



## People Power

# A Volunteering Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees 2021-2026

Co-ordinated on behalf of the VCSE sector in Stockton-on-Tees  
by Catalyst and Stockton on Tees Borough Council

# Welcome to the new Volunteering Strategy for the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

Volunteering can be many things, from shopping for a neighbour to supporting people with learning disabilities. Whether it's a regular commitment or a one-off event, all volunteering makes a valuable contribution and it is the value of volunteering that lies at the heart of our strategy.

We believe that volunteering should be mutually beneficial for the organisation and the volunteer themselves and a positive volunteering experience should go far beyond having an extra pair of hands.

According to National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) the most widely reported benefits to volunteers are enjoyment and a sense of personal achievement and a feeling of making a difference. Also, widely reported, is the value to volunteers' mental and physical health and how volunteering can help people feel less isolated. We have seen that this has become increasingly important during the Coronavirus pandemic. For the charities, organisations and businesses that engage with volunteers there are also many reported benefits. These range from increased capacity to gaining additional skills, ideas and experience.

Because volunteering is so important, we have worked with colleagues from across the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to produce this new strategy. It provides a platform for organisations to share good practice and to collaborate in the management and development of volunteering in the Borough. It was developed with contributions from partner organisations who gave their time to provide a valuable breadth of knowledge and experience from the sector. Existing volunteers also made a vital contribution by sharing their experiences.

The strategy recognises that volunteering takes place in individual organisations thanks to the hard work and commitment of individuals and it aims to identify how this valuable activity can be supported and encouraged to grow. The strategy focuses on what we can do structurally and on a system-wide basis to create the best environment to help volunteering to thrive in the Borough.

The VCSE sector in Stockton-on-Tees offers a diverse range of services, delivered by people with fantastic energy and commitment. We are proud to support our brilliant VCSE sector are to delivering on the objectives in this strategy and to grow, sustain and celebrate volunteering in the Borough. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy and of course we are grateful to our amazing volunteers. You are making a huge difference to peoples' lives and a valuable contribution to our communities. Thank you.



**Councillor Steve Nelson**

Cabinet Member for Access,  
Communities and Community Safety  
Stockton on Tees Borough Council



**Guru Naidoo**

Chair  
Catalyst Ltd Stockton-on-Tees



## The Vision

We have a vision for volunteering in the Borough where:

More people will be sharing their skills and talents for the good of the community through volunteering.

Volunteering in the Borough will be a positive experience for volunteers and the people and organisations they volunteer with.

The contribution volunteers make to the Borough will be recognised and celebrated.

Volunteering in the Borough is already thriving and delivering many benefits to both volunteers and the organisations and people that rely on this vital resource but we think that we can make things even better and that we can make this vision a reality.

# More people will be sharing their skills and talents for the good of the community through volunteering.

We believe that the Borough would benefit from an increase in the number of people who are able to share their skills and talents through volunteering. We believe that the actions we are proposing in this strategy will lead to an increase in the number of people committing to volunteering. Making sure there are lots of volunteering opportunities, making sure people have a positive volunteering experience and celebrating the contribution of inspirational volunteers will all create the environment to allow volunteering to thrive. However, we have also identified the following specific actions which we think will lead to a direct increase in the number of people who are committed to volunteering in the Borough:

## Setting a baseline and a target

We do not have a current estimate of the number of volunteers in the Borough. What we do know is that across the whole of the North East of England 30% of people aged over 16 volunteered formally (ie with a group, club or organisation) at least once in 2018/19 and 16% volunteered regularly (at least once a month). If these levels were to be achieved in the Borough then we would have 45,000 volunteers volunteering at least once a year and 24,000 volunteers volunteering at least once a month.

We believe that there is value in finding out what the volunteering levels are in the Borough so that we can set ourselves a target. There is no reason to expect that our volunteering levels are any lower than the average across the North East but having this information would be useful and provide a focus for action.

*We will carry out a survey in 2021 to assess the current volunteering levels in the Borough and use this as a basis for setting a volunteering target. We will then continue to measure levels on a regular basis to track our progress.*

## Improving volunteer recruitment

Having the most exciting and creative volunteering opportunities ever is great, but only if people know about them. A simple communication and recruitment strategy for promoting volunteering is also essential. We will support organisations to recruit volunteers by providing training (including social media training) and by delivering general advertising and communications campaigns about the benefits of volunteering that will be useful support to individual recruitment campaigns.

We will also provide useful recruitment materials such as volunteer case studies which feature and celebrate the real-life experiences of volunteers. Told from their perspective, these are a powerful way to spread the key messages about what volunteering can offer those who take part. We will produce and provide a range of case studies for organisations to use to help with recruitment.

We will continue to carry out research to support recruitment such as the volunteer motivation research we carried out in 2020:

## Catalyst volunteer motivation research

Current volunteers in Stockton-on-Tees were asked what motivated them to start volunteering. The top two responses, that the specific group/ club was important to the person and the cause was important to the person are perhaps to be expected.

The third most popular response, that I had spare time to do it, shows that volunteering is seen by many, as something to do, to fill their time and is useful to know when considering volunteer roles and targeting recruitment efforts. Having spare time is often connected to those who are retired, which may well be true. It could however also apply to other groups of society, such as students, part-time workers, unemployed people and during the Coronavirus Pandemic, those on furlough from their job. It can also apply to those given time to volunteer by their employer.

A desire to change things and meet a need in their community were the next most common responses showing a passion and drive for social change. This tells organisations that there is a need for volunteer roles to go beyond increasing capacity to get specific tasks done. By offering a mixture of practical roles and more awareness and change-inspiring activities organisations can broaden their appeal to potential volunteers and encourage as many as possible to get involved.

*These findings can be used by charities and organisations to consider the way they develop and promote volunteering opportunities. By having an insight into why people volunteer, we are able to see things from the volunteers' perspective and strive to inspire this motivation in others to increase the number of people volunteering across the Borough. Our existing volunteer community is also a valuable tool in informing and planning our future activity and something we should continue to make use of to develop volunteering further.*

Lucy Owens Volunteering Manager Catalyst

## Cowpen Bewley Café

Billingham Environmental Link Programme run Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park Visitors Centre with a team of volunteers. As well as running the tea room the volunteers have also developed their own projects to run from the Centre, which include walking groups, a camera club and craft sessions.

*Volunteers told us they were willing to help for a variety of reasons, such as to make a positive contribution, meet people, keep busy, offer something back to the community and boost their CV.*

James Hadman – Billingham Environmental Link Programme



We will offer recruitment training, research and materials for use in the sector and run volunteering advertising and communication campaigns to promote the benefits of volunteering.

## Encouraging employers to support volunteering

Employer supported volunteering is a great way to make volunteering more flexible and enable more people to join in. We will work with employers across the Borough to encourage them to consider ways in which they can support their employees to volunteer, whether through flexible working to allow an early finish, building volunteer days into contracts, mentoring VCSE staff or team volunteering as an away day activity.

*We will work with employers across the Borough to encourage them to support their employees to volunteer.*

## Achieving more diversity in the recruitment of people volunteering in the Borough

We are committed to looking at ways to encourage diversity of roles, more diversity in the way people can volunteer and also broadening the diversity of our volunteers to encourage those who are currently under-represented in volunteering in the Borough to get involved. We need to be willing to learn and have some challenging conversations within organisations to identify ways to work towards a more diverse volunteering offer and hopefully make progress.

In December 2020, NCVO published its Time Well Spent: Diversity and Volunteering Research Report which aimed to understand what diversity means to volunteer-involving organisations and explore the journey or addressing diversity issues in practice. It also looked to highlight lessons learned and identify areas of focus for future research. It identified that those from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to volunteer than those from higher socio-economic groups. People over 65 are also more likely to volunteer than younger age groups. Furthermore, younger, BAME and disabled volunteers report a less positive volunteering experience. Put simply, volunteering is not inclusive of all people and communities both in terms of levels of participation and the volunteer's experience of being involved.

We have expertise, advice and communication channels available through a number of the Catalyst forums that meet regularly to consider the needs and opportunities of specific communities in the Borough. For example, the Refugees and Asylum seeker Forum, the Disability Advisory Group, the Over 50's Forum can all provide advice on help on increasing diversity in volunteering.

### CASE STUDY

#### Stockton Baptist Church

Some Asylum Seekers arrive in the UK and are dispersed to Stockton, fleeing persecution because of their Christian faith. They are so pleased to find a welcome from many local churches. Others find friendship in those churches - and it has been a life changing experience for Stockton Baptist Church which has engaged with hundreds of Asylum Seekers and Refugees over the past few years.

E is a skilled surgeon, who had been practising in a world class hospital in a capital city of his home country in the Middle East.

He was supported by the Church through the ups and downs of his application for Refugee status. During this lengthy process, he was able to volunteer his services, in a limited way, within the NHS. As he works through the process of validating his qualifications in the UK, he is using his time and skills in the community to help support others whose position he can empathise with.

E volunteers in the Church community as a mentor and translator and also supports others to volunteer and build their own skills and experience. He progressed to become a key member of the management group responsible for two houses in Stockton, which provide short-term accommodation to new refugees and asylum seekers.

*Peter Chapman Stockton Baptist Church*

Not all volunteers will be able to commit in the same way and the value of short-term volunteering should not be overlooked. Volunteers may prefer one-off opportunities to contribute to their community or volunteering for organisations in a variety of roles, from grass-roots support to communities to being a Trustee. Providing a range of volunteering options helps organisations to increase volunteer numbers and make the most of the additional capacity they provide. We will provide volunteering advice and support to help organisations develop a range of flexible and workable volunteering opportunities.

CASE STUDY

### Community Hub Volunteers

Catalyst volunteer, Joanne has so far contributed almost 40 hours during her time on furlough from her job as cabin crew for a major airline. She delivered over 60 prescriptions and shopping orders for vulnerable people across Stockton who had been advised to shield during the Coronavirus pandemic. After returning to work in January, Joanne has been in touch again to offer her services during a third period of furlough starting in March.



*I was never sure what I could commit to as I didn't know when I would be called back into work. Catalyst were very flexible and I volunteered throughout November delivering prescriptions and shopping to people who were advised to shield. I had lots of time to give but only in short bursts and at short notice. This wasn't a problem and Catalyst were very accommodating.*

**Joanne, Catalyst Volunteer**

While there are many examples of young people making a valuable contribution to their community through volunteering, there remains a reluctance from some organisations to provide opportunities for young people- especially those under 16. With many young people having so many skills and talents to offer, this represents an underused resource for communities. Volunteering can also provide a great opportunity for these young people as they look to develop their skills, and consider the direction they may go in educationally and beyond into employment. While there is much to consider when recruiting younger volunteers, including safeguarding and DBS arrangements, we are committed to supporting the inclusion of young people in volunteering and will continue to provide safeguarding training, advice and guidance.

CASE STUDY

### Bright Minds Big Futures

Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) is a young person led movement in Stockton-on-Tees and is supported by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The programme provides a platform for young people from across the Borough to volunteer their time to contribute towards making Stockton-on-Tees a great place for young people to live and grow up. The group is managed by an elected panel of young people known as the Big Committee. BMBF is a great way for young people to make friends, gain valuable life skills, increase confidence, and be involved in making a real difference to the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.





*Young people who join can get involved in many different ways, from hands on social action opportunities including work on their own allotment to behind the scenes developing social media campaigns to support young people's mental health. [They can also help with] campaigning and empowering other young people to have their voices heard and to influence decision makers.*

**Sophie Haste, Community Engagement Officer, Stockton-on-Tees Brough Council, Bright Minds Big Futures**

We will work with organisations across the Borough to support them to encourage and recruit volunteers from any background, age, race, sexual orientation, faith or other demographic.

## Removing the barriers to volunteering for those who require assistance to access volunteering opportunities

Support and advice for those considering volunteering is vital if we are to grow the number of volunteers in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees and make opportunities as accessible and open as possible. Many people may have the desire to volunteer but have barriers or obstacles to overcome to ensure they have a positive experience. Signposting to support to enhance or develop their skills prior to committing to a voluntary role may be necessary and volunteering may not be the right thing immediately. Organisations may offer their own pre-volunteering service or refer into partner organisations such as Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind who offer the Community Minded Project which prepares people through a range of support.

### CASE STUDY

#### Little Sprouts

Little Sprouts Health and Wellbeing make great use of volunteers, to help run their cafes lunch clubs, cooking workshops and selling bread. Pre-Covid, four part time members of staff and up to 12 volunteers worked across six projects. Since Covid we have two full time members of staff, three part time and in excess of 20 volunteers all working on Covid related projects. In February 2021 volunteers were contributing over 60 hours a week to help support the community.

Little Sprouts Health and Wellbeing's Billingham Lunch Club draws on the skills and strengths of volunteers to deliver a great service but also provide a positive volunteer experience. The Club provides a wonderful opportunity for volunteers with learning difficulties to showcase their skills and gain valuable experience working with the public.

To make this happen, Little Sprouts liaised with the volunteers' support workers to carry out skills mapping and identify any support which needed to be put in place to help them meet their full potential.

*Providing a little extra support in areas such as travel training to help the volunteer get to the venue safely, allowed us to make use of the skills and talents of volunteers who may have otherwise felt this opportunity was closed off to them. We learned it's vital to ask what these barriers may be rather than make assumptions in order to understand each volunteers' individual situation and potential barriers.*

**Debbie Fixter, Little Sprouts**



The four volunteers quickly became an integral part of the lunch club, contributing a 10 hours per week between them. The lunch club would not have been viable without volunteer support as the additional staff costs would have made the lunch unaffordable for the target audience.

## Increasing the number of volunteering opportunities available in the Borough

We are committed to ensuring that there are plenty of volunteering opportunities available in the Borough. We will work with volunteers and potential volunteers to understand the gaps which may exist and to work with organisations that may benefit from developing the volunteering opportunities to meet this need. We will explore the search analytics on the Stockton on Tees Volunteers website and carry out a survey to identify the volunteering opportunities that individuals would like to see.

We will work proactively with organisations across the Borough who do not currently offer volunteering opportunities to promote its benefits and to offer support and advice to begin.

## Volunteering Opportunities

At the Council we provide a wide range of volunteering opportunities and we benefit from the amazing skills and experience that the volunteers bring. From helping at the LiveWell Dementia Hub, to our community champions at our family hubs to supporting school admission appeals and even supporting activities across Preston Museum and Park there are hundreds of volunteering opportunities.



*Our dedicated team of brilliant volunteers work with us across the museum and the park.*

**Sara Fortune – Preston Park Museum and Grounds Manager**

We will work with organisations across the Borough to support them to offer volunteering opportunities and we will carry out a survey of potential volunteers to identify the type of volunteering opportunities they would like to take part in.

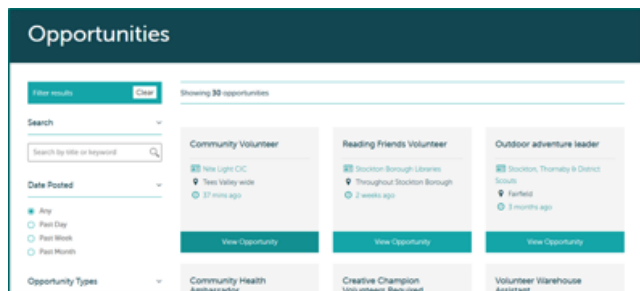
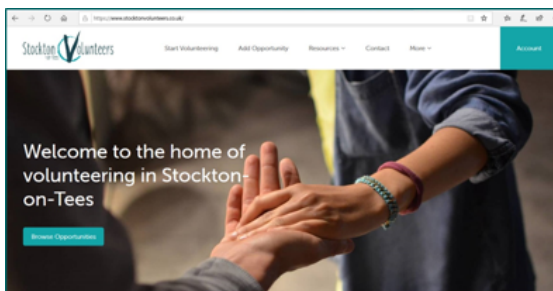
## Improving the mechanisms in place to help people who want to volunteer and the organisations who need volunteers to find each other

There are several mechanisms in place to help volunteers and organisations offering volunteering opportunities to find each other and we are committed to their ongoing development and improvement.

Launched in 2016, the Stockton Volunteers website established a home for volunteering and a place for volunteers to find a range of opportunities across the Borough. It also provides a place for organisations looking to recruit volunteers to post these opportunities. Our vision is to see all volunteering roles across the Borough in one place making applying and recruiting as simple as possible. A review will be carried out in 2021 to ensure the site remains relevant and useful to its audience.

## Stockton Volunteers Website ([www.stocktonvolunteers.co.uk](http://www.stocktonvolunteers.co.uk))

Stockton Volunteers launched in 2016 and after an update in 2019 continues to provide a platform for charities and organisations to recruit volunteers. For potential volunteers, it provides an easy platform to view opportunities across the Borough, saving time and introducing organisations which may be new to them. Once opportunities are posted, applications can easily be made through the site, with applications going straight to the relevant organisation for processing.



Family Action is just one of the charities that have made use of Stockton Volunteers to help their volunteer recruitment.

*Since April 2019, Stockton Volunteers has been a positive and reliable source in helping secure volunteers in our service. Numbers show that 13 volunteer applications have been directed from the website. This amounts to 11% of our volunteers. We are grateful for the service the website provides: it has played a valuable part in helping advertise our roles and we hope to continue with this successful partnership in the future.*

**Louise Scotchbrook, Volunteer Support Worker, Family Action**

**We will review and continue to develop the [www.StocktonVolunteers.co.uk](http://www.StocktonVolunteers.co.uk) website.**

Catalyst will work with colleagues in the sector to develop the Good Neighbours scheme to help match up volunteers with short-term or one-off opportunities as easily as possible. The scheme assists in the efficient matching of volunteers with available opportunities by reducing application and induction requirements and providing a source of readily available volunteers to organisations for occasional work.

## CASE STUDY

### Good Neighbour Volunteers

In October 2020, Catalyst launched the Good Neighbours campaign. With so many people isolating and shielding, the need for volunteers to help out became even more pressing. To help respond to the ever-changing demand for volunteers at this time, Good Neighbours was launched. The idea is to make registering as a volunteer for short-term or one-off opportunities as easy as possible. Volunteers register centrally as Catalyst Good Neighbour Volunteers, then receive information about opportunities from any organisations across the Borough. Good Neighbour volunteers complete Catalyst application and induction requirements and are available to help with any organisation which registers a Good Neighbours opportunity without the need for additional application forms or processes to be completed. By streamlining the path to becoming a volunteer, the result is a team of helpers ready to respond to the needs of the people of Stockton-on-Tees.



*I've been helping at the COVID test Centre at Splash and also at a local pharmacy supporting the vaccination programme. It has been great being able to help out two organisations without having to go through all of the application paperwork again. I've really enjoyed it so far and I'm looking forward to seeing what other roles I may be able to get involved with.*

**David - Good Neighbour Volunteer**

The Good Neighbour Scheme will continue to develop and new roles added on a regular basis

**We will continue to develop the Good Neighbours Volunteer scheme.**

We can achieve the best matching of volunteers and volunteering opportunities if we work together and collaborate rather than competing with each other for volunteers. As far as possible we should find the most suitable volunteering opportunities for those who wish to give their time. As part of this we will establish and encourage involvement in the new Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum to provide an opportunity for joint working.

Volunteering in the Borough will be a positive experience for volunteers and the people and organisations they volunteer with.

Volunteering can and should be a positive experience for both the volunteer and the organisation or people they volunteer with. This can be achieved if we commit to promoting good practice in volunteering and volunteer management. We will do this by establishing the Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum to bring together volunteer managers, co-ordinators and other representatives from charities and organisations who wish to establish or develop their volunteering offer. This Forum will provide the opportunity for discussion, joint working and the sharing of good practice in volunteering and volunteer management across the Borough.

We will establish and develop the Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum to bring together volunteer managers, co-ordinators and representatives from charities and organisations who wish to establish or develop their volunteering offer. The Forum will provide the opportunity for discussion, sharing of best practice and joint working.

We will also continue the development of the Volunteering Kitemark . Catalyst began work on a Volunteering Kitemark as a sign of good practice and a commitment to having a robust set of policies, procedures and paperwork to demonstrate this.

In response to feedback from partner organisations, the Kitemark will be revised and tailored to meet the needs of the VCSE sector in the Borough. The Kitemark will provide a high quality, yet achievable standard to meet the needs of charities and organisations of all sizes, across the Borough.

The Kitemark will provide a stepping stone for those organisations wishing to progress on to the national Investing in Volunteers quality standard and a valuable standalone award to those that don't feel the national award is appropriate to their infrastructure and capacity.

VSCE organisations will be invited to input into the revised Kitemark and help shape this award in order to ensure it meets the needs of both organisations and volunteers.

We will launch a Volunteering Kitemark to provide organisations with the opportunity to apply for the award as a sign of good practice.

# The contribution volunteers make to the Borough will be recognised and celebrated.

While many volunteers don't seek out recognition or reward we believe that their contribution should be recognised and celebrated. This recognition obviously takes place within individual organisations but a wider celebration also provides an ideal opportunity to encourage volunteering activity through the sharing of inspirational stories and also generates positive community spirit and engagement.

We will continue to provide formal ways of recognising the contributions volunteers make across the Borough through the Catalyst Annual Achievement Awards and the Mayor's Civic Awards. The annual Volunteers week remains a key opportunity to celebrate the work of the sector. We will offer a joined-up approach to nominating volunteers for national awards. We can support charities and organisations with a smaller infrastructure to prepare and submit nominations for national awards such as the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

We will provide formal ways to recognise the achievements and contribution of volunteers through the Catalyst Annual Achievement Awards and the Mayor's Civic Awards.



## Delivery

Throughout this strategy we have identified actions to deliver the vision for volunteering in the Borough. We have collated them here for ease of reference. Catalyst and the Council will support the VCSE sector to turn them into reality. We also envisage a key role for the Volunteer Co-ordinators' Forum in overseeing the implementation of these actions:

- We will establish and develop the Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum (VCF) to bring together volunteer managers, co-ordinators and representatives from charities and organisations who wish to establish or develop their volunteering offer. The Forum will provide the opportunity for discussion, sharing of best practice and joint working.
- The VCF will oversee a survey in 2021 to assess the current volunteering levels in the Borough and to use this as a basis for setting a volunteering target. We will then continue to measure levels on a regular basis to track our progress
- Catalyst will offer recruitment training, research and materials for use in the sector and run general volunteering advertising and communication campaigns to promote the benefits of volunteering.
- The VCF will work with employers across the Borough to encourage them to support their employees to volunteer.
- Catalyst, the Council and colleagues in the sector will work to support them to increase diversity in volunteering.
- The VCF will oversee support for organisations in the Borough to offer volunteering opportunities and we will carry out a survey of potential volunteers to identify the type of volunteering opportunities they would like to take part in.
- Catalyst will review and continue to develop the [www.StocktonVolunteers.co.uk](http://www.StocktonVolunteers.co.uk) website.
- The VCF will oversee development of the Good Neighbours Volunteer scheme.
- Catalyst will launch a Volunteering Kitemark to provide organisations with the opportunity to apply for the award as a sign of good practice.
- Catalyst and the Council will provide formal ways to recognise the achievements and contribution of volunteers through the Catalyst Annual Achievement Awards and the Mayor's Civic Awards.

# Delivery

Catalyst and SBC will produce an annual report on progress towards the system-wide and structural actions identified in this strategy.

We have invested in a small team at Catalyst to work with the sector to support volunteering. The Volunteer Manager post will lead work with the VCF to oversee delivery of the strategy. This role is jointly funded by Stockton Borough Council, County Durham Community Foundation and Tees Valley Community Foundation. The Volunteer Manager will be supported in this work by the wider Catalyst team and the Volunteering Co-ordinator for Adult Care and the Covid Community Hub Coordinator.

The Volunteering Partnership Forum will also be re-established as the Volunteer Co-ordinators' Forum, bringing together volunteer managers, co-ordinators and other representatives from charities and organisations who wish to establish or develop their volunteering offer. This Forum will provide the opportunity for discussion, joint working and also the development of clear action plans to help make the vision of the Strategy a reality. Task and finish groups will be established as required, to work on specific projects and areas of the Strategy and work towards tangible outcomes and results to benefit the Borough.

This document is the product of contributions from many partner organisations and this collaboration has resulted in a Strategy which reflects the experiences and interests of a representative range of organisations. There are many charities and organisations delivering high quality, valuable volunteering activity across the Borough and we look forward to engaging with as many partner organisations as possible as we move forward to implement this strategy and continue to learn from each other.

If you would like to get involved or to find out more please contact

The Volunteering Manager at Catalyst  
enquiries@catalyststockton.org  
Tel – 01642 733906



In partnership with



Working in partnership to create a stronger volunteering sector in Stockton-on-Tees

May 2021