

Larger Organisations Making a Difference in the Community 2014 Winners, Bernicia Group

Bernicia Group is a registered social landlord based in Northumberland.

Bernicia's equality practices have affected the business in ways they never would have imagined when they first began their equality journey. There is no aspect of the business that the practices have not affected and improved, from the way they recruit and retain staff, to the way they work with partners to provide accessible services to tenants and the ways in which they engage with the community to achieve their mission to 'Make a Difference.'

Bernicia have many initiatives to support their tenants, one being the Learning Hive which they introduced to the local community because they recognised that some people don't have the skills or confidence to start looking for work.

To fill this gap they developed a partnership with the Northern Learning Trust to deliver a programme to improve basic educational skills and start learners on a progression route to further training, education or employment.

The impact has been phenomenal with an average 39.3 learners per month accessing the Hive. Activities include IAG on employability, support with CV's, ICT skills and support and improved financial capability.

Furthermore, their Runway Programme for young people who are often disadvantaged in the labour market due to lack of experience and job specific skills has been 'life changing' for some.



Bernicia representatives, winners of the Larger Organisations Making a Difference in the Community category.



equality north east

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NORTH EAST EQUALITY



The programme is targeted at 14-24 year olds offering a range of possibilities from a few days' work experience or 12 month placements to 3 year apprenticeships. Outcomes include:

- All apprentices who have qualified have gone on to be offered full-time work with Bernicia.
- Five have won confidence-boosting awards as student of the year.
- Four have been to the House of Commons where one spoke about her experiences in front of MPs.
- One has been promoted and will be sponsored to do a degree part-time.

Accessible communications for tenants is a major objective of Bernicia. They have 84 units for people with learning disabilities, mostly in accommodation with from 1 to 10 bed spaces. Bernicia does not provide the day-to-day care but owns and manages the buildings and has a duty to communicate with residents on housing issues.

Changes in the way care is provided have led to a more direct landlord tenant relationship with residents and there has been an increase in clients with learning disabilities, making this project a priority.

For 35% of their homes, which accommodate older or disabled people, they have invested in aids and adaptations, community alarms and visiting and on-site wardens to maximise independence. An Occupational Therapist is employed to assess peoples' needs.

With this in mind they wanted to make Tenancy agreements more accessible, amongst other documents, but they cannot be translated into Easy Read because of the necessity to maintain their legal integrity. They worked with SPF (Sunderland People First) a group of people with learning disabilities who had done this type of work before, to produce Easy Read Guides. SPF expressed their delight with Bernicia's work, saying that they will be cited as an example of best practice to others doing similar work.

For more information about the North East Equality Awards, please visit our website, www.equality-ne.co.uk/awards or contact Equality North East on 0191 426 4399 or email info@equality-ne.co.uk.

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