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The Oxhill Green Leaders Project

Supported by the Point North – Stanley Community Fund

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Executive Summary

BSBCIO delivers Wellbeing, Employability, Environmental and Heritage programmes for young people which aim to address issues such as their engagement in education and the community, social isolation, difficulty making and sustaining friendships and poor self-esteem. The programme that is the subject of this report was delivered with pupils in Oxhill Nursery, Stanley, County Durham. This area is in the bottom 20% on the National Deprivation Index, specifically in the bottom 20% for family income, income affecting children and older people, education, skills and training, health, employment, disability and barriers to social housing. It is also in the bottom 10% for crime.

25 young people were identified by the school Headteacher and referred into this group. The specifically identified young people were 'Early Years Pupil Premium Plus children, from low-income families who receive free school meals, looked after children or from families with parents in the Armed Forces. Some children were also affected by recent bereavement, lived in families affected by serious, long-term health conditions, or were vulnerable living in complex mental health or domestic family circumstances.

The project aimed to empower the children to lead on sustainability and ecology related activities, designed for children who are the least socially connected. By delivering group eco-based activities, we aimed to give opportunities to the most disadvantaged children in the school to create new friendships, improve their confidence and self-esteem, and instil a passion for caring for the environment in them from a young age.

With this goal in mind, we delivered weekly sessions, delivering sustainability and environmental activities including seed planting and flower pot decorating. These activities taught the young people important lessons about caring for the environment, as well as helping to develop their fine motor skills and creativity. The sessions were delivered in groups, aiming to facilitate the creation of new friendships and connections between the young people.

In addition to the eco-activities with the young people, our team also worked to renovate a section of the Oxhill Nursery garden, turning the once empty and lifeless space into a colourful, fun and interactive environmental space for the children to enjoy. We used the products of the activities such as the flower pots and painted rocks that the children had decorated, in the new and improved garden. We ensured that the renovation was entirely student-led asking the children what they wanted to see in their space.

Another aspect of the programme was the environmental visit to Gibside-National Trust, to continue teaching the children the importance of looking after the environment and spending time outdoors to benefit our mental



health. The trip was a huge success, providing students with the opportunity to go to a country park which many had not attended before due to socio-economic disadvantage, despite it being on their doorstep. The children enjoyed exploring the park, having a picnic and getting to take part in a minibeast safari hunt, fitting their nursery themed books of 'Superworm' and 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'.

Overall, we really enjoyed completing the programme with the young people and it was a privilege to see their progress and development each week. The project aimed to give the most socially disadvantaged opportunities that they would not otherwise be offered and teach them the importance of protecting the environment from an early age.

What We Did

The funding supported us in delivering the 'Oxhill Green Leaders Project', with 25 disadvantaged young people, aged 3-4, in an area of significant national and regional economic and social underprivilege. We delivered eco-based activities to support the community cohesion, social connection and engagement in environmental conservation in the young people.

The Building Self-Belief 'Green Leaders' programme consists of young people taking part in a 12-week project that aims to teach the importance of looking after the environment and loving the planet that we live on. We delivered sessions in groups, facilitating social connection, new friendships and improving the young people's communication skills. The activities develop more confidence in their own abilities and improve creativity and motor skills.

This programme was delivered by Christine Thomas CEO, Aimee Wager (BSBCIO Intern from Newcastle University), Beth Mein (BSBCIO Intern from Sunderland University) and Anna Thomas (Volunteer).

We delivered a series of activities including flower pot decorating, seed planting, tree decorations, rock painting, eco treasure hunts and flower bombs. This project gave the young people choice and ownership over what activities and decorations they wanted to create, to build their decision-making and autonomy within the school. We supported them to ensure their ideas became a reality, by designing the garden exactly the way they wanted it to look.

The Young People

25 young people were identified by the school Headteacher, as either 'Early Years Pupil Premium Plus' children, children from low-income families who



receive free school meals, looked after children or children from families with parents in the Armed Forces. Some children were also affected by recent bereavement, live in families affected by serious health issues or are vulnerable in terms their mental health or domestic circumstances.

Oxhill Nursery

“Our large, well-resourced nursery provides high-quality early learning for over 100 children aged 2-4, between 8.00am and 4.00pm. The Victorian building is very spacious, and we benefit from having a range of areas and spaces which are used for a variety of purposes.

Highly experienced and qualified staff, stimulate children’s interest and natural curiosity through a range of well-planned, interesting, imaginative activities for the children in a stimulating environment both indoors and out.

Our large outdoor area is accessed in all weathers, to enhance the children’s learning in all areas of their development. Here the children are encouraged to access a wide range of good quality play equipment, including a static climbing frame, a large sunken sandpit, a ‘woodland’ area, a garden, mud kitchen and yard for wheeled toys. We grow vegetables in our allotment area and are developing more opportunities for creative play.

Oxhill Nursery school is inclusive in its approach and welcomes ALL children. We believe that ‘Everyone is Special’. Through a broad and balanced Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, each child will be enabled to develop holistically. A well-planned curriculum based on play and communication in a rich and stimulating environment provides first hand experiences that motivate and challenge all children.

At Oxhill Nursery School we know that the children need positive relationships, and we foster a sense of belonging with staff that are sensitive and responsive to the children’s needs, feelings and interests. We support the children’s developing independence and set clear boundaries which will help the children to feel safe. If we can increase well-being in the Early Years, it will help children carry resilience and happiness going forward and most importantly give them the tools to be the best they can be and reach their full potential.”



The Research

- Low self-esteem can have a significant impact upon an individual's ability to cope with their daily experiences and interactions with others. It has the potential to impact upon the physical, intellectual, emotional and social experiences of people who, as a result of low self-esteem, can become isolated, self-critical, low in mood and vulnerable to developing other co-morbid mental health difficulties (Waite et al., 2012).
- There are significant improvements in a child's cognitive, emotional, social and fine motor skills as a result of attending nursery schools with more of a focus on outdoor education, rather than traditional nursery schools with traditional indoor activities. Playing is crucial for development in early childhood (Monti et al., 2019).
- Giving children the opportunities to explore adventure playgrounds is particularly important as this type of outdoor play enables children to develop emotionally, socially and physically (Staempfli, 2009).
- Research shows an increase in emotional intelligence and self-esteem following increased outdoor intervention (Woodward, 2010).
- All of this is recognised by the Government Green Paper "Mental Health in Schools" (DfE & DHSC, 2017, 2018a, 2018b), however the Green Paper awaits solutions and does not include funding for the cohort where we target our efforts.

Fundamentally, our programmes work because they are student led. We give them the choices around the activities they would like to complete, and we adapt the sessions, provide facilitation and coaching, and equip them with the tools to complete these activities in groups. They learn from the start that their opinions and preferences matter, and that they will be listened to and supported.

The Analysis

In our environmental programmes, we use observational evidence to assess the young people and determine how they performed, and to measure the positive impact the programme has had on them as individuals. The pastoral support in the school reports both soft outcomes such as engagement with the school and community, better relationships with parents and peers, as well as more quantifiable outcomes such as attendance record, behaviour records and engagement in activities.



We also compare before and after images and take progress photos of our environmental renovations. We collect testimonials from children, staff and parents to measure the impact our work has had on the wider community, not just the children.

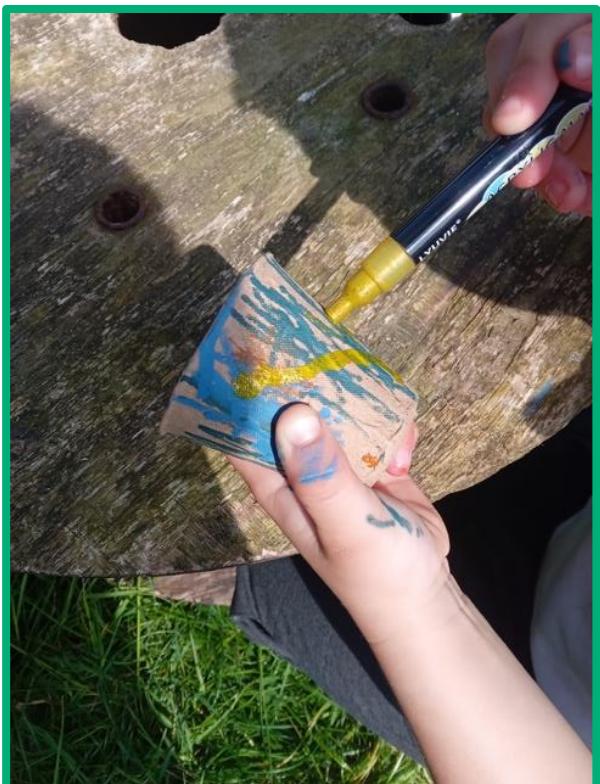
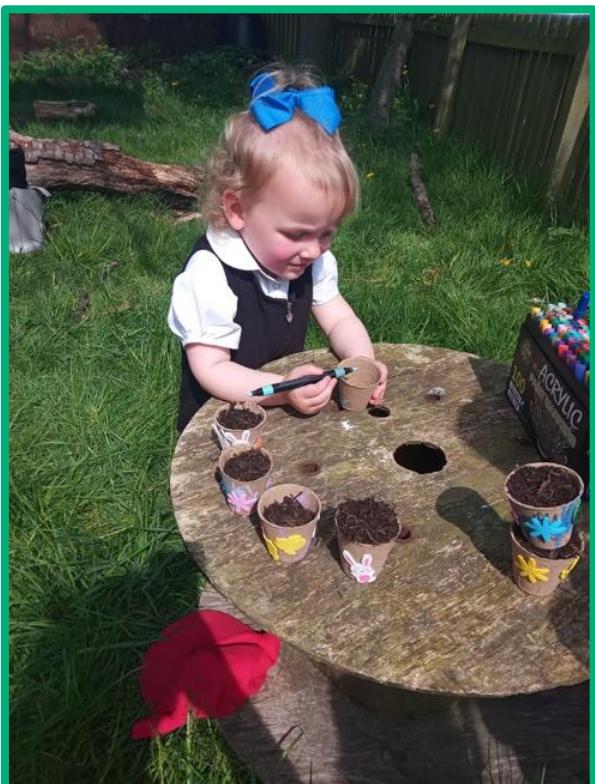
What Happened in this Programme?

We delivered sessions designed to teach the children the importance of environmental conservation and sustainability from a young age. This included sessions on flower pot decorating, seed planting, tree decorations, rock painting, eco treasure hunts and flower bombs. The decorations that the children made were displayed in the garden once completed, ensuring that the garden was designed with their ideas and to display their work. We also read different animal and environmental-related books each session.





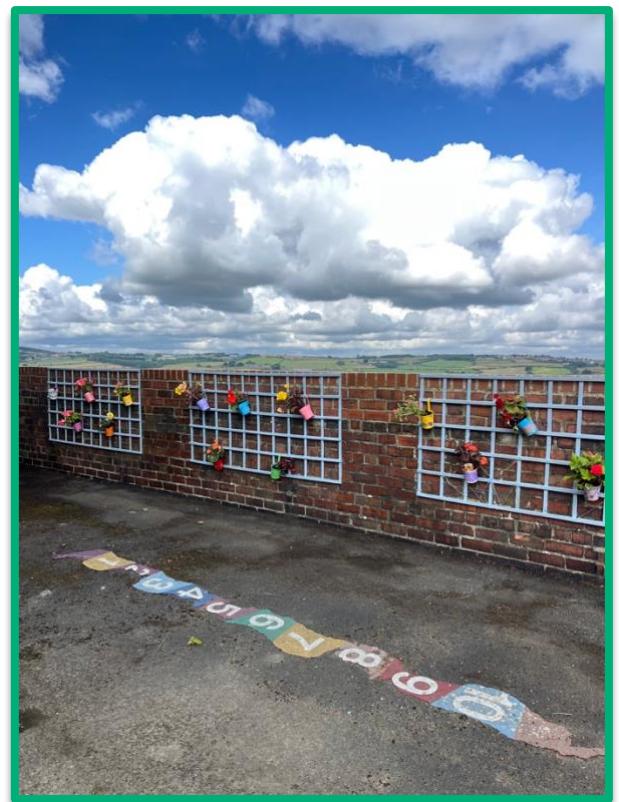






Garden Renovation

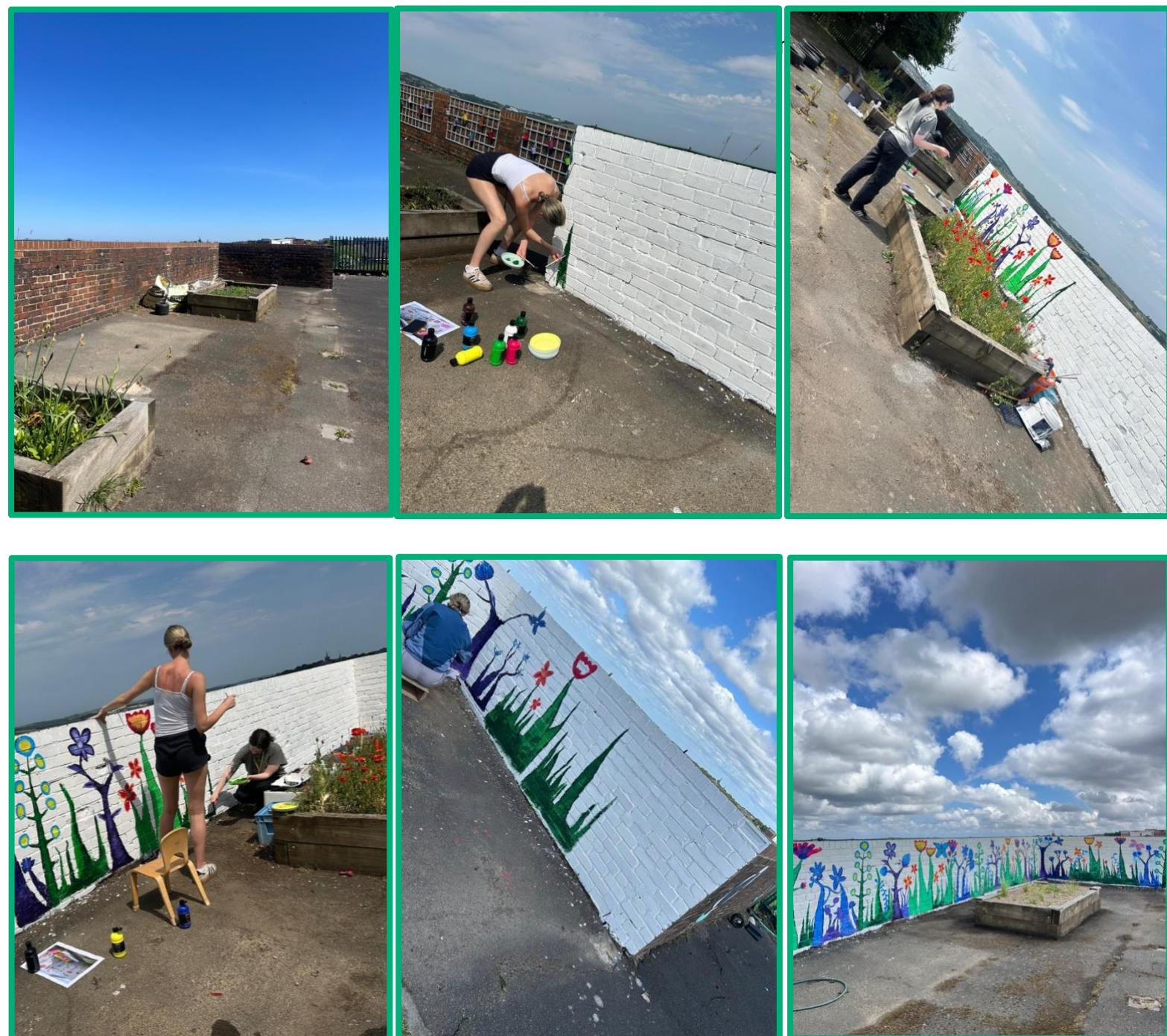
As part of the project, we renovated an area of the Oxhill Nursery garden. We turned the once empty and lifeless space, into a colourful, fun, interactive environmental space for the nursery to enjoy. The decorations that the children had made were included in the garden renovation, including their rock paintings and their painted flower pots. They also planted their own seeds and will be maintaining the plants now that our project is over.







We also painted a mural on the wall of the garden; the design was chosen by the staff and students of the nursery.





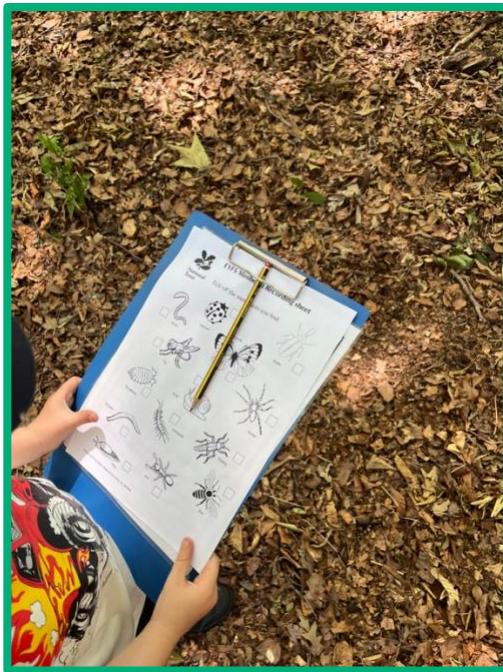
We even created Oxhill's very own Hungry Caterpillar and Bumble Bee, as requested by the children.





Gibside- National Trust Visit:

To conclude the project, the children thoroughly enjoyed a visit to Gibside-National Trust. Despite this park being on their doorstep, many of the children hadn't been before due to their socioeconomic backgrounds. We had a picnic, played in the park and were taken on a minibeast safari hunt. We found lots of insects including spiders, worms, beetles and snails, to name a few.







Successes of the programme

- Forming relationships with others in the group. The children became closer friends with one another throughout the programme, and it gave them more opportunities to develop their friendships.
- Many of the children displayed increased confidence socially, especially with new people.
- The children improved their fine and gross motor skills by taking part in activities that included writing, drawing, painting and planting.
- Everyone worked together to create something positive for the school community to enjoy for years to come.
- The children developed their creativity, teamwork and communication skills through the project.
- The children developed better understanding of how to take care of the environment and the importance of protecting the planet, creating good habits and a lifelong passion for conservation from a young age.
- The young people were given choice and autonomy over what activities they wanted to complete and what they wanted their garden to look like.
- The children thoroughly enjoyed the trip, especially getting to go somewhere new with their friends.

Awards

As a result of the huge amount of effort and dedication by our team, the young people and the staff at the nursery for maintaining the garden, the garden received a Silver Award in the School Category in the Northumbria in Bloom awards! This is a testament to the hard work of our volunteers to renovate the garden and the huge improvement in the space as evidenced above.





Testimonials from the Young People:

"I love our new garden especially our caterpillar!"

"I really liked it when we planted our own flowers."

"My favourite part of the trip was getting to play with my friends."

"I liked reading Superworm."

Testimonials from the Teachers:

"We are so lucky to have worked with this amazing charity this year. They have enriched our outdoor spaces and worked with our children on outdoor projects, including organising a brilliant trip for us. The children are really enjoying working on projects in our garden, they look forward to it every week. Our beautiful mural has brightened up our garden just in time for summer."-
(Julia Watson, Headteacher).

"Thank you so much to Building Self-Belief for creating our very own Hungry Caterpillar in the garden! The children love it!"- (Clare Donoghue, Deputy Headteacher).

Testimonials from the Parents:

"My child loved the eco sessions with Building Self-Belief, especially getting to spend so much time outside. I'm glad she was chosen for the project."

"Both me and my child loved going on the trip. It was great to see how much fun all the children had. Thank you for the opportunity."



Appendix A: Building Self-Belief Charitable Incorporated Organisation – Who Are We?

A Charitable Incorporated Organisation, or CIO, has been the usual form of charities since Jan 2013. It has the same legal status as any other charity, i.e. regulated by the Charity Commission, but whereas most charities have to have dual registration with both the Charity Commission and Companies House, and two sets of reporting, with a CIO the Charity Commission files annual reports and accounts with Companies House on our behalf; a single set of reporting. This means we can dedicate more of our resources to delivering for our beneficiaries, instead of on paperwork.

Who is involved?

The Trustees of Building Self Belief CIO are: Lucy Reed; Isabel Wherritt; Karen Rose; Kate McGuigan; Martin Smith and Hugo Minney. The chair is Dr Hugo Minney PhD FRSA.

Christine Thomas is Chief Executive and develops and leads on the delivery of the programmes. She is supported by interns from Newcastle University's Psychology course (working with us for the complete year), Sunderland University's Psychology with Counselling course (working with us part time for an academic year) and by others with suitable qualifications and experience as needed from time to time.

Christine Thomas FRSA

CEO, Building Self- Belief CIO



Christine has a passion for inspiring and working with young people. Having worked for many years in the teaching profession and as a consultant in schools in London and her native North East, she is now using the skills developed through her teaching of English, to lead Building Self-belief CIO.

Christine is a determined advocate for the improvement of educational opportunities, self-belief and aspirations of all young people and this runs through everything that she professionally undertakes. As CEO of Building Self-Belief CIO, as well as leading the charity, she still works with the young people and maintaining contact with young people is an essential element to her work. She is

particularly proud of the success of the workers and the volunteers linked to Building Self-Belief, and their continued success is an essential element of her work in the sector.



Christine's skills in communication - in particular through podcasting have added a new dynamic to the charity, where we can use such a medium to educate, entertain and support others. Christine regularly liaises with educators, funders and has taken advantage of numerous requests to make presentations to support other charities. Her gardening skills have also greatly improved since the charity took on a 25-year lease for Benfieldside Community Garden.

Christine was Regional Activities Officer on the Management Committee of the National Association for Teachers of English (NATE). She regularly writes blogs about education and the wellbeing of young people, and her articles have been published in the national magazines of both NATE and the National Literacy Trust. Christine is delighted and honoured to be a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

As a volunteer, Christine is also Chair of the Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum, where she is coordinating the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for the area.

Aimee Wager

Newcastle University Intern, Building Self-Belief CIO



Aimee is currently studying a BSc (Hons) Psychology degree at Newcastle University, with a passion for developmental and educational psychology. Alongside her studies, Aimee volunteers as a peer mentor, helping young people with diverse needs to improve their self-belief and reach personal goals. These experiences have sparked a keen interest in child development and the impacts of deprivation on wellbeing and self-esteem. Aspiring to make a difference in youth mental health, Aimee eagerly anticipates a year-long professional placement at Building Self-Belief. She looks forward to getting involved in the charity's programmes, promoting positive mental health and building a strong community of confident young people.

Beth Mein



University of Sunderland Placement Student, Building Self-Belief CIO

I am currently a Stage Three Psychology with Counselling student at the University of Sunderland. I look forward to meeting the young people and getting to know them in the hope that I can help to bring out their creativity and interests and find common ground within the group.



During my time at university, I have focused my career goals on counselling for young people and their mental health. This is drawn from the experience I had during my time in school, and from supporting close family members that found their teenage years very difficult.

This interest in supporting young people led me to seek out voluntary opportunities to mentor and build confidence in teenagers. I am now continuing my professional development by eagerly beginning

my placement with Building Self Belief, hoping to use the skills I have gained while learning new things and meeting new people.

Looking to the future, I would like to complete my counselling training and work with young people of a range of ages. I aim to provide considerate support by understanding the person as an individual and nurturing their passions and differences.

Anna Thomas

Volunteer, Building Self-Belief CIO





With special thanks to





Appendix B: Documents Cited

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