

homes & people

Bringing you all the news that matters to you

October 2021



We're buzzing! Learning Hives reopen doors to help with job seeking and learning

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YHN Community Fund helps mental health charity
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Honouring a former resident
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Welcome to the latest edition of Homes & People.

Hi everyone, I'm Zara and I'm part of YHN's Customer Service Committee.

It's a worrying time in terms of money for lots of people at the minute. I know a lot of people are concerned about the rise in energy costs, and combined with the reduction in Universal Credit payments, many residents may feel overwhelmed and worried about how to manage. I want to say to anyone who is worried or struggling - help is available, please don't think you're alone. YHN's Income teams are on hand to offer advice and support with budgeting and can help you through this. Take a look at page 7 for more info.

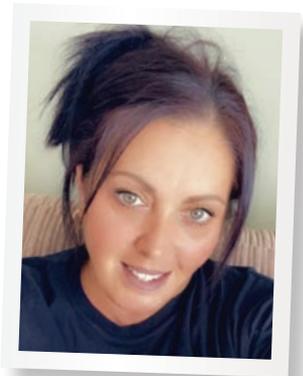
Some really good news I'm pleased to share is that the Learning Hives have opened their doors again - pop in to the Galafield or Walker Hive for a cuppa and get some support with job hunting or brush up on your English/Maths. The Hives are fantastic community hubs and I'm so pleased they're able to open once again, read more about this on page 9.

I also wanted to share a bit more with you about the Customer Service Committee, I know some residents aren't too sure what we get up to! We've been really busy, not just in and around Newcastle, but all over the country.

We've taken part in events, resident panels and steering groups both in person and virtually. This work is an important part of our role because it gives YHN customers a voice regionally and nationally, as well as locally. We've helped influence key decisions and policies which affect all of our customers, which I'm really proud of.

We're also award winning - one of our committee members was a finalist in the recent Women in Housing awards, and I was lucky enough to receive a Prime Minister's Points of Light Award for the work I did and continue to do in helping my community pull together through the pandemic. I'm also a finalist in the Amplifon Brave Britons Award. Community engagement is a strong passion of mine and I'm always looking for ways to be more involved. It's never a dull day being part of the Committee! If you'd like to know more about what we do, email getinvolved@yhn.org.uk.

Enjoy this issue
Zara



Are your details up to date?

To help us keep in touch with you and provide updates on our services, please let us know if you think your contact details may be out of date.

Email: communicationsteam@yhn.org.uk | Online: www.yhn.org.uk/contact-us | Call: 0191 278 8600

Latest information on our services

Our offices



Many colleagues continue to work from home and those teams that do need to come into the office have been given advice on following the Government's social distancing guidelines through our safe working practices.

Our hubs remain closed, but officers are making home visits if you'd like to see someone in person. You can call our Contact Centre to arrange this, or you can use the 'Find an officer' tool on our website to get email addresses to contact your local officers directly: www.yhn.org.uk/find-an-officer

For current services updates, please visit www.yhn.org.uk/coronavirus.

Repairs



Report a new repair by calling **0191 278 7878**, or if it's a non-urgent repair you can also report it on 'My Account' at www.yhn.org.uk.

We are prioritising repairs that were booked in and cancelled due to Covid-19, along with new non-essential repairs that have been reported during lockdown. We are experiencing a high demand for non-urgent repairs and would like to thank you for your patience while we work to fully reinstate the service. Any changes to our current services will be announced on our social media pages and on our service update webpage: www.yhn.org.uk/coronavirus.

Registering and bidding for properties



Customers can continue to register and bid for properties on the Tyne and Wear Homes website. Visit www.tyneandwearhomes.org.uk to bid on a property, view your account or check on the progress of your bid.

Moves and mutual exchanges can go ahead if safe to do so. We will be doing as much virtually as we can. If you have any questions, or need support in completing a property application, please email housingsolutions@yhn.org.uk.

Support for customers



We work closely with Newcastle City Council and can advise, guide and signpost you wherever we can.

We understand that finances can be a concern for many customers during this difficult time; if you are having any concerns about paying your rent, please get in touch as soon as possible so we can discuss how we can support you. More information on rent, finances, Universal Credit and benefits advice is available on www.yhn.org.uk/coronavirus.

We continue to offer support to customers experiencing anti-social behaviour or noise nuisance. To register a complaint please contact our Safe Living team on safeliving@yhn.org.uk.

Contacting us



For any enquiries you can call us on **0191 278 8600**.

You can save time by getting in touch with us online and help to keep our lines free for emergencies. Visit www.yhn.org.uk/contact-us or email us on yhn@yhn.org.uk.

All information correct at the time of print.

Getting back to business - challenges we're experiencing due to the pandemic

A message from YHN's Customer Services Director, Jen Vinton

Like everyone else, we had to quickly get our heads around new and changing restrictions, rules, and ways of working that came with the pandemic. The safety of customers and staff has always been our number one priority.

But lockdown is over and restrictions are easing, so customers understandably may question why YHN services aren't fully back to 'normal'. We know the delay in carrying out certain repairs hasn't been ideal, and we appreciate that the time spent on hold when calling the contact centre has been longer than usual. We don't want to make excuses or use the Covid line, but we do want to be honest and say, "this is where we are".

Repairs

We're very busy at the moment, but we're working hard to complete repairs as fast as we can. You may find you need to wait a week or two longer to get repairs completed, but we'll still provide you with a convenient appointment time and date when you contact us.

As with many other businesses, we've had difficulties with staffing. The virus is still out there, and as with everyone, repairs colleagues must self-isolate for 10 days if they test positive. This continues to have an impact on teams and being able to complete jobs in the usual timescales.

Contact Centre

We know it's frustrating being on hold and having to wait to speak to a member of our team. Call waiting times in our Contact Centre have been longer than we'd have liked as we adjust to new ways of working. The number of calls increased due to customers requesting updates on services which had been restricted, such as repairs, and as restrictions eased, more customers contacted us with new service requests (as people now felt more comfortable letting staff/operatives into their home). This was coupled with the need for staff to self-isolate or being absent due to Covid.



Our average wait times are now recovering, with an average wait time of between 4-5 mins.

Neighbourhoods and estates

Now that restrictions have eased, we are getting out and about in our communities again. Our housing officers are prioritising improving the environment of our estates which have suffered throughout the pandemic, so you'll likely see our teams out talking to customers, litter picking, and doing a general tidy up.

Our hubs remain closed, but officers are making home visits if you'd like to see someone in person. You can call our Contact Centre to arrange this, or you can use the 'Find an officer' tool on our website to get email addresses to contact your local officers directly:

www.yhn.org.uk/find-an-officer

We do understand the issues that are causing customers frustration. Your understanding and patience are hugely appreciated as we work hard to catch up and get back to a level of pre-pandemic 'normal' as soon as we can. Please contact us if you have any questions - the details for our different services can be found on page 2.

Thank you again for your understanding and support.

Jen Vinton, Customer Services Director



Leazes Homes is now part of the YHN group, so you'll see a few more stories about Leazes Homes developments in the newsletter. YHN provided many services under the management agreement we used to have so there won't be many changes, and customers with a Leazes Homes tenancy will retain that tenancy and won't see many differences on the ground.

Leazes Homes has a terrific record of delivering on its promises and has built over 600 new homes since its inception, so we are delighted to welcome them onboard!

YHN Community Fund - helping communities to thrive



A North East charity has helped residents struggling with mental health and addiction issues, loneliness and isolation after the lockdown, thanks to funding from Your Homes Newcastle.

Anxious Minds received a grant from YHN's Community Fund to help fund their new outdoor therapy centre and provide outdoor activities including canoeing, woodland forestry skills, mountain biking, and hill walking/map reading.

The charity supports thousands of people in the North East every year and wanted to offer service users the chance to interact outside, to make friends, get fit and improve mental health.

The project has been a massive success, with over 50 people attending the group activities within the first six months. Anxious Minds is hoping to support over 100 people by the end of the grant.

“What an excellent day out, it has made me feel so much better and confident with myself getting back out into the community.”

“I've really benefited from my woodlands experience; it's made me realise just how important it is for me to get back into nature, for my emotional wellbeing.”

For more information on Anxious Minds, visit www.anxiousminds.co.uk or call 0191 262 0305.

YHN's Community Fund is an annual fund of £80,000 distributed to community and voluntary groups via grants of up to £4,000. The fourth round of the YHN Community Fund will be open in the new year. If you'd like to find out more, please email communityfund@yhn.org.uk.

Sprucing up the city

Over the coming months, you'll see YHN staff out and about helping to clean up parts of the city that have become a little less loved than they used to be. We want to help make our estates cleaner and brighter, and to get to know our customers better.

We've already taken part in a week-long clean-up operation in Byker, which was funded by the Home Office's Safer Streets fund. Significant amounts of fly-tipped waster, litter, and overgrown vegetation have been removed from parts of Byker and we look forward to making the same difference elsewhere in the city.

Jen Vinton, Customer Services Director at Your Homes Newcastle, said: "All of our customers deserve to live in safe and well-maintained



communities where they feel proud of their homes.

"We know that working in partnership with colleagues across the city is the best way we can make real improvements to our estates so we are delighted to be involved in this project which has already made a massive difference to the local area."

Medical pioneer honoured with plaque on Elswick property

In a first for YHN, one of the properties we manage had a commemorative plaque added to it, in recognition of a pioneering former resident.

Ruth Nicholson was born in the house on Kenilworth Road, in 1884. She went on to attend Church High School in Jesmond, then enrolled at Newcastle's College of Medicine, where she was the only female graduate of her course.

Being one of few women in a more traditionally male occupation didn't hold Ruth back at all, and she worked in a field hospital in Gaza just before the outbreak of the First World War. Unfortunately, Ruth was prevented from working in male-dominated British military hospitals, but she rose to prominence at an all-female hospital supported by the French Government.

Here she shared the bulk of the major surgical workload, providing treatment to soldiers injured in the Battle of the Somme, and was later awarded medals for her efforts. When she returned home, she began a career in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, becoming a founder member of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.



Cllr Habib Rahman, Lord Mayor of Newcastle, and David Langhorne, YHN's Director of Assets and Development at the plaque unveiling this summer.

We were pleased to honour Ruth and her incredible work by supporting the installation of the plaque.

This got us thinking that there must be loads of people living in the properties we manage who are doing really noteworthy things – whether in their personal or professional lives – and having a huge impact in their communities. And we'd love to hear about them!

If you think someone you know who lives in a YHN-managed property is doing something significant to help others then please let us know – just send an email to communicationsteam@yhn.org.uk and, with their permission, we might shout about their achievements here too!

Universal Credit reduction and energy price rise – we're here to help

The Government's £20-a-week increase to Universal Credit payments has now ended. It was introduced as a temporary measure to help people at the height of the pandemic.

We know this reduction in UC payments, along with the increase in energy costs, will be worrying for many of our customers. If you're struggling financially, our income teams are here to help:

- eastincome@yhn.org.uk
- westincome@yhn.org.uk
- kentonincome@yhn.org.uk

Please email or call us on 0191 278 8600.

Useful budgeting and money advice websites

- www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/budgeting
- www.moneyhelper.org.uk
- Visit www.newcastle.gov.uk and search 'debt advice' for lots of links and suggestions.

Energy advice

If you're concerned about rising energy costs, visit www.yhn.org.uk/services-customers/save-energy where you can read our guide to help you save energy and water in your home. You can request an energy saving check-up appointment, where one of our trained officers visits your home to give you advice about how to save energy and water (appointments take around an hour). We can also give advice over the phone – just call **0191 278 8600** and ask for the Energy for the Future team.

You could also get £140 off your electricity bill if you qualify for the Warm Home Discount Scheme – find out more about this here: www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

If you're worried at all please do get in touch – our specially trained officers are here to help and offer advice.

Happy 10th birthday Station Court!



One of Station Court's original residents, Tony Walker, with the Lord Mayor

Residents of Station Court in Walker came together to celebrate the development's 10th birthday at the end of September.

Station Court is owned by Leazes Homes and managed by Your Homes Newcastle. It provides accommodation for 17 people of all ages who have a learning disability, with YHN staff on site Monday to Friday to provide support and lead activities.

During the celebration, the Lord Mayor, Habib Rahman, officially unveiled a plaque designed and created by the residents. Residents had each painted an individual tile showing something that reminded them of Station Court that made them happy.

Local councillors joined in the fun and residents enjoyed a fabulous party with an entertainer, disco and karaoke. Happy birthday Station Court!



Wild West End/Save Newcastle Wildlife update



Climate change - what can I do?

Global leaders are coming together in November to tackle climate change. Climate change is a hot topic, with protests taking place across the UK, including Newcastle.

Temperature increases do not happen evenly across the globe. The arctic has warmed 2.3 degrees since the 1970s, which is why the ice sheets are melting so fast and the polar bears are suffering so badly. Temperature increase is called 'global heating' and caused by greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide and methane.

When faced with a challenge like climate change, we can sometimes feel helpless. But there are lots of changes we can make at home to reduce our impact on the planet.

Did you know that eating less meat and dairy reduces your environmental impact? Eating local, seasonal food is better for us and the planet. You could even grow your own food. Newcastle-based Vertical Veg (verticalveg.org.uk) has ideas for growing in small spaces.

Turning off lights and electrical devices when not in use will cut your carbon footprint and reduce energy bills. Putting on an extra layer, not the heating, and leaving the car at home helps too. Cycling is a great way to exercise and doesn't create exhaust fumes!

Our green spaces and gardens are important in fighting climate change too. They absorb carbon dioxide and help reduce flooding, as well as providing habitat for wildlife.

If you have time, join a campaign group such as Climate Action Newcastle to help make change happen at a national level: www.takeclimateaction.uk/group/climate-action-newcastle.

Remember to talk to others about what you are doing in your homes and gardens. Friends and family are more likely to take action against climate change if they know you are!

For more information, search 'Wild West End Newcastle' and 'Save Newcastle Wildlife' on Facebook.

Learning from complaints



We've recently involved customers in reviewing some of our complaints to provide their view on where we can improve.

What they told us

- Timeliness and communication were key factors affecting the quality of service
- The complaints were well handled overall
- One complaint was really well managed, and the learning was excellent
- They suggested more specific measurable learning outcomes

Give us a compliment or complaint by:

 Emailing YHNComplaints@yhn.org.uk

 Filling in an online form at www.yhn.org.uk

 Calling us on **0191 278 8600**

 Writing to us at: Customer Experience Team, Your Homes Newcastle, YHN House, Benton Park Road, Newcastle, NE7 7LX.

Look out for more information about how we've continuing to improve how we handle complaints in future issues.

Have you heard the buzz? The Learning Hives are back!

After being closed for a while due to the pandemic, we are delighted to let you know the Galafield and Walker Learning Hives are now open! We're also thrilled to introduce Liz and Lindsay, our new Your Homes Your Jobs trainees, who are ready to welcome new learners and give support.

Delivered in partnership with local charity Northern Learning Trust, the Learning Hives offer a variety of services in a friendly, relaxed and informal way. If you're looking to brush up your English or Maths, get support with searching for jobs or employability skills, or improve your IT skills, then the friendly team can give one-on-one support and work with you comfortably at your own pace.



Lindsay (left) and Liz are based at the Hives.

If you're simply looking for some information, advice, or even just a chat, you're always more than welcome to drop in and speak to one of the friendly tutors or volunteers - there's no such thing as a daft question and they'd love to meet you! Learning Hives are at the heart of local communities and are completely free. They want to listen to and work with YOU to provide the best possible services, so if there's anything you'd like help with, please call in for a cuppa and a chat.

Walker Hive -

open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the Parish Centre, Church Walk, Walker, NE6 3BS.

Galafield Hive -

open Tuesdays and Wednesdays at the Galafield Centre, Newbiggin Lane, Newbiggin Hall, NE5 1LZ.

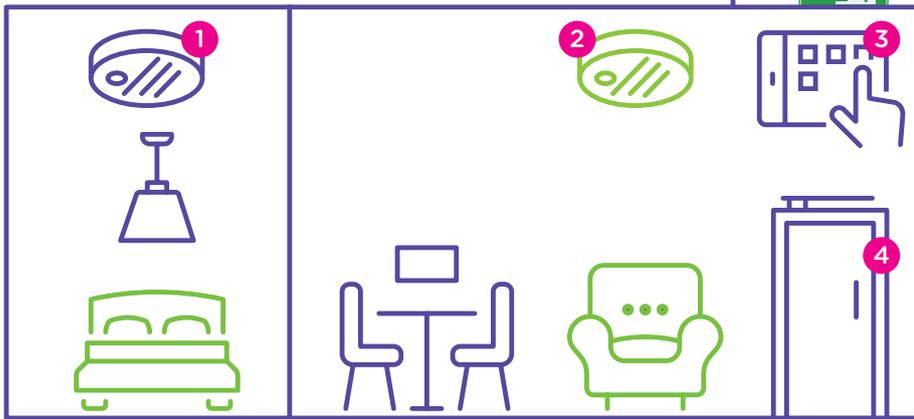
If you don't live near a Learning Hive and want help with job seeking or learning, please call 0191 2710131 - they may be able to come to you.

Keeping high rise buildings safe

If you live in a multi-storey building, these are just some of the safety features we provide to keep your building safe.

Features in your flat

- 1 Mains wired smoke alarms connected to our 24 hour contact centre
- 2 Carbon monoxide alarms (where there is a gas supply)
- 3 Intercom connected to our 24 hour contact centre
- 4 Fire doors with door closers on every flat



Features in buildings

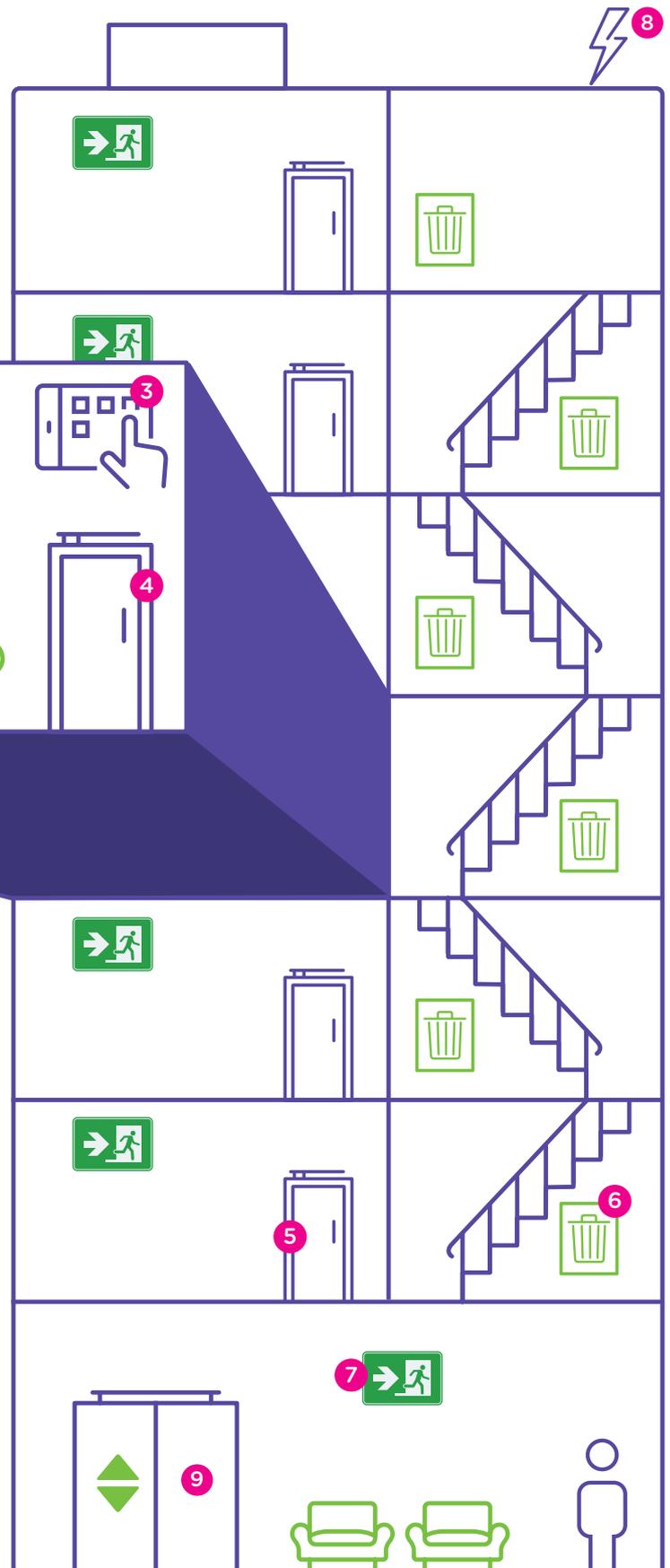
- 5 Fire doors with door closers to protect escape routes
- 6 Automatic closers on bin chutes
- 7 Fire exit signage
- 8 Lightning conductors
- 9 Serviced lifts linked to 24 hour control room

Ongoing support from our team

- Annual gas servicing
- Water hygiene monitoring to prevent Legionnaires' disease
- Electrical safety testing
- Onsite and responsive caretaker service
- Repairs and maintenance service

Help us keep your building safe

These safety features are carefully designed and maintained to reduce the risk of a serious incident like a fire. If you notice any problems with or damage to any of these features, including fire doors, please tell us immediately by calling **0191 278 7878** or **pressing your intercom**.



If you have any questions about the safety measures in your building, please contact us at buildingsafety@yhn.org.uk or on **0191 278 8600**. We'll also be holding drop-in sessions at blocks around the city over the coming months so you can talk to us in person if you prefer.

IN AN EMERGENCY SUCH AS A FIRE YOU SHOULD CALL 999.

£25 prize wordsearch

Complete the puzzle which contains words found in this issue of Homes & People.

But - one of the answers is missing. To enter the competition all you need to do is identify which word is NOT in the wordsearch then email us your answer. Good luck!

P R P U B Y L Q N Y T J H X E A N Y Z S
C U W I G M Q W C I T O L U K N O E Y Y
T C C H R B N N G P A K S V O M U F U O
H L B E W P L H X C X R B R F Q Z Z F C
I Z B D Q U J X V L T T F W A R Z Y R I
C Z E P R I V J Q D A C I L K S U V M B
T B H Z R I S Y N R E F P D B A V Q R B
T Y C P F T Y R X L G K A G E Q A K T H
L Q K N D I S B E T S W E Y F R A W W E
N E G T W G U M R J E T O S O S C L Q X
N L Y C O M W Z Y Q O E O M P I Z U Q I
N Y Y N B V D L W N C G X Q U H E Y T Q
X A I Q H C P F L B N C E N N G Z S Y F
Q T C S Q C N I K P W C K Q A R B U Y I
S T A T I O N C O U R T N B E T W H Q R
T V L W M E Y B L Q T I J P L Y O R Z E
O D S H C V R Z P G H H F U C O H K J D
N D O J I L Q X L N T Q I C Y Z T Y A O
X W M P I K G S U D Y W M V U C C S D O
F R Q S R C Z E G D L A S R E V I N U R

Universal

Credit

Energy

Clean up

Plaque

Station Court

Hive

Fire door

Get online

Send the missing word along with your name and address to:

Email: communicationsteam@yhn.org.uk

By Friday 3 December

Please note: competitions are only open to customers with no rent arrears.

Congratulations to Hatice Kacmaz who was the winner of the July competition.
The missing word was 'library'.



Backyard brilliance

Stepping Stones is a YHN specialist housing service that provides a high level of support to 16-21 year olds who are homeless. The young people based at the Stepping Stones supported accommodation hostel recently came together to completely transform the back yard with the support of Support Worker, Jason Mellings.

Using a grant from the Better Together fund, Jason enlisted the support of the young people to complete a bespoke piece of work to decorate the floor of the back yard. The young people all took part in completing the work – they prepared and repaired the yard, chose the design, and painstakingly brought it to life using stencils. We think you'll agree the finished result looks fantastic!

Anthony Clark, Supported Living Manager, said: "It was fantastic we were able to give the young people the opportunity to express themselves and add their touch to the hostel. The work runs alongside our ongoing development programme to continue to modernise our service and create a home that young people want to live in."



Help to get online and use a computer

We're so pleased to let you know our face-to-face digital support sessions at the City Library are back!

We're working in partnership with Newcastle City Learning and can now offer more accredited courses, which means they are nationally recognised and look great on a CV.

Here's what's on offer:

- **Learn My Way, Online Basics** - designed for those who have little or no basic skills (includes using email)
- **Intro to Office (accredited course)** - an introductory course to Word, Excel and PowerPoint
- **Digital Skills (accredited course)** - learn digital skills to support you in your life and work
- **Techy Tea Parties** - bring along your own device – laptop, smart phone, tablet or iPad – and find out how to complete your basic settings, secure your device and download and navigate apps



How to book

Book your place by visiting the Get Online webpage - www.newcastle.gov.uk/get-online-newcastle You can also email us at getonline@newcastle.gov.uk or give us a call on 0191 277 4100 and we'll be happy to help.