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EMPLOYABILITY PROJECT INVESTS IN LOCAL PEOPLE HELPING TO FULFIL ALL-IMPORTANT ROLES



In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term “key-worker” has never carried such weight. However, the UK’s opinion on which jobs qualify for the title has changed rapidly since the virus halted every-day life. Respect for NHS workers, lorry drivers and supermarket teams is now stronger than ever; but with growing demand and heightened pressure, they are looking to recruit more. Now, thanks to schemes like Community Matters Project, the team at Heart of England Community Foundation has helped fill job roles to meet the need in the West Midlands.

No-one could have predicted the shift in core workers, but due to the worldwide pandemic, roles ranging from medical practitioners through to supermarket employees have never been relied on more. In a recent three-year project managed by Heart of England Community Foundation, in partnership with Walsall College, 157 people were given key employability skills to help them get back into work and take up jobs in these vital sectors.

The project was one of many within the nationwide Building Better Opportunities programme, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF). The programme was launched in order to co-invest in the local projects tackling the root causes of worklessness, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth.

Kate Kaur, Project Mentor at Connecting Communities Walsall, comments:

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“We are so pleased to see how successful the programme was, and it was great to see so many people benefitting from the scheme. The programme provided participants with not only the skills and expertise, but also the confidence to get back into work. It’s programmes like these that need to be available within communities across the region, offering support to people who may not know where to begin when looking for employment.”

By mobilising and teaching these core skills, the scheme has helped find employment for those whose confidence had been holding them back; meaning that today some of these participants are now employed and stand as the everyday heroes that the nation is thankful for. One of the participants, Shanae Tennant, attended the programme and sessions focused on women’s empowerment, health and well-being, and she is now a care assistant in a residential home for the elderly. Likewise, Kashmir Dhillon, who also benefited from the programme took away employability skills, and is now taking up a residential support worker role in a care home for children.

Tina Costello, Chief Executive at Heart of England Community Foundation, comments:

“The Community Matters Programme is a key project that the Foundation has helped to manage and support; we are incredibly proud of the success of the scheme, and happy to see that so many individuals have benefited from this.

“It’s important to us that local people like Shanae and Kashmir are provided with the skills and confidence they need to succeed in gaining employment. Not only has it been successful in ensuring that they secure employment but, in turn, has eased the pressure on the health sector by widening the pool of expertise out there. This is important not just in a time of need, like the Covid-19 pandemic, but all year round; we need to ease the pressure on our key industries and support them as best we can.”

For more information about the Community Matters Programme, as well as the other projects that Heart of England Community Foundation supports, head to www.heartofenglandcf.co.uk.

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For all media enquiries, please contact EAST VILLAGE. on 0121 487 1410, or email:

Jodie Tipper || jodie@eastvillageagency.com

Holly Young || holly@eastvillageagency.com

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest community funder in the UK – we’re proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to 6 of 8 Section nine: Publicity (v13.0 31 January 2019) communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since June 2004, we have made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9 billion to projects that have benefited millions of people. We’re privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

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CENTRICK UNLOCKS VIRTUAL VIEWINGS TO TACKLE COVID-19



In light of Coronavirus grinding every-day proceedings to a halt, industries across the board are changing the ways that they operate. Accommodating new practices to run ‘business as usual’ in unusual times, the region’s leading property specialist, Centrick, is launching virtual platforms to help both buyers and sellers that may be self-isolating to carry out viewings.

Known for doing things differently, Centrick prides itself on pioneering practices in the property industry. When it launched its innovative new hub of its core centralised services earlier this year, the company pledged to integrate the newest technological and digital initiatives into its offering.

Now, the property experts are helping to keep its customers safe by establishing its ‘Virtual Viewing’ capabilities. Debuting these at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has seen governments push for social distancing and self-isolation, Centrick’s latest move will cover all the properties on its portfolio – including both those to rent and to buy.

James Ackrill, Chairman at Centrick, thinks we all need to do what we can to help and is proud of the company’s innovative response to the COVID-19 crisis. He said:

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“This new way of working signals a huge shift for the property sector. We know there are people out there who desperately need to find a new home for a variety of circumstances in a time when ‘business as usual’ simply does not exist. We’ve developed this model to help those people.

And, while Coronavirus has forced our hand in implementing these Virtual Viewings, this has been in talks for a while and we’re proud to be able to bring it to all our clients. Not only is this a fantastic way of keeping the property industry operating at a time when social distancing is being enforced; it also offers huge opportunities in the future for those who might be buying from abroad or struggling to make viewings work around their schedule, not to mention customers with additional accessibility needs. We may even find that our Virtual Viewings will prove popular far beyond the pandemic.”

These comprehensive video walkthrough tours will be hosted on Centrick’s website and major property portals; however, prospective tenants and buyers will be able to opt for a bespoke live video viewings, which will be hosted by one of Centrick’s team. They will guide viewers virtually through the property, using Whatsapp or FaceTime, answering any questions in real-time that they might have.

“This is an uncertain time for all industries and with no indication of how long the circumstances will last, it is easy to feel hopeless. However, the team at Centrick has been unstoppable, striving to find new and creative ways to make the best of a bad situation. We will do everything we possibly can to reassure our customers and give them practical solutions to property needs throughout this national emergency,” concluded James.

To find out more about Centrick’s Virtual Viewings and see some for yourself, head to centrick.co.uk.

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For more information, please contact EAST VILLAGE. on 0121 487 1410 or email:

Hattie D’Souza: hattie@eastvillageagency.com

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ESPRESSO-DELIVERY: EVOLVE LAUNCHES COFFEE DOOR-DROP SERVICE



Having seen normal life *grind* to a halt almost five weeks ago, the UK is missing many things: family gatherings; get-togethers with friends; and shop-bought coffee being just three of them. However, social enterprise café Evolve is aiming to address the *latte*, with the launch of ‘Evolve Delivers’: an at-home drop-off service that will bring coffee beans direct to your door.

Brewing the idea since the city went into isolation, Evolve has now brought its deliveries to life, offering three hamper options. Filled to the brim with the bestsellers from its Digbeth and Selly Park sites, each aims to bring a little coffee-shop delight to your doorstep.

Whilst ‘The Caffeine Pack’ is the dream delivery for the coffee-lover in your life, boasting two bags of Union roasted and ground coffee beans, an Evolve eco cup and two bars of luxury chocolate, ‘The Afternoon Snack Pack’ is designed to offer treats that get you through the mid-PM slump. The third option is ‘The Refill Pack’, containing a top-up of coffee beans for when the cafetière runs dry.

Speaking about the launch of Evolve Delivers, Taylor Barrett, Social Enterprise Lead at Evolve, commented:

“When the government announced the lockdown measures, we started racking our brains for how we could keep the spirit of Evolve alive and still stay in line with the new regulations. After working with our brilliant suppliers, we’re now so proud to be bringing ‘Evolve Delivers’ to Birmingham – not only



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does this give the city a wonderful way to support a small business and shop local; it will help us to continue offering ongoing help to the young people we employ, with every penny made being directly reinvested into Evolve's work. It truly is coffee with conscience!"

Since opening its doors in 2017, the social enterprise has helped provide young people facing barriers to employment with training, qualifications and job opportunities. Created by addiction support charity Aquarius, Evolve has since gone on to help 28 young people, offering over 1,000 hours of one-to-one support.

"We hope that our Evolve Delivers service will satisfy some of the caffeine-cravings being felt across the city, but also help those who are looking for a pick-me-up in these tough and trying times. At moments like this, we know how tough it can be for people to find a reason to smile, but we hope our packs will provide a little brightness to people's days," concluded Taylor.

Ordering your care package couldn't be simpler: simply head to the Evolve website and purchase from there: www.evolvebirmingham.co.uk. Packs start at just £10, including delivery, and will be delivered within a five mile radius of its Pebble Mill café on the Pershore Road.

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Hattie D'Souza || hattie@eastvillageagency.com

THE BUTCHERS SOCIAL (DISTANCING): HOW THIS PUB HAS ADAPTED TO THRIVE IN LOCKDOWN



The Butchers Social, an independent pub-restaurant in Henley-in-Arden, has adapted to life in lockdown by becoming a high-street shop, selling local produce and take-away meals – including its famous chicken wings.

Following the government closure of eat-in restaurants, Mike Bullard chef-owner of The Butchers Social, initially began preparing sous-vide ready-meals for the residents of Henley-in-Arden to enjoy in the comfort of their own homes. Now taking it to the next level, The Butchers Shop is operating a full 'click and collect' service, sending shoppers a catalogue of products to order from ready for them to pick up in store.

Offering an alternative to the over-stretched supermarkets, the shop is filled with fresh fruit and vegetables, the finest quality meats, essential supplies like milk and flour, a selection of beers and wines, and even household plants. Not only does it enable locals to stock-up on their high-street; it also allows them to shop local, and support the small businesses and suppliers hit hardest by Covid-19.

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What's more, The Butchers Social continues to serve up its signature dishes – but this time, to be enjoyed at home. Last week alone, The Butchers Social's shop has made some impressive sales in its newly adapted operation, with Mike and his staff selling over 150 Sunday lunches, 3,600 eggs and selling out of the restaurant's famous chicken wings by 6pm on Saturday.

Mike comments:

"It's no secret that the hospitality industry is struggling to adapt under the circumstances, but we are trying to make the most of the situation. It's been a great few weeks in The Butchers Shop; I am so happy that I can continue to support my local suppliers and it's been amazing to see so much support from local people; I cannot thank them enough for helping a small business like mine and I hope we can continue to offer them the supplies they need through the coming weeks."

Local people of Henley-in-Arden are living by the 'shop local' mantra and have been happy to shop with Mike. Not only is the restaurant helping to support local suppliers, but is also signposting the free crisis call lines being operated by West Midlands mental health charity Living Well UK, for key workers and members of the public who are anxious during the pandemic. Eager to ensure that no-one is suffering alone, Mike is including cards with the numbers on in the take-away and pre-packed shopping collections, so people know where to turn to in these unprecedented times.

To find out more about The Butchers Social and what it offers, call the team on 01564 792135 or visit www.thebutchers.social.

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Notes to editor:

- The Butchers Social began life in an old butchers' shop in Harborne. A one-off event soon turned into a nine-month venture due to the popularity of the food and the relaxed atmosphere.
- Mike Bullard and his team moved to Henley-in-Arden back in August 2016, serving up light bite lunches, delicious three course dinners, and traditional Sunday lunches.
- With a fully stocked bar, a gorgeous garden and a 60-cover restaurant, The Butchers Social has quickly become a foodie haven.