastle
12. Nourish Food School
13. Newcastle Cathedral
14. West End Refugee Service
15. Northern Pride
16. Blue Sky Trust
17. Children North East
18. St Martin's Community Centre
19. Gosforth and Jesmond Minibus
20. ReCoCo
21. Daft as a Brush
22. Recyke Y'Bike
23. Northern Cancer Voices
24. The Men's Pie Club
25. Newcastle Mela
26. Altitude Foundation
27. The Magic Hat Cafe

28. The Sunshine Fund
29. Mindful Therapies
30. Greening Wingrove
31. St Oswald's Hospice
32. LGBT+ Northern Social Group
33. Gem Arts
34. Crisis Skylight Newcastle
35. NE Youth
36. Marie Curie
37. West End Women and Girls Centre
38. NGPS
39. Star and Shadow Cinema
40. Newcastle United Foundation
41. Curious Arts
42. If U Care Share
43. NCC
44. Smile for Life
45. Seven Stories
46. English for All
47. Street Paws
48. Percy Hedley
49. Ground Work

50. NE1
51. Centre West (Hat-Trick project)
52. Citizens UK (Tyne and Wear Citizens)
53. Friends Action North
54. Newcastle College
55. James' Place
56. Welcome to Badminton
57. Clean Slate
58. Newburn activity centre
59. Alzheimers UK
60. Road to Recovery Trust
61. Tuesday trailblazers community group
62. Owl Tree Cafe
63. Skills for people
64. Newcastle Cat and Dog Shelter
65. Search
66. The Alphabetti Theatre
67. Urban Green
68. Get Online Newcastle
69. TWAM
70. West End Refugee Service
71. Benfield FC

72. Salvation Army

73. Divercity Hub

74. Pride Action North

75. Newcastle Gurdwara

76. Patchwork Project

77. Street Pastors

78. Disability North

79. Newcastle University - Go Volunteer prog

80. St James Environment and Heritage Group