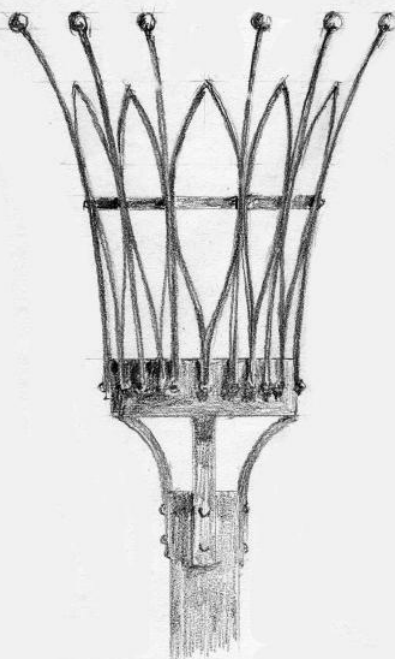




Durham City Freemen



Brian Russell
Little Newsham Forge
7/3/22

Charitable Trust

Community Donations 2021 - 2022

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Foreword

This booklet is designed to provide information for Freeman and the Community of Durham about the objectives and activities of the charitable giving arm of the Durham City Freeman.

The Guilds of Durham City historically provided benevolence to its members who fell on hard times and the funds were largely dependent upon subscriptions/donations from its members.

During the 19th and early 20th century when the numbers of Freeman declined and some Guilds became extinct, this act of benevolence, was more difficult to achieve and it gradually disappeared.

The Charitable Trust was established in January 2015, initially to reinstate and formalise elements of Freeman's traditional values, including training and education and by providing support for the wider community the City of Durham, particularly those more vulnerable in our society and thereby by reconnecting with our heritage and historical values.

The Trustees of the Charitable Trust are drawn from Freeman and non-Freeman. The balance of the group is always in favour of the Freeman to insure that the historical values and traditions are sustained.

The Charitable Trust receives funding from the Freeman but operates independently and autonomously, providing reports to the Wardens and Trustees, which are tabled at their quarterly meetings.

The activities of the Charitable Trust are posted on the Freeman's website and a full report is included in the Yearbook for the benefit of the membership.

The Trustees meet at four quarterly meetings. Their main function is to receive and discuss applications for support, then allocate donations as appropriate within established criteria.

Once a donation has been approved, contact is made with the recipient charity or community group and arrangements made to visit their centre, so that the Trustees have a greater understanding of the work that they undertake and meet participants who will benefit from the Freeman's support. This personal contact with recipient charities provides trustees with an insight into the valuable work undertaken by charities and community groups within the City.

There are two main objectives to the work of the Charitable Trust, which embrace the traditional values of the Freeman: Training and Education and

Supporting Charities, Community Groups and Worthy Causes.

Training and Education

The Guilds to which the Freemen are members, are based on crafts and trades which were established in the City over 500 years ago. A function of the their original Charter was to set and maintain standards, this was maintained by the training of craft apprentices.

It has become apparent during recent times, with the change in apprenticeship training, that very few young people were applying to become, Freemen via 'Servitude', which has prompted the Wardens of the Freemen, to initiate an Apprenticeship Award Scheme with employers within the City to promote achievements in craftsmanship that was and continues to be a cornerstone of the traditions the Freemen.

Supporting Charities, Community Groups and Worthy Causes

A feature of the Freemen history has been it's benevolence, initially to its members and more latterly to charities and groups within the city.

The Trustees continue to uphold the heritage of the Freemen by maintaining this important role, particularly vital in these difficult times for some of the most vulnerable in our local community.

The booklet highlights these organisations that have benefited recently from donations by the Charitable Trust.

The Charitable Trust have also supported causes outside these categories which include:

Freemen Jubilee Beacon,
Annual Mayor's Appeal
City's Remembrance Parade
Ukrainian Refugee Appeal

Trustees of the Charitable Trust
Eric Bullmer (Chair)
Alan Ribchester MBE
Stewart Atkin (Treasures)
John Booth (Chairman of the Wardens)

This booklet was compiled by John Booth

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Community Donations 2022

04/02/2022

Freemen's Beacon

Durham City Freeman's Gift to the City

In January of this year, the Durham City Freeman's Charitable Trust following information from John Booth, decided they would celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee by commissioning Brian Russell , Artist Blacksmith to design and fabricate a beacon as a gift to the people of Durham City. The unique design will not only serve as a beacon for ongoing celebration events but also as a bespoke piece of public art.

The project in partnership with Durham County Council, will be installed on Jubilee Hill opposite the Durham Light Infantry in the autumn.

Brian Russell was born in Framwellgate Moor, he attended the local primary school and then the Johnston Grammar School where he developed an interest in art and design. He continued his education by undertaking a Fine Art degree course at Sunderland College of Art.

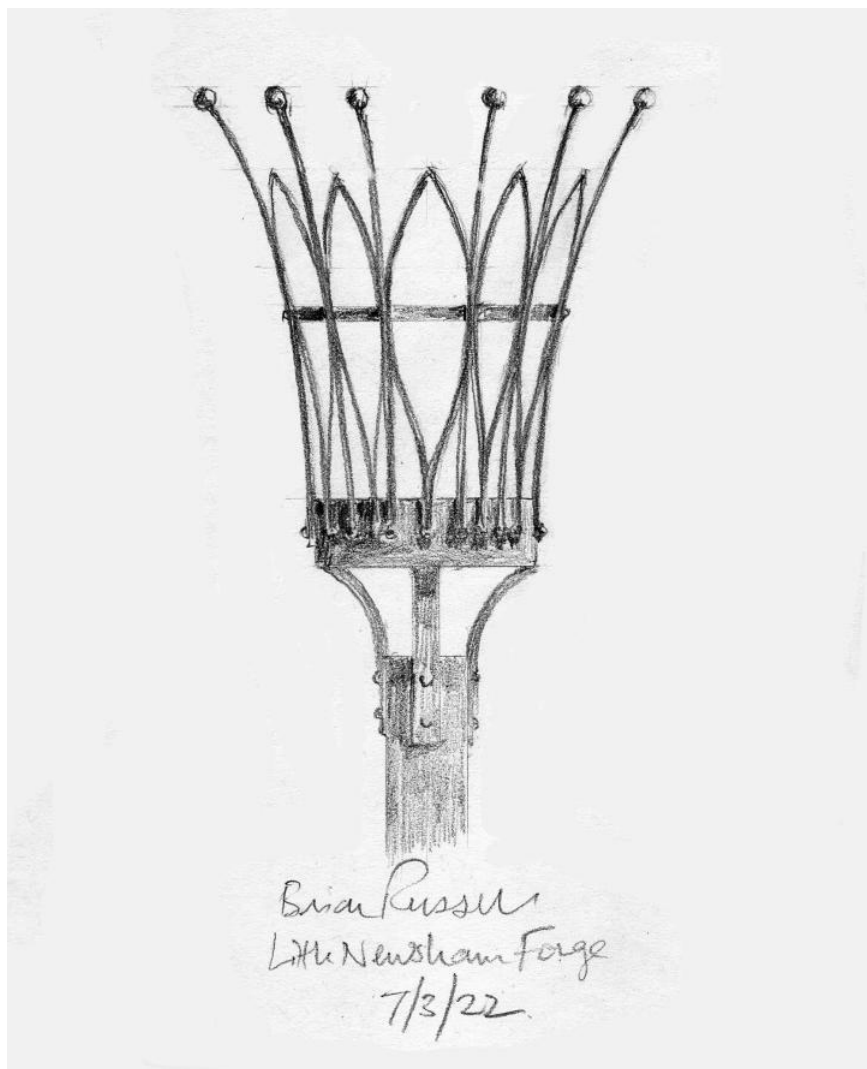
Leaving college with his degree, he set his sights on seeking an apprenticeship as a blacksmith, unfortunately at that time there were few blacksmiths operating and non-were looking for apprentices.

With a strong desire to learn as much as he could about working with metal, he attended evening classes at both the Johnston School and St Leonard's School in the city, all the time pestering The Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas for help in following his chosen craft. Eventually in 1974 they asked him if he would be interested in an old forge at Little Newsham near Staindrop and as they say the 'rest is history'.

Brian established his business over thirty years ago at the 200 year old forge set in the heart of Durham countryside. Over the years Brian has developed his skills and incorporated his undoubted talent in design, to place himself at the forefront of his craft.

One of the few true artist blacksmiths working in the North East of England, Brian was awarded the prestigious Silver Medal of The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths for his skills and expertise in 1995.

In 2017 in recognition for his excellent skills and contribution to the Blacksmiths craft, he was awarded the Gold Medal of The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths, is the only "Gold Medal Blacksmith" currently working in the UK.



27/09/2022

Brandon Carside Youth Centre

A month-long programme of school-holiday breaks for young people from a string of former pit villages around Durham, was given a “massive boost” by the city’s freemen.

From their centre in Brandon the Carrside Youth and Community Project embraces Meadowfield, Langley Moor, Ushaw Moor, Esh Winning and New Brancepeth, offering a year-round safe haven for young people to develop skills, learn more about themselves and take a more active role in their communities.



For a month, during late July and into August more than 70 youngsters aged 11 to 16 from families across the area, got the chance to enjoy a special programme of outdoor activities, offering new opportunities to build positive memories and experiences.

While Mondays and Tuesdays were reserved for community activities and craft workshops, Wednesdays and Fridays were set aside for off-site outdoor activities the centre's older members would not normally have access to. The fun included horse riding, surfing, ice skating, bowling in North Shields, a sand castle competition at Whitley Bay, kayaking and raft building on the River Wear at Chester-le-Street.

At the same time an equal number of children under eleven enjoyed community sessions centred in Brandon and Esh Winning

As part of the same programme organisers provided opportunities to improve youngsters cooking skills, encouraged healthy eating and also provided healthy meals to combat their holiday hunger. Additionally, at the end of the programme, each participant left with a special cooking pack to take home for their family's benefit.



All the summer-time escapades, which project co-ordinator Rachael Avery estimated had cost £14,000, was underwritten by grants and donations from seven benefactors.

“We are very grateful for the Freeman’s generosity and it contributed significantly towards our programme and it has benefited families during this on-going cost of living crisis and the long six-week break,” said Rachael.

23/09/2022

New Brancepeth Revellers

The New Brancepeth Revellers, established more than 50 years ago when Juvenile Jazz Bands were the rage, currently boast 49 members whose ages range from three to 60.

But without the financial support of the Durham City Freeman donation from their Charitable Trustees the band would have struggled to meet the costs of the three-day trip to Cardiff's Sophia Gardens Sports Arena to take on 16 rival bands from across the country.



"Hiring the bus was £2,000 and there were other add on expenses including accommodation. Without the Freeman's generosity we would have struggled to raise all the money needed to compete. Thanks to them we had an absolute blast," said band secretary Sharon Rank, who was a four-year-old member of the original band, founded in 1970. Now one of the oldest members she steps in to play the bass drum when required.

Over a decade ago the band, made up of adults, teenagers and children, was promoted to the national top tier after winning the national second division title.

Sharon explained: "We need a mix from across the generations because these days, unlike the 1970s, some of the instruments are heavy and need at least a teenager to carry them."

The band is now back to weekly training sessions after life was put on hold during the pandemic.

“We are fortunate to have stayed together during that difficult time and have enjoyed a busy summer. The high point was undoubtedly the trip to Cardiff for the UK Marching Band Association’s main event,” added Sharon.



A constant presence since the band was first formed is Sharon’s dad, Dennis Rowland. As a member of the Army Cadet Force he was initially recruited to provide a few weeks marching training back in 1970 and has been a constant ever since. His dedication to both the band and the cadets earned him an MBE for his youth and community work in 2000.

02/07/2022

Hawthorn House

A specialist centre offering temporary 24-hour respite care to people from across County Durham with learning difficulties is also benefiting for a second time from the Freeman's latest round of charitable awards.



Over two years ago Hawthorn House, a 15-year-old county council-run complex at Newton Hall, Durham City and staffed by a specialist team, used their first windfall to fund an internal decorative make-over which included clocks, cushions, wall art, safety mirrors and bed throws to brighten the surroundings. The centre's latest gift will this time be devoted to taking the sensory benefits on offer to users, whose ages range from their mid-teens to their sixties, to a new level.

Respite manager Sue Smith explained: “Those who come to us all have a degree of sensory impairment ranging from mild to profound. They all benefitted from using the ‘Alexa’ listen and respond devices and derive great pleasure from listening to music and stories they can respond to themselves. “We intend to use the money to buy three additional ‘Alexa’ machines and further develop our garden as a place of fun and enjoyment.

“Our summerhouse has been used to offer a variety of themed ventures and doubles up as a café where users can sit with soft drinks, cakes and ice creams. We now plan to add a garden water feature, incorporating a bird bath. They love watching the birds and it will also provide an opportunity during the summer months to enjoy splashing water with their hands.”

10/07/2022

Durham University Apprentices

Apprentices working for Durham University's estates directorate have been handed the "key" to new computer and software equipment to support their training, thanks to the city's Freeman.

Craft apprentices have played a vital and unbroken role within the city's commercial heart since the 14th century and the donation from the Freeman's eight surviving craft guilds underlines their pledge to continue the proud tradition.



The University employs 60 plumbers, electricians, mechanics and botanical specialists with their estates department, among them six apprentices. The new equipment will be available specifically for apprentices within the first stage of a training unit currently being developed in Green Lane.

David Profit, the university's senior maintenance services manager, said: "Not everyone has easy access to specialist computer equipment outside of work or a suitable space at home in which to study. The Freeman's gift fills that gap and allow us to provide the space and time for apprentices to enhance their studies within an allocated room in the new training unit.

"In the face of the current shortage of trades and skills training is vitally important and we would not have been able to move as quickly as we have without the Freeman's generosity."

30/06/2022

Durham Community Association

A community group is literally rolling out the carpet as it puts the finishing touches to the refurbishment of a special adult teaching unit.

Durham Community Association, based in Shakespeare Hall, in Durham City's North Road, is completing the face-lift thanks to a gift from the city's Freeman.

The donation will meet the cost of new hard wearing carpets in two rooms offering courses in basic numeracy, literacy and other writing skills to long-term unemployed adults and those seeking to return to work after post medical or addiction issues.

The modernisation has included replacement brickwork, plaster work with fresh coats of paint and skirting boards added. A new kitchenette is an added feature and delivery of replacement furniture, bookcases and desks is imminent.

"The hangover of Covid is still having its effect on the numbers of those attending but they are slowly beginning to build. We fully expect to open with all guns blazing by July 4th," said the centre's manager Liam Cawley. "The Freeman's generosity has been timely and really appreciated," he added.

During the course of the year the centre is expected to offer ten-day courses to about 250 people.

The association provides rooms and spaces for hire which are suitable for a wide range of uses. They include arts and craft classes, sports groups, local history and art groups, ballroom, sequence and line-dancing, youth groups and education classes with more details on www.durhamcommunityassociation.co.uk.



Liam Crawley and Eric Bulmer

10/07/2022

The Lionmouth Centre

At the end of last year the LionMouth Rural Centre, a community project based at Broadgate Farm, near Esh Winning, was hit by Storm Arwen's 100 mile-an-hour winds which tore apart a large marquee being used as a makeshift classroom.

Project manager, Brigid Press Bartle explained: "In March 2020 Covid forced us to close our gates not only to those who seek our support but to members of the public as well.



"When our clients were allowed to return in August we made many changes to protect them from the spread of the disease. Our social distancing and cleaning routines, alongside the continuing absence of the public, allowed us to take some of our lessons outside into the open air. Our large marquee was a key part of the strategy, sheltering attendees from rain, wind and shine."

In 2016 the centre was awarded a donation by the Freeman's Charitable Trustees to help underpin a series of major developments at the ground-breaking complex.

Charitable Trust

The centre sells plants, herbs and shrubs cultivated in their nursery, as well as glass-ware and pottery from their kilns and furniture from the workshops, to the general public.

The Freeman's latest gift, is no less vital, covering the cost of a pop-up heavy duty replacement marquee.



Two dozen local people, aged between 14 and 64 and suffering or recovering from mild to moderate mental, social or learning difficulties, are offered day care support and training sessions available in woodwork, horticulture, art, pottery, conservation and cookery.

The centre's support is delivered by two full-time and three part-time employees while their 16 volunteers will return after all Covid restrictions are finally lifted. The service is overseen by a board of four directors drawn from the local area.

"The new marquee will be a huge benefit not only to the day-care users on site but also to the general public who are buying our products and attending our team rooms again," added Brigid.

08/02/2022

Durham Action on Single Housing

Against a background of constant struggle to raise funds Durham Action on Single Housing (DASH) - a non-profitmaking organisation founded in 1972, still pressed ahead with the project. The Charity offer direct help to vulnerable homeless women, struggling with “complex and multiple needs,” has been underwritten by a gift from Durham’s Freeman.

Their venture utilises four flats and two houses in the city to create a safe haven with round-the-clock support for a dozen women facing physical or mental health issues, relationship problems, historic abuse, sex exploitation, domestic violence, self-harm and childhood trauma.

The Charity’s entire county-wide network of properties offers 45 homeless people, or people who are vulnerably housed, their ages ranging from 16 to 65 a safe haven and a chance to rebuild their lives.



Director Trevor Atkinson said during the pandemic their service users had struggled more than most to cope.

“There has been a significant change in the complex needs of those coming forward for our help. Yet the grants we receive have not been increased for six years and donations given by the Feemen are enormously helpful. The women’s project will benefit and it also enables us to provide ‘welcome packs’ to those who comes to us with nothing. They include food, toiletries and cleaning products,” he said.

The charity’s work primarily embraces rough sleepers, people relying on friends for somewhere to stay, people leaving hospital or prison and those whose tenancies are at risk.

“Our users could be young and inexperienced people on their own for the first time, individuals with long-term mental health problems, people with substance or alcohol abuse issues and those suffering after a bereavement or excluded from mainstream housing because of a history of offending.

“Everyone, regardless of circumstances, has the right to shelter and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Everyone referred to us for supported accommodation is allocated a named support worker, has an individually tailored support plan and an identified pathway to ultimately finding their own independent accommodation,” added Mr Atkinson.

Official funding covers basic support and accommodation costs but the charity is looking to improve users’ mental and physical health through sport, recreation, exercise, mindfulness, cookery and cinema visits, as well as provide winter clothing and food.

01/02/2022

Laurel Avenue Community Centre

Durham's Freemen are backing the launch of a targeted aid programme designed to bring fresh hope to scores of disadvantaged children and young people on a city housing estate.

The staff and management team of the Laurel Avenue Community Centre, established in 1985 and located on the Sherburn Road Estate, have identified many “stigmatised” children and young people in particular need of support – their ages ranging from birth to 19.

They have already raised £5,000 towards the cost of the 19-week project, designed to cultivate the “personal, social and emotional well-being” of those in particular need of help. The gift from the freemen has lifted them to within reach of their final target.



Claire Linfoot, the centre manager, said children and some families living in the Sherburn Road area were unfairly stigmatised and discriminated against because of where they lived.

“For the past six years we have been funded by Children in Need, working to cultivate children’s confidence, self-esteem and give them a voice. Throughout the pandemic we have worked in a wide variety of ways to reduce anxiety, much of it heightened by self-isolation. This project is designed to target those who remain disproportionately affected,” said Claire.

The centre will be the main base from which evening and morning support sessions will be delivered across the 19 weeks, offering the “safe place” lost during the pandemic when many of the social networks the youngsters enjoyed through school, youth clubs and community groups were put on hold.

Activities will include sports, arts and crafts, playground games, dance and drama, singing, mindfulness activities, team building and resilience.

Off-site activities will take in nature walks and family swimming sessions and staff are also trained to offer advice to parents and carers on housing and debt, as well as referrals food and clothing banks.

“The need to engage children back into the community is even greater than ever before. Our main aims will be to improve the emotional well-being and mental health of those we are targeting, tackle social isolation, improve social development and make sure they are heard.

“Our work is welcomed by all schools and early year settings within our area and our centre is recognised as the main support hub within the estate,” added Claire.

Community Donations 2021

20/03/2021

Durham Agency Against Crime

Volunteer police cadet Charland Brain was awarded “top marks” for helping a crime fighting charity’s mission to build safer communities, and her work has now earned a special vote of confidence from Durham City’s Freeman as she embarks on a career as an apprentice youth worker in the employ of the police.



Charland Brain with Chief Constable Jo Farrell

Sixteen-year-old Charland, who lives in Chester-le-Street, devoted two years of her spare time to supporting the work of the Durham Agency Against Crime (DAAC) and logged a one-hundred per cent attendance record along the way.

Her commitment and determination to succeed so impressed the Freeman's Charitable Trust they offered her a bursary to buy laptop software and other equipment needed in the first year of the two-year apprenticeship based at Derwentside College.

Durham Constabulary's apprenticeship scheme has been running for five years and the 20 cadets who have successfully completed the course have found employment. Among them are two who became full-time police officers, two are special constables, six are Police Community Support Officers and two went on to become teachers.

DAAC – a partnership launched over 30 years ago by involving the public, private and voluntary sectors - currently has 75 cadets, aged from 11 to 18, on the books and are looking for more to help deliver crime prevention initiatives, assist with public safety events and get involved in community projects. Six cadets applied for apprenticeships this year – with Charland scoring the highest marks.

In addition to their college studies all apprentices work directly with primary schools, delivering instruction to “mini police officers” on internet safety and involvement in projects helping steer youngsters away from risks of being caught up in crime or anti-social behaviour.

DAAC's executive manager, Bryan Russell, said: “Charland's route to securing the apprenticeship has not been as easy one but her determination to succeed has been there for all to see. Covid too has played its part.

29/05/2021

Durham Scouts

A timely gift from Durham's Freeman's has been instrumental in helping the scouting movement hit a target set to meet the costs of major improvement work at a large outdoor adventure and training centre on the eastern outskirts of the city.

Adaptations, costing £32,000, are key to making a large two-storey building, known as Moor House, more accessible to teenagers and young people with mobility and special educational needs.

The property, set in 18 acres of woods and farm land at Rainton Gate, plays host to some 10,000 visitors a year, among them similarly organised groups within the community.



But the entrance and residential accommodation on the ground floor of the building needs vital changes to give greater freedom and independence to youngsters with physical and learning disabilities. The bill for the work was set at just under £32,000 and the bulk of money came from grants and pledges from charitable trusts, along with a contribution of £4,000 from Durham Scouts themselves.

Charitable Trust

“As well as the house we have a permanent tented village within the grounds and can, on occasion, cater for jamborees for up to 3,000. The dorm provides residential opportunities for 40 young people and allows them the chance to tackle a variety of outdoor skills and qualify for badges during their stay.

“The accommodation will offer everything from overnight to week-long stays and adaptations allow those with mobility and learning needs the opportunity to thrive in scouting.

“Over the past four years we have cultivated new links with schools whose pupils have physical or special educational needs. Until now they have not been able to fully enjoy their stay but that can now change. The Freeman’s donation completed our appeal for support,” said Louise Barbe, a county fundraiser for Durham Scouts.



Kathleen Vasey Warden of the Drapers Company Durham City Freeman, Mark Ireland Moor House Trustee, Pip Cottam Centre Manager Alan Ribchester Durham City Freeman Charitable Trust Trustee.

19/07/2021

Durham Area Disability Leisure Group

Hundreds of children with special needs are to be re-united at four huge fun-filled picnics organised by a leading County Durham charity to mark the end of their Covid isolation.

Until the virus struck, the Durham Area Disability Leisure Group (DADLG), a registered charity based in Gilesgate, Durham, worked for over 30 years to meet the “dreams and wishes” of youngsters.

But their county-wide programmes of sport, leisure and social activities, staged during evenings, weekends and school holidays, providing the key face-to-face contact they and their families craved, was lost during the lockdowns.

Now the four picnics, funded by the county council, with additional support from Durham City Freeman, promise an extravaganza of “fun and food,” the first vital step in the transition back to a “new normality” for DADLG’s growing number of families.

A total of 200 children, some as young as two, will be eligible to attend the picnics - along with parents, carers and siblings - set to be staged in Horden Welfare Park, Chester-le-Street Park, Wolsingham Recreation Ground and Sedgelyield’s Hardwick Park towards the end of this month and into mid-August.

Project manager Lesley Clelland explained: “In March of last year we had to take the very sad decision to halt all our usual activities - and then immediately thought hard about ways to provide some sort of interim service.”

They first launched a regular newsletter and followed that with two-way “conversations” via photographs and feedback on social media and e-mail. Next came themed activity bags delivered to every family, then a “design-a-Christmas-card” competition resulting in the production of professionally printed greetings cards for every household.

From there Velcro bats, balls and skipping ropes, along with four short videos demonstrating skipping techniques, were distributed by volunteers – providing the only friendly face some shielding families got to see. More recently “Zoom” was central to youth and reading clubs, providing families the chance to communicate through virtual youth and reading clubs. For those without the technology Kindles were provided.

At the end of June the group learned their bid to organise the picnics had secured a county council contract worth a total of just over £5,000 – enough to cover delivery of the “food and fun” project at the four venues. A gift from Durham’s Freemen, which follows a donation two years ago, will on this occasion be used to buy circus skills toys, which include juggling balls, spinning plates and diablo equipment.



“The number of families seeking our help has continued to grow throughout the pandemic and we will be catering for those who have been the hardest hit during the last seventeen months. We are particularly grateful to the council for the confidence they have shown us and to the freemen for their repeated generosity to our organisation. We aim to put smiles back on faces of children and adults who have missed all the close contact opportunities with each other that are so highly valued,” said Lesley.

“I do not see the day when we will stop our new activities and return to the old in this changing virus landscape. Rather it will be a transition between the old and the new, based on a careful risk assessment of each type of activity and venue. We will meet the challenge, even a one as big as this,” added Lesley.

19/10/2021

Brandon Boxing Club

Durham's Freeman are proving an even bigger hit with young boxing enthusiasts – by repeating a donation first made a year ago to buy key pieces of training kit.



The club has been operating for eight years from a purpose-built gym within the village cricket club's multi-sports complex.



Last November a gift from the Freeman's Charitable Trust helped Brandon Boxing Club cover costs of a new punch bag and gloves. This month the trustees decided to match their initial generosity, the same amount of money this time going towards coaching pads used to develop punching combinations.

Boasting 150 members – a third of them female – it caters for a range of youngsters, some starting out as young as five. Two dozen of its leading exponents, most of them teenagers, take part in regular local, regional and national competitions. Among them are juniors Euan 'The Mighty 'Oakes'(13) 'Amazing' Grace Kenny (12) 'Hurricane' Harvey Smith (13), and John 'TNT' Dixon (14) who are taking part in the Lord Lonsdale Box Cup, a national event held in Penrith.



“Finding funds to replace worn-out kit is a never ending challenge for any volunteer-led organisation like ours. The generosity of both individual donors and organisations like the Freeman are vital to allow us to survive and thrive,” said the club’s competition secretary Alex Oliver, a civil servant awarded a British Empire Medal in 2017 for his services to the sport.

16/11/2021

Waddington Street Centre

People seeking help and support from an independently-run mental health resource centre near the centre of Durham will now be able to enjoy a welcome breath of fresh air, thanks to a gift from the city's Freeman.

Every week the Waddington Street Centre, a respected charity celebrating its 40th anniversary this month (November), has provided a haven for up to 120 members struggling to cope with the crippling stress of modern living, more recently aggravated by the new tensions created by Covid restrictions.



Alan Ribchester Freeman Charitable Trust and Steve Wakefield Waddington Street Centre

However, the lockdown closures provided the opportunity to give the terraced property a major face-lift, the result of the generosity of city developers. But the latest donation from the Freeman's Charitable Trust will help meet the £1,000 cost of a new and welcome addition to the facilities which re-opened in August.

Centre manager Ali Lee explained: “One of our main features is a long lounge extending into a café area which, in its turn, leads to a set of french doors. Beyond that is a pokey backyard - particularly gloomy when it’s wet.

“Adding a canopy roof over the yard and colourful wall murals will turn it into a brighter protected space where anxious members, who might feel closed in, can sit in comfort and take a breather.”

The centre’s team of 20 volunteers look to relieve the worries of home life, illness or community conflict through a wide range of informal educational activities. Help is tailored to address each individual’s needs, hopes and aspirations and embraces arts and crafts, writing and music workshops and exhibitions.



They also look to the extra value of theatre and cultural visits, as well as sporting activities. To that end they set a target of £40,000, to mark their 40th anniversary to cover costs of providing a new 14-seater mini bus to replace their ageing transport. To date they are less than 10 per cent of their target.

“As a charity we rely on all the help we can get and are indebted to the Freemen for their support,” added Ali.

13/12/2021

Blind Life in Durham

A future of a vital communications link operated by a Durham-based charity for the blind has been guaranteed, thanks to the generosity of the city's Freeman.

Blind Life in Durham, operating from Framwellgate Community Centre, provides a wide range of quality-of-life support to more than 70 members across the county.

A key tool used in the delivery of its wide-ranging service is a special printer used in the production of monthly CDs posted out to members.



Blind and wheelchair user Jim Welch, the organisation's chairman and founder, explained: "The technology provided by our existing machine gave us the ability to print directly onto the face of a monthly CD we post out to members. These custom-made labels are important in helping each recipient understand what each CD offers and avoids confusion.

“But the machine was simply worn out and a costly replacement, along with the inks it needs, was not easy to find. Without it we would have been in a fix but the Freeman’s generous gift means we can now keep this important link going.”

Jim and his wife Margaret, group’s the treasurer, launched the service in 2004 with the twin aims of promoting the welfare, independence and quality of life of members while, at the same time, voicing awareness of problems facing the blind and partially sighted among service providers and other organisations.

Their work is supported by two part-time employees, backed by a further 15 volunteers. Jim is also a board member of Health Watch County Durham, and a volunteer for promoting blindness and disability awareness for Durham Constabulary and other organisations.



Social activities for members include ‘Skype’ chat groups, a book club and monthly meetings in the community centre. Activities also offer up to three events a week and they also embrace new age kurling, new age bowls and Boccia (another indoor ball game developed for players with disabilities). In spring and summertime regular days out and theatre trips are also organised.

www.blindlifeindurham.co.uk or telephone 01388 763501.