

## COMMUNITY

### South Tyneside Council

## Championing a Safe Recovery from Covid

A partnership approach between the Council and charities and voluntary groups across South Tyneside is helping people to recover from the pandemic.

South Tyneside Council successfully secured £500,000 of government money to help the third sector engage with groups most at risk from the virus. The main aim of the fund was to recruit Covid champions to relay accurate and timely information about the virus. In addition, voluntary groups were able to secure funds to support Covid recovery and mental health. Some of the grants ranged between £5,000 and £15,000 while smaller amounts of between £100 and £1,000 were also available.

One charity which has already benefitted from a micro-grant is local charity BLISS-Ability which secured £976 for a part-time project co-ordinator to run a new service to bring socially isolated people together once a month. This is aimed at people suffering from low mood, anxiety or mild depression. In addition to socialising they will have access to short sessions on self-care and digital health with the support of an IT tutor or a volunteer digital champion.

Sharon Bell, Chief Executive of BLISS-Ability said: “We know people with low mood, mild depression, or who are socially isolated or have long term conditions, have been adversely affected by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. To help them regain their confidence, it is important that they can meet in an environment where they feel safe and comfortable and can support each other through difficult periods in their life.

“Knowing who they can ‘turn to’ in their community enhances the quality of people’s lives, impacting positively on their health and well-being, particularly at difficult times such as the pandemic which has only exacerbated people’s feelings of loneliness and anxiety.”

Another charity which secured funding is South Tyneside’s Citizens’ Advice Bureau (CAB). Funding of almost £15,000 was secured by the CAB to help people from ethnic minorities learn more about the Covid vaccine and help them navigate the government’s roadmap in a safe way. The funding will also secure the charity’s BAME Advice project, allowing the three multi-lingual staff to expand their roles to enable them to respond to the social, financial and psychological effects of Covid-19.



Older people in the Borough are also now receiving tailored advice and support to help themselves stay safe thanks to the funding. Age Concern South Tyneside (ACTS) was awarded more than £14,000 to support communities and individuals to navigate the Government's roadmap in a Covid-secure way. The charity is using the funding to train their staff so that they can accurately advise older people on the vaccination programme and integrate their support needs into tailored provision. The money has also paid for training for befrienders and volunteers so that older people can be advised how they can begin to connect with others safely. The charity also hopes to start running community events where people can socialise safely.

Your Voice Counts is another charity which has secured a slice of the funding. The £12,000 grant will enable four Covid Community Champions with learning disabilities to raise awareness about the government's roadmap and increase understanding about safe participation in community activities. The Champions will provide clear and easy-to-read information and organise workshops to help people understand what the guidance means for them. The charity will provide practical support planning to identify community services and activities that their clients may want to use and help them to travel and participate safely so they can access them.

Councillor Moira Smith, Lead Member for the Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Cooperatives, said: "Sadly, the pandemic has left its mark with many people having lost loved ones while others cope with the ongoing emotional or financial misery the virus has left in its wake. In line with one of the Council's priorities to support our vulnerable communities, we have, throughout the pandemic, sought to keep those groups most

at risk from the virus at the centre of our thoughts. That is why these grants are so important in enabling our wonderful third sector to reach out and help those who may need additional support.”

She added: “If there is one silver lining from Covid, it is the way in which communities across South Tyneside have come together to support one another. This spirit of South Tyneside will sustain us as we seek to recover from the pandemic. We will continue to harness this enthusiasm and civic pride through the people-led #LoveSouthTyneside campaign which seeks to highlight the sterling work done by volunteers and stimulate social action.”

The funds have been distributed by Inspire South Tyneside, the umbrella organisation for the third sector in the Borough.

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