



BERNIA

**Community
Investment Strategy**
Impact and Outcomes

Bernicia in the Community

Bernicia is a not for profit Housing Association providing over 14,000 homes for people across the North East. We're a socially responsible organisation and anchor institution at the heart of building and supporting communities. We understand the need for support beyond our basic commitments of providing and maintaining homes. We recognise the benefit that successful communities bring to the region, economically and socially.

Bernicia has a framework which drives our approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR). It affects our entire business. It informs what type of homes we build, how we manage their maintenance and our approach to environmental impact. It drives how we procure services. Our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy guides how we interact with the world, while our Community Investment Strategy directly supports and encourages community development.

We support vulnerable families and help people to live independently in their homes. This community approach is complemented by our grant and employability programmes and the work we do with suppliers. Our commitment ensures we treat people fairly and that they have the opportunity to thrive. It helps to develop skills and wellbeing through training and health programmes. It is the foundation of our commitment to work collaboratively to support the North East region.

This report provides a flavour of our Community Investment activities during 2022/23. They cover two key themes, economic inclusion and social inclusion. Economic inclusion activities aim to address poverty through employment, focusing on aspiration, skills and jobs. Social inclusion activities tackle isolation and loneliness as well as helping people to live well in their communities





Jenny Allinson
Director of Corporate
Governance



Executive Summary

It has been another challenging year. Increased costs, recruitment issues and a changing work environment have affected businesses and individuals alike.

The launch of our £2million social value funding commitment, including our new Employability programme, has been especially well timed. This, alongside our established economic inclusion and social inclusion activities has delivered positive outcomes for tenants and communities. We are pleased with our progress and the positive impact that we continue to have on peoples life chances.

Our new Employability team has focused on building relationships with businesses, charities, agencies and local communities. It has provided support to help people, with barriers to work, prepare for and access jobs. We have used our internal structure to provide training and work experience. This includes an expansion of our apprenticeship programme at a time when we and other employers continue to experience challenges in recruiting skilled workers. We have engaged specialist organisations to support those with specific barriers, whilst we have linked with local employers to create opportunities at the end of projects.

Readiness for the world of work continues to be a challenge for young people whose schooling was heavily disrupted by Covid lockdown and our school support activities have reflected this.

Meanwhile our social inclusion activities often work alongside and as part of our traditional housing activities. Increased focus on helping people sustain their tenancies or live well in their homes comes in the form of advice, signposting, adaptations, hardship support, emergency protection, property improvements and community development. We work with local agencies to deliver a package of support which goes beyond simply providing a place to live.

Our Community investment Grant and our charity, Bernicia Foundation, fund community activities and help people flourish through a wide range of economic and social inclusion programmes.

This year, the Foundation has awarded £219,999 to 24 Inclusion projects and 8 inspirational young people. A total of £807,342 has been awarded by the Foundation since its inception.

We are proud to be supporting the people of the North East and of our achievements in Housing People Helping People.

Employability - Aspiration

We help tackle poverty by supporting local people into good work. Aspiration is at the heart of this. For many, especially young people, good work seems far away and difficult to picture. Some do not have good role models or a clear pathway, whilst others face barriers that can seem insurmountable.

We have tailored our employability support, helping people to understand their opportunities and addressing some of the barriers that stand in their way. We recognise that support happens at many stages and we have tried to link our activities so that there is a connection between our projects and the progress people make.

Our Enterprise Advisors work with partner schools to mentor young people. This is particularly important in encouraging young people to apply for our apprenticeship programme. This year we expanded our intake, offering 14 apprenticeships across a wide range of roles in our business. We were delighted to be able to encourage more young women into trade apprenticeships and to deliver opportunities for a diverse range of applicants.

Long term placements for young people with additional needs have produced excellent outcomes for them. As a result we are now exploring the opportunity to deliver supported apprenticeships.

For those who are having trouble engaging with school and are at risk of exclusion, we have funded a project to keep them engaged and provide them with construction sector work based skills.

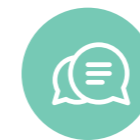
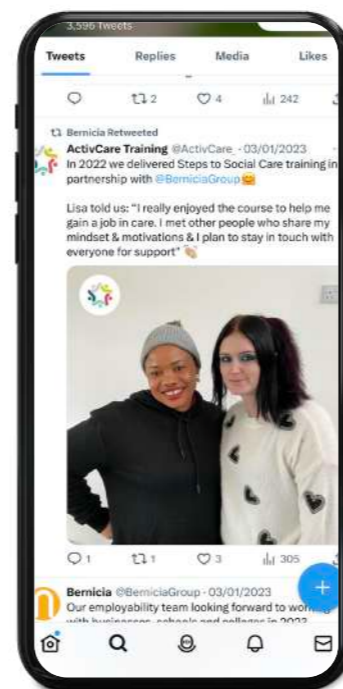
We have also supported STEM projects to encourage young people into science and technology, linking with the new green economy opportunities which are developing along our coast.



We're working with Buzz Learning College to develop supported internships for 16 to 24-year olds with special educational need or disability (SEND). They gain real work experience and confidence, whilst also working towards qualifications. A programme of key tasks, based on their personality, needs and aspirations, sets out their workplan and role.

This year's interns are Justin and Billy. Justin has a natural aptitude for making sure our information is right as part of our Compliance Team whilst Billy enjoys a more outdoor role with our Estates Team. During the year, we've seen them embrace everything they've been asked to do and both are now a lot more independent and confident.

Importantly, our staff have also learned a lot from working with Billy and Justin and everyone has enjoyed the experience. They're a valued part of the team. It's been such a success, we're running the programme again and are exploring next steps opportunities in the form of supported apprenticeships.



Over 1,500 school children received employability support and advice

Employability - Skills

We've delivered a blend of projects to help people get the skills they need to access work opportunities

One project helps people who struggle with basic reading and writing, as a first step to being ready for the job market. Another is working with care leavers whose schooling can so often be interrupted. A training course where participants achieved a Health and Safety qualification led directly to a warehousing role for someone who had struggled to find work.

Other projects have supported specific skills to help people into chosen industries such as contact centres, health and social care, hospitality or aviation sector. We've combined these projects with sectors where there are known vacancies to create real opportunities, not just another training course.

Young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) are at greater risk of becoming long term unemployed. We've funded several projects to give them the skills they need to enter the world of work, with guaranteed interviews at the end of the courses.

We've found that many people have attitude and aptitude for work but just need help demonstrating that to employers, as well as guidance on what is required in a work environment. Feedback suggests communication skills and understanding workplace expectations has been an issue for young people whose schooling was interrupted during Covid. So we've provided a range of placements and employability training. It incorporates how to interact in the workplace alongside cv writing and interview skills.



AkzoNobel Partnership

In partnership with AkzoNobel, we ran an intensive three week course for local unemployed people. Over 60 people applied to join the programme, with 12 selected to undertake the course. All 12 completed the three weeks, which combined wellbeing, company culture, direct work experience and employability training. All achieved a health and safety qualification. Four progressed into available roles with AkzoNobel and we're working with the others on alternative opportunities. None of these recruits would have been in this role were it not for this programme, which has helped them all with a range of personal challenges.

Sophie said: "Working at AkzoNobel will be a huge positive change for me - having the consistency of work is something I won't need to worry about."

"I've never been successful in an interview, but Luke and Jackie at Bernicia worked with me and on interview day I was much more confident and using the techniques

I learnt, I was successful in securing the role. "I am so glad I pushed my boundaries as I've been massively rewarded working for an amazing company that has assisted me throughout. If there's something you want to do, grab the opportunity with both hands as the feeling at the end when you succeed is indescribable."

For AkzoNobel too it's been a great success and we're now planning another programme.



Employability - Opportunities

In a short time, our employability team has built relationships with agencies, businesses and potential partners. This is helping to bridge the gap between job seekers and recruitment.

We've supported the voluntary sector, who are often closest to issues that people experience, and engaged them to deliver targeted support to their clients who face barriers to work. Funding for disability charities has supported their clients who have health barriers into a range of job roles and volunteering opportunities.

Together with the local prison and specialist charities, we've supported people with prior convictions to find and sustain work on their release, significantly reducing reoffending rates. We're supporting a similar project for people who are turning around their lives following addiction.

Teaming up with local employers and Foundation of Light, we're supporting a project to help unemployed people gain work in manufacturing and logistics sectors.

In partnership with other Housing Associations we delivered the New Start programme. Our project provided five months work placement in our Estates Team for a group of men who had struggled to sustain regular work.

Partnership too with our suppliers, who work with us to create opportunities are part of their contractual commitments, has created jobs and apprenticeships for local people.



New Start

Our New Start project offered a five months placement with our estates team for unemployed people who had previously struggled to sustain employment. As well as job training, they received specialist employability training including resilience and mental health awareness. Five were successful in gaining employment, including three with Bernicia. The project was funded by the Government's UK Community Renewal Fund, as part of a partnership with other local Housing Associations.

"I just wanna say a massive thank you to the staff involved in the programme.

"Bernicia as a whole made me feel very welcome starting this programme, throughout my time here everyone's contributed in their own way, overall making me feel very valued as part of the team or family more like. This is something I've never experienced in all my career. 100% of the staff I've had the pleasure of working alongside are extremely friendly, helpful, polite and understanding individuals. I've struggled with mental health issues nearly 15 years & this program has been the biggest positive in my life continuing to boost my confidence & self belief on a daily basis. I consider myself to be very lucky to have gained so much from this experience and have a more positive & motivated approach to life exiting the program.

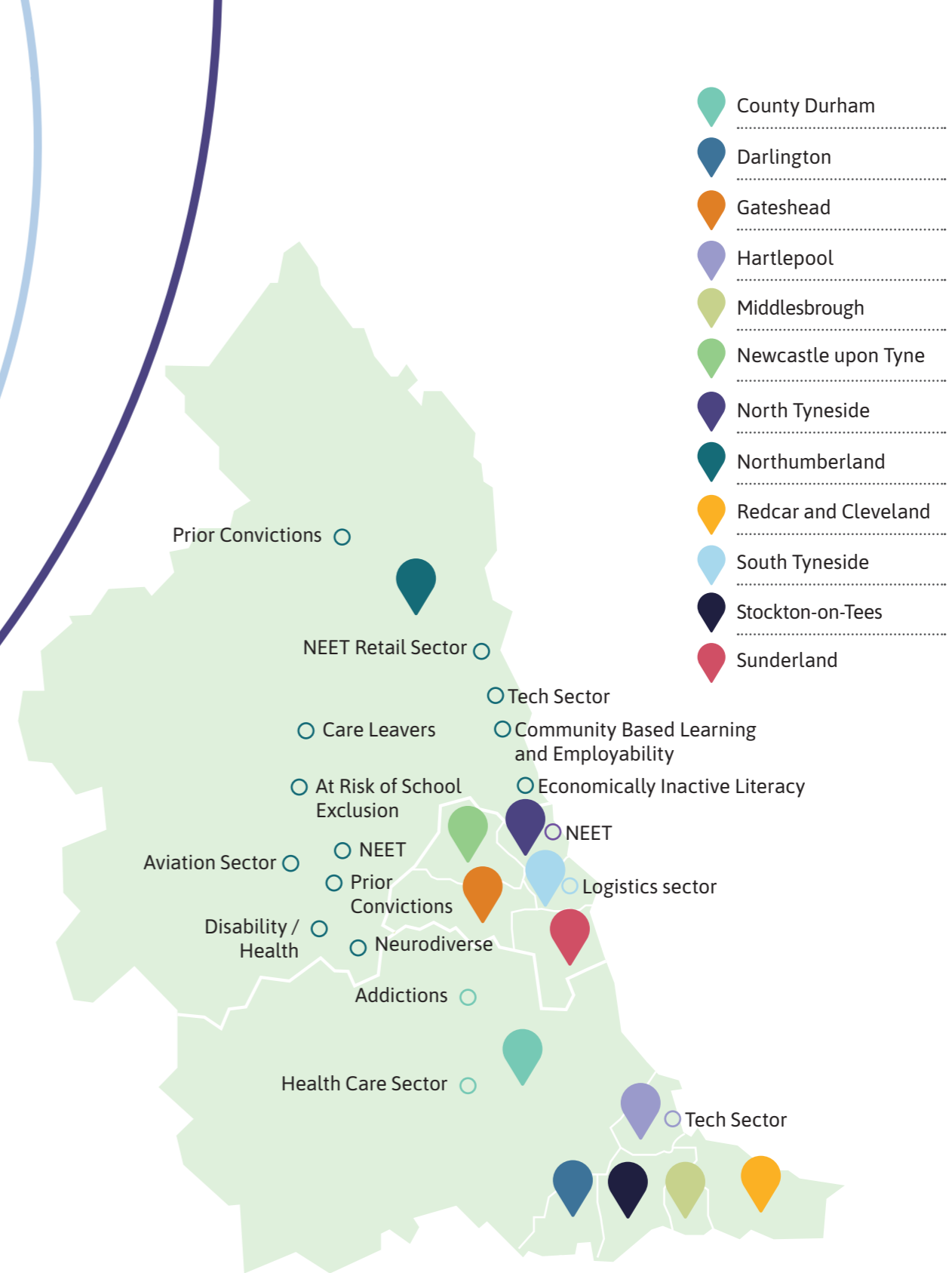
"Thanks so much for everything."



A girl in Year 11 was finding it difficult to engage with school and attendance was very low.

During the Careers Fayre she was introduced to our Enterprise Advisor from a local housing firm and she was taken through her options with regards to getting into this industry. Following the conversation she is now looking at applications for an apprenticeship with the company and is very keen to complete work experience with the company. This is currently being organised for her.

Since this intervention her attendance has increased and she has become much more engaged with school. Her attendance for the first half term in Year 11 sat at 61% but following the work we have done with her this has increased to her current attendance figure of 93%.



"I finally managed to get a job!"

"Thank you for your help with sorting out my CV, helping with my interview skills and just talking things out, helped me out quite a lot."

"I was immediately struck by Y's enthusiasm and very strong work ethic."

"He has worked as a chef, he knows how to work in a pressurised environment and off his own bat had sought out training in warehousing skills to improve his chances of getting work in this sector."

Social Inclusion – Living Well in the Community

Our social inclusion activities are firmly embedded in our daily approach to housing people and helping people.

This year, our development strategy has provided new housing to meet the needs of the community. We've built older person and affordable rent accommodation at key locations across the region.

We've accelerated our maintenance programme to focus on reducing energy costs for tenants whilst at the same time helping to meet our environmental sustainability aims.

We work closely with social care and health care agencies to deliver specialist housing such as homes for those with learning difficulties or for older people in need of additional support.

During the year, we continued to respond to our tenants needs, making adaptations to properties to allow people to return home from hospital or to continue living independently.

For those who need extra support, our alarm call service provides both peace of mind and the security of having someone available to respond to emergencies or day to day health issues. A key factor in being able to live independently is being able to call on support when it is needed.

With that in mind our Handyperson service continues to prove popular, providing minor repair and odd job services to people across Durham.



Almost 7,000 aids and adaptations installed to help people live independently.



2,987 vulnerable people benefited from availability of emergency support, covering issues such as boundary exit alarms, fall alarms, carer support alerts.



Social Inclusion – Living Well in the Community

We recognise too that sometimes tenants need a little extra support to see them through a difficult time.

This year our Intensive Housing Management Team (IHM) have helped people who were at risk of losing their tenancy. We've provided financial advice and signposting, as well as support for those with mental health issues or addictions. Running a household is a new experience for many and is often a point at which a tenancy fails. The Team provides advice and guidance for those who need some extra support.

Our Ashkirk homeless family centre has worked with 28 families who were at risk of homelessness, undertaking a holistic range of activities around both their family life and their living space to help them progress to secure accommodation.

With prices rising we know how difficult it has been to make ends meet for many on low incomes. We have supported foodbanks with donations to make sure our communities don't have to choose between food and household costs. Our new Hardship fund is available to tenants in need.

We make sure too that our colleagues are aware of the issues that our customers face. Regular inclusion and engagement activities run throughout the year, like our Neurodiversity week which provided advice while colleagues told their own stories to raise awareness and understanding.



28 homeless families provided with temporary homes alongside intensive support programme to help them address issues in their lives and sustain a tenancy. 22 went on to live independently in their own homes.



Hardship Fund Launched. It's early days but so far 29 grants totalling £1,115 have been awarded for energy and supermarket vouchers. We've also donated £3,000 to four foodbanks across the region.



Intensive housing support meant 305 at risk tenancies sustained, unlocking £202,730 of financial support.



Social Inclusion – Tackling Isolation and Loneliness

Living well is about more than meeting basic needs. There is lots of evidence that isolation and loneliness affect health and wellbeing.

Sometimes, a little means a lot, like activities for the residents of our supported accommodation. Making best use of garden spaces or providing day trips for isolated residents brightens lives. We continue to make regular wellbeing calls to some of our more vulnerable clients, supported by our warden service.

We provide a number of community centres for groups to come together as meeting places or activity hubs. Our Pelaw View Centre is the focus of several neighbourhood events in an area where support and cohesion are important factors in helping residents feel part of their community.

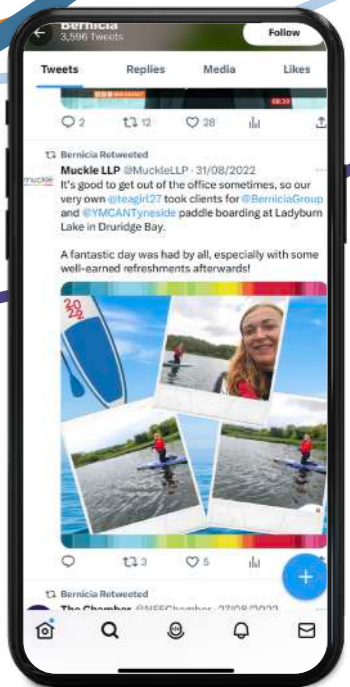
In partnership with Northern Learning Trust, Learning Hives provide gardening, cookery, money management and other group courses. Many of these lead people on to the next step of exploring employment, receiving help with qualifications, training and job search.

Activities and social events aren't just confined to Bernicia properties. Our Community Grant programme encourages participation across a wide range of activities. We have supported free football sessions linked to opportunities for volunteering and training classes in Berwick.



Local volunteer Bob Bell uses his green-fingered skills to nurture the Bedlington Learning Hive's community garden, complete with flower beds and an allotment packed with vegetables and a greenhouse. The delicious produce is shared out with the local community.

Bernicia is proud to support the Bedlington and Newbiggin Learning Hives delivering training, learning and employment opportunities to local people.



Bernicia Foundation

Contributing to all our Economic Inclusion and Social Inclusion aims, is the Bernicia Foundation. Funded by the “profit for purpose” of our commercial company, Kingston, it provides grants to charities and inspirational young people, across the region.

This year, the Foundation has funded charities that help people get ready for the world of work, as well as those who are feeling the effects of increases in living costs.

It continues to fund many social inclusion projects, helping those with barriers to participate more fully in their communities. A full report of Bernicia Foundation’s activities for the year is available alongside this report.

Here is a sample of the feedback from inclusion projects:

“I’ve made a lot more friends thanks to Skills for People. I’m a lot less isolated I’m having less bad days I have become a lot more active I am going more places and meeting more people – its really helping my wellbeing.”

“The group is good. I love coming. The women, the Mums, are really kind. The staff are really kind and supportive. I love coming to the group to see my friends. We all support each other, and we do lots of nice things. I will say the best thing about the group is that I have made a lot of new friends and I’m getting out the house as I have not been in good places due to not getting out, but since I have been coming to this group I feel I’m a little more confident and it’s a safe place I’m really happy to be coming to the group. I don’t feel there is anything you can do better.”

“As his supporter, I think that whilst P loves his life, the range of people in it and places he goes to, he has very few opportunities to spend time with groups. The walking group fulfils an aspect that is missing in his life, that is the chance to do a small group based activity. Being with and doing activities with others, means that unexpected things happen. This helps him build tolerance and resilience when things don’t always fall exactly into place and when his is introduced to new settings and situations.”



Case study

Marta (not her real name) has been attending two social groups for a few months. She attended the evening ‘Christmas Lights’ session. A group of 13 met in Newcastle at a previously used meeting point. Marta said a few times about how she hadn’t been out at night for years. She initially seemed nervous as we navigated the crowd. Marta uses a walking aid and was supported by staff to make a path through the crowd. Once we had found a position where we could see the stage Marta started smiling and laughing. On the way back she repeated to staff that she hadn’t been out at night for years and had enjoyed herself greatly. Marta texted staff to say when she had got home and again to say how much she had enjoyed being out at night, she followed up by saying she would like to do more evening activities with the group.



Case study

Morrison Trust Employment Consultant, Caroline, met with Emily at an outreach session we hold at a food bank. Emily struggles with anxiety and had left university as she felt unable to continue her studies. She said she had a job interview arranged as a childcare practitioner for a children’s nursery and would get in contact if she needed any support.

A few days later, she got in touch to say that the interview had gone well and she had been offered the job, however, in order to accept it she needed to pay for a DBS check and a Paediatric First Aid Course which she was not able to afford. She had approached Jobcentre Plus but they were unable to help.

Caroline arranged to meet Emily the next day at another community venue and arranged for Emily to attend a Paediatric First Aid course and to pay for the DBS; Emily was able to start work the following month. A couple of weeks after starting in post, Caroline contacted Emily to check in and see how things were going. Emily asked to meet up as she said she had some concerns. They arranged to meet at a community venue (which also runs a nursery). Emily explained that she was working fewer hours than she had expected and as a result she was starting to feel very anxious; Emily wanted the stability of regular hours. She also said that she did not feel fully supported in the job. With Emily’s permission, Caroline spoke with the Nursery Manager at the community centre and established that they were looking to recruit staff. It was arranged for Emily to complete a work trial which she did and was subsequently offered a job.

Caroline met with Emily several times over the following weeks to maintain support. Emily has now started a level 3 childcare qualification, has settled into the new role well and feels supported by the nursery in terms of her mental health.

Measuring our Effectiveness

Much of the social value that we create is difficult to measure. The effect of day trips for elderly residents or the positive impact of a beautiful floral display are hard to assess.

Where there is significant impact, and it is practical to gather supporting documentation, then we use the HACT Social Value Bank to measure the improvement in wellbeing. This is supported by the TOMS calculator which is used by many of our contractors.

We anticipate that, over the lifetime of our Housing People Helping People corporate strategy, where we have measured social value, our community investment activities will contribute more than £15 million of wellbeing improvement in our communities. In addition, the money that we spend in the local economy, has a ripple effect, and we aim wherever possible to engage local suppliers to deliver local services by local people.

Whilst it is helpful to reflect on whether our activities are creating value and how this compares to the cost of delivery, it tells only part of the story. We prefer to focus on the outcomes that our actions achieve. The examples we have provided show the range of ways in which we are an active part of our communities. We take seriously our responsibilities as an anchor institution and social organisation and are proud to that our Community Investment activities have had such an impact on so many peoples lives.



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