

Together

with
thirteen

Issue 4
Spring 2021

Cover story

Meet a Community Hero

Opening doors with
apprenticeships



Planting 100 trees



New developments



thirteen

Managing and building homes



Welcome from Val

Welcome to issue 4 of our customer magazine, Together.

I hope this finds you well as we continue to stay safe and work to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. It looks like there may be light at the end of the tunnel for us all, so thank you for your continued understanding as Thirteen has worked hard to support customers, while working safely and very differently, through this difficult time.

You can see a wonderful and uplifting example of the difference that's made when you read about two of the women that have stayed in our NIDAS domestic abuse refuge in Newcastle. I was also heartened to read about Gary, a customer that's found a lovely new home through My Thirteen.

There's also a whole new section that tells you what our involved customers have been working on. We're always looking for new customers to join us if you have time to spare.

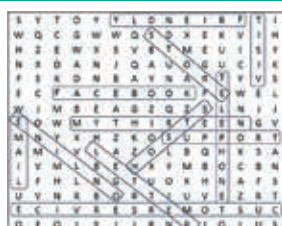
These are just a few examples of what you'll find in this issue, so grab a cuppa and enjoy a good read!

Val Scollen

Chair of the Customer Engagement Framework

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Wordsearch solution from issue 3 of Together



Congratulations to our winner, **R Atkins**, for identifying that the missing word was **'Touchpoints'**.

You'll find a new puzzle on page 18.



Opening doors with an apprenticeship

“Being a qualified apprentice can help to open lots of doors during your career.”

We supported National Apprenticeship Week in February by sharing stories from people across Thirteen who have benefited from going through an apprenticeship - 45 of them since 2015. Beth is one of them.

As a neighbourhood co-ordinator working in Hartlepool, Beth was already working for Thirteen. Along with a group of existing colleagues, she had the chance to take an apprenticeship to give her a formal qualification in housing. Beth completed the course with a distinction in December 2020.

“I was offered the chance to do the apprenticeship when I first started work at Thirteen,” Beth said. “I was really happy to do it as I didn’t have loads of experience of housing, and I wanted to better understand the theory behind the practical work that we do for our customers.

“There was a lot to learn about why we do the things we do, and it helped me to understand the context around policies and procedures, so it gave me a good grounding in the job.

“If someone’s thinking of doing an apprenticeship, I’d say definitely go for it. You need to be aware that it’s hard work, but being a qualified apprentice can help to open lots of doors during your career.”

Great opportunities

“Our apprenticeships offer a great opportunity to help people on their way to a bright future,” adds Heather Ashton, Thirteen’s executive director of business change and improvement. “Everyone at Thirteen is really supportive of the apprenticeship scheme and it’s brilliant to see someone working at Thirteen as an apprentice and building a successful career, no matter what their age or background.”

Our apprenticeship vacancies for a September start will be advertised in the summer. Keep an eye on social media and our website! www.thirteengroup.co.uk/jobs

Keeping quiet about money worries?



There's no doubt that times have been challenging for everyone this past year. So many things are unknown, but one thing's for sure. If you're worried about falling into debt we have friendly colleagues on hand to support you.

We can offer Thirteen customers confidential support on things like Universal Credit claims, benefits, budgeting and dealing with arrears. We can also signpost you to a wealth of support that's available from other organisations too, so please don't worry in silence.

Email us at customer.services@thirteengroup.co.uk or give us a call on 0300 111 1000 as a starting point.

Telephone payments are now even more secure

Did you know you can pay your rent through your My Thirteen account?

If you don't already have an account, just pop to **www.mythirteen.co.uk** and call us on **0300 111 1000** to activate, and enjoy peace of mind that you can manage your account wherever and whenever you want 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



Instead, once you've let the colleague know how much you want to pay, they'll ask you to use your telephone keypad to input the information that's needed including your card number, expiry date and three-digit security code.

You'll get a receipt once the transaction's completed and you'll be guided through the process at each stage in case you have any queries.

If you prefer to pay your rent over the phone, we've changed how we take those payments to make them even more secure.

Now when you call us on **0300 111 1000** to make a payment you won't be asked to read your debit or credit card details out loud.

There are lots of other ways to pay too, offering you as wide a choice as possible and you'll find them all here:

www.thirteengroup.co.uk/payingrent

Are you an EU citizen?

Did you know that if you're an EU, EEA or Swiss citizen, you and your family will need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme so that you can carry on living in the UK after the end of June this year? The deadline to apply is 30 June 2021. For a step-by-step guide and to get all the details of how to apply, visit

<https://www.gov.uk/eusettledstatus>

For a list of free advice agencies out there who can help you to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme if you need further support, visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-support-for-vulnerable-citizens>

Cover story: Michelle is a true community hero



We recently ran a competition to search for Thirteen customers within our communities that had shown real strength, compassion and community spirit in 2020. Maybe they'd rallied round their neighbours, helped reduce loneliness and isolation, supported with food, shopping, masks or generally being a strength within the community. Well, you certainly didn't disappoint with your wonderful nominations.

Angela Corner, head of community resilience at Thirteen, said: "This past year has obviously been really difficult for people everywhere and we were blown away by the nominations we had. It's clear that there are some very special people living in our communities!"

Three very worthy winners were given a shopping voucher to treat themselves and in this issue of Together, we'd like you to meet Michelle from Middlesbrough.

Michelle was nominated as a community hero by Claire, one of her neighbours. Claire said: "Michelle has gone well above and beyond for her community and surrounding area....and has been a true inspiration and rock for Middlesbrough.

"Not only does she volunteer with the White Feather Project; she also works with My Sisters Place volunteering in their charity shop. She does endless runs in aid of charity.

"She donates so much of her time and love to these charities and never asks for praise and reward. It would be lovely to see her get a little

recognition for all she does. I am proud to know her and proud to have her on our estate."

Michelle was bowled over when she found out she'd not only been nominated, but had won one of the prizes. "I've got two teenagers and I work as well, so I do this on my days off and on an evening. We do crisis care packs on a night, so I do that as well. Sometimes it can be 24/7.

"Everything I do, I do because I want to give back. So it was a bit overwhelming really, especially when I found out it was a neighbour that wrote in and nominated me."

The White Feather Project runs three community food hubs across Middlesbrough to support low income families and delivers emergency food care packages and offers lots of other services for those in need. Visit **www.whitefeatherproject.co.uk** to find out more about the charity's work.

Well done Michelle and thank you for all you're doing for your community. Look out for more community heroes in our next issue!

Support in your

NORTH ORMESBY

UNMASKED

Find out about what's available in your area including:

Join us for an online Zoom event:
4pm till 5pm on Tuesday
26 January 2021

WIN A FREE £20 Voucher
LOVE2SHOP just for being there!

Employment and volunteering

Money and benefits advice

Staying active

Fire safety

And lots more!

Book your place at: <https://bit.ly/2Xx2c6a>

You can get support to access Zoom at tel **01642 811400**
or email **communitylearning@mcls.ac.uk**

thirteen
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For more details, contact
Mark McGahern on 0300 111 1000.

Middlesbrough
moving forward

Foundation, Cleveland Fire Brigade and our very own employability team.

Thank you to everyone who got involved.

Mental health support

Throughout lockdown, there have been reports of increasing problems with many people's mental health. To help customers who might be facing any mental health issues, we've published a page of information on our website to give you details about the help available from a range of different organisations.

The Mind website (www.mind.org.uk) has some really useful details. On the NHS website you can even find a tool to assess your mood (www.nhs.uk) plus loads of other information about services you can access and practical tips.

There's help to be found from local charities and councils, too. On our website we've published links to the websites providing support for people with mental health needs.

If you're experiencing any mental health problems, head over to the new page on our website **www.thirteengroup.co.uk/MentalHealthSupport** for help available from us and other organisations.

Or simply scan the QR code below on your smartphone to go straight to the page.

We also offer support with circumstances that can give rise to mental health issues.

Visit **www.thirteengroup.co.uk** to find details about help with money and benefits, homelessness, domestic abuse, rent difficulties and finding jobs or training.



Zooming in North Ormesby

"I would just like to say a massive thank you for the Zoom, my first Zoom! Both me and my 16-year-old son found it very useful and will be taking up some opportunities."

This comment is from one of the people attending a special online Zoom event we hosted in January for people living in North Ormesby. Over 50 people logged-on to connect with each other at the unique virtual market stall event where organisations showed people what services they offer and how to access them.

The pandemic has meant being unable to provide face-to-face community events, so 18 organisations took part including Middlesbrough Council, Middlesbrough Community Learning, Big Local, the Citizens Advice Bureau, MFC

communities

COVID-19 support in your community

While some lockdown restrictions are starting to be lifted in the coming weeks and months, we know that you might still need information and support to do with the COVID-19 pandemic. We have a dedicated page on our website that's updated whenever there are any changes to our services that you need to know about, plus general advice around the virus, frequently asked questions and support you can find in your community. For more details, visit **www.thirteengroup.co.uk/covid19**

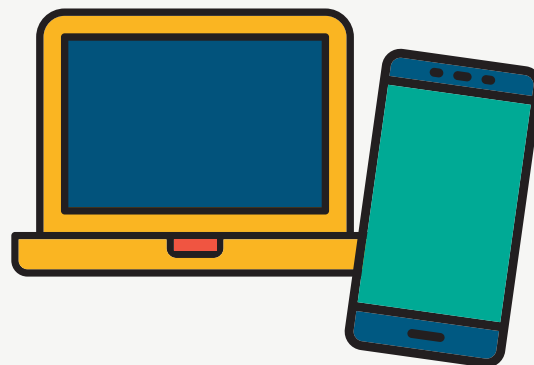
Getting connected through IT

Over the past few months, many parents have had to help their kids with home-schooling, which was especially tough if the right computer equipment wasn't available at home. That's why we worked with a number of organisations to help people get better access to IT kit. We provided £20,000 to Middlesbrough Council's project to make sure every child has access to an internet device.

"We know how tough it's been for families to home-school, and it was made even harder for those that don't have the right IT equipment. This project made a valuable contribution to families in the area." said Val Scollen, chair of Thirteen's involved customers group.

We've also worked with housing developer Countryside to provide £5,000 for the Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation's digital poverty project. Our community fund gave the Hope Foundation £10,000 to help develop an online system enabling organisations to donate and recycle IT kit for people unable to buy.

Proceeds from the IT equipment which we don't use anymore at Thirteen has also generated £4,600 for the Hope Foundation, and the sale of PC monitors to our own colleagues has raised almost £950 for Zoe's Place baby hospice.



Keeping safe online

While we've been spending more time at home and doing more things online, cyber criminals have been trying to cash in by gaining access to your personal and/or financial information.

Watch out for online scams around the pandemic, such as messages demanding you pay fines for breaking the rules while we were in full lockdown or saying you can apply early for a COVID-19 vaccine, then asking you to click on a link or provide information such as your name, credit card or bank details.

Many scams can be very convincing, so please take extra care if you get any messages that ask you to provide personal or financial information.

Important reminder

If we contact you by email, phone or text we'll never ask you for a username or password. If anyone rings saying they're from Thirteen and asks you for passwords or any other personal information, don't give these details. If you call us, we'll always take you through a number of security questions to make sure we're talking to the right person about your issue.

Most emails from us will come from a 'thirteengroup.co.uk' email address. If you're ever in doubt about an email or any other contact, please call the touchpoint service centre on **0300 111 1000** to verify it.



Around 12,500 of our customers in Middlesbrough are set to benefit from the fastest and most reliable digital connectivity available - thanks to a partnership with CityFibre, the UK's third national digital infrastructure platform.

Through the partnership, CityFibre will ensure its full fibre network rollout reaches every Thirteen property in the town via a blanket wayleave agreement. Once complete, customers will be able to benefit from full fibre connectivity, which, currently, less than 20% of UK households can enjoy.

The project will continue over a number of years and will extend beyond Middlesbrough to give customers access to full fibre services in Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton, Hartlepool and surrounding areas across the North East, including Newcastle and Gateshead.

Full fibre is seen as the best in connectivity for its speed, near unlimited bandwidth and reliability and users will be offered a broadband service capable of Gigabit speeds (1,000 Mbps).

Steph Carter-Smith, CityFibre's City Manager for Middlesbrough said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has proven just how vital connectivity is and so we are committed to addressing the need for better infrastructure, while also ensuring nobody is left behind.

"This agreement will make a genuine difference to Thirteen customers in Middlesbrough by ensuring they too can access Full Fibre services as they go live across their neighbourhood."

More reliable connectivity allows customers to benefit from better home working, learning and entertainment experiences. CityFibre's full fibre network is also future-proof, meaning that its capacity can be increased as data needs grow.

Helen Ivison, Thirteen's Infrastructure Project Lead, added: "We're delighted to be working in partnership with CityFibre to give thousands of our customers the opportunity to sign up to Gigabit-speed broadband.

"We're all using technology much more these days in our daily lives, at home, work and school. We also recognise how an improved digital experience can benefit the customer journey and that's why at Thirteen, we've created MyThirteen, which provides customers with a convenient way to find and manage their home online, all in one place.

"We have no doubt that this exciting project will make a real difference to our customers now and those we attract in the future and we look forward to continuing this partnership as CityFibre's build enters the surrounding towns and cities."

Residents interested in connecting to full fibre broadband can pre-register their interest at **cityfibre.com/residential** and they will receive information when services are available.



“This is more than just a house...it's a home”

When Gary found himself having to stay with friends, he was desperate to find a place of his own.

Gary contacted his neighbourhood co-ordinator, Lisa, and she recommended that he registered with My Thirteen. Gary said: “Lisa was so helpful and it was really easy to activate my account. I work full-time, so I liked the fact that I could log in on an evening to manage my account and search for a home.”

He needed a home with two bedrooms so that he had enough space for his children to come and stay, and through My Thirteen he found the perfect place.

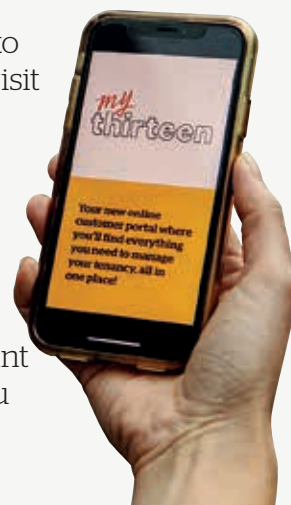
“I was successful in getting the house I applied for and I'm properly settled in now” said Gary. “This is more than just a house. It's a home that's given me and my children a lovely, relaxed environment. Just before Christmas I also got a call to say I was one of the winners of the My Thirteen prize draw,

which was a lovely surprise to end the year! I can't fault my experience and would recommend My Thirteen to anyone.”

Everything in one place

As Gary says, it's really easy to activate your account - just visit **www.mythirteen.co.uk**

With My Thirteen, you can search for a home, check your balance, pay your rent and update account details, enjoying peace of mind that you can manage your account wherever and whenever you want 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



Could you be a priority customer for your gas supply?

Some Northern Gas Networks' customers need extra support if there's an unexpected interruption to their gas supply.

If you have a disability or illness which means you might struggle without your gas supply, even for a few hours, it's a good idea to get added to your gas supplier's Priority Services Register.

If you've got an elderly or vulnerable neighbour or relative who you think might benefit from this service, why not make them aware of it too?

Find out more by visiting **www.northerngasnetworks.co.uk/network-supply/priority-customers/** or by scanning the QR code above.



TAKE CONTROL₂

save money and help the environment

You'll be surprised at the big impact small changes to your energy use can make

Did you know around 34% of the UK's carbon emissions come not from traffic, not from industry, but from our homes? That's why as part of our **Take Control** campaign, we're encouraging everyone to make better choices and reduce this negative impact on the environment.

It could just be by making small changes in our daily habits. It could be making bigger investments in appliances and systems. There's a double benefit to taking more control of your household energy. It can not only help the environment, but also reduce your energy bills.

Green renewable energy

As well as helping the environment, switching to renewable energy can save you money. Hundreds of Thirteen customers are already benefitting from green, cost effective heating systems in their homes, with renewable air source heat pumps being used to fuel the heating and hot water, instead of a traditional boiler.

As we work to achieve our goals to becoming a much greener organisation, we're continuing to provide more efficient ways of keeping our customer's heating bills as low as possible and reducing our environmental impact.

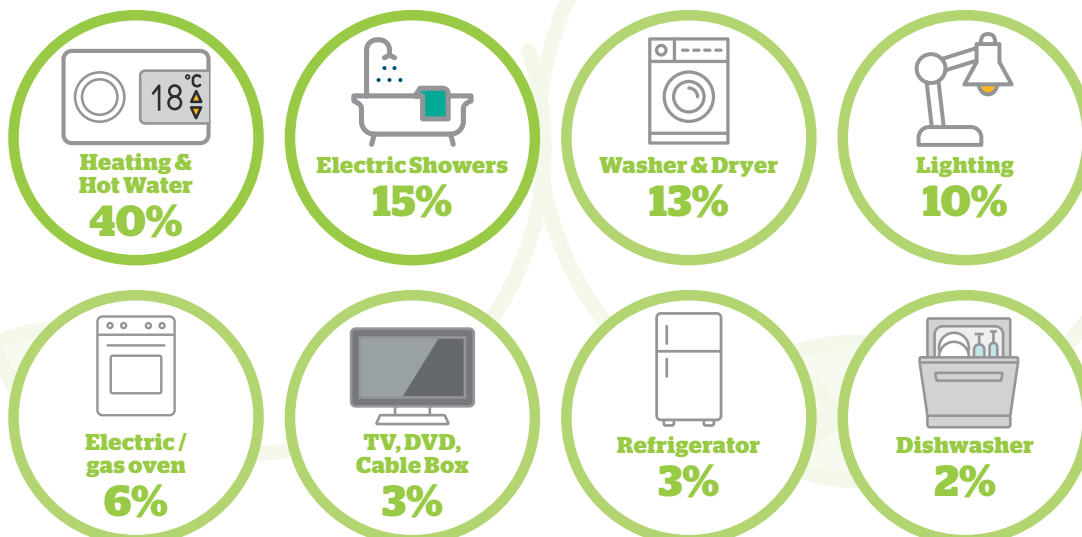
Quick tips to save on energy

- Pull the plug when devices are not in use and don't leave them on standby
- Get a smart meter to track your energy usage
- Turn off the lights when you leave the room
- Use LED lights and energy saving bulbs
- Check your appliances - old and inefficient ones may use too much power
- Only fill the kettle with the amount of water that you need
- Keep the thermostat at a low temperature.

For more top tips visit **www.energysavingtrust.org.uk** and to read about our Take Control campaign visit **www.thirteengroup.co.uk/takecontrol**

Be clever about what uses energy in your home

Look at this list of what uses the most energy in your home, and see where you can be clever about making savings.









How planting 100 trees will bear fruit for Boro's birds, bees and beings

To mark National Tree Week, children at Pennyman Primary School in Netherfields, Middlesbrough got their hands dirty and joined Thirteen and Middlesbrough Council to help plant the first of 100 fruit trees.

Thirteen is working with Middlesbrough Council in a partnership project to improve the environment across the town to benefit local communities by planting cherry, plum, apple and pear trees.

The first trees were planted, during the UK's largest annual tree celebration - National Tree Week. The trees only need limited maintenance and will form lovely mini orchards.

They'll begin to bear fruit in more ways than one. They will:

-  help to bring communal land back to life
-  provide fresh fruit for the community
-  create greener neighbourhoods for residents to take pride in
-  become part of a change which will attract many more people to live in the town.

Like many projects that we're working on together with residents' groups, it's about giving something back to the community.

Valuable lesson

"Learning about the environment, why trees are so important is such a valuable lesson for children and their families," said Thirteen's environmental specialist John Woods. "Trees are the most effective natural way of helping to remove greenhouse gases. In the green areas we manage, we want to increase biodiversity to support and protect the natural habitats of birds, bees and insects."

Mayor of Middlesbrough Andy Preston added: "This is just one location in Middlesbrough which will benefit from the project. This is a fantastic project. It will help to reconnect children with nature - great for mental health, great for the environment."

Executive member for communities and education at Middlesbrough Council, Mieka Smiles agreed: "It's educational for the children, teaching them where their food comes from and it's going to be lovely if they're hungry and want a healthy snack, they can pick their own fruit."

Come on a whistle-stop tour of some of our latest developments!



Gresham **The green light for heart-of town-living**

We're building 145 beautiful new homes at Gresham in Middlesbrough, with strong access links to the town centre and within walking distance of lots of key amenities.

This mix of different property types - two, three and four-bedroom houses plus apartments, and bungalows - will help address the demand for affordable housing in Middlesbrough and create a legacy for years to come.

We're expecting the first of the new homes to be available to rent by summer 2022.



Scholars Field **Bringing back the bungalow**

Bungalows are popular but often hard to find. That's why work underway at Scholars Field, Brierton Lane in Hartlepool is especially welcome. These 81 innovative and sure to be sought-after two and three-bedroom bungalows have been specifically designed to promote independent living for over-55s and those with mobility issues.

The initial work on these contemporary style new homes has been really well-received and will be a much-welcomed addition to the town when they become available in summer 2021.

Are you looking for a bungalow? **Have you considered Shared Ownership?**

Thirteen has brand new bungalows available with Shared Ownership - another way to buy your own home. You buy a percentage and pay rent on the rest, which Thirteen owns.

You live there, you decorate it and you decide when to sell. Buying a percentage means it's a more affordable way to get on the property ladder and your share is based on your personal financial circumstances.

Scholars Field, Hartlepool

from **£35,000** for a 25% share

Bracken Grange, Middlesbrough

from **£36,250** for a 25% share

To find out more about how Shared Ownership could work for you or our available bungalows, contact our Sales Team today

☎ 01642 947070

✉ sales@thirteengroup.co.uk





Roworth Road

A constructive partnership

This fantastic housing and regeneration project of 89 new homes off Cargo Fleet Lane in Middlesbrough is the first we've delivered in partnership with Gus Robinson Developments Ltd since the Hartlepool firm joined Thirteen.

Providing 57 two and three bedroomed houses and 32 two and three bedroomed bungalows for affordable rent, this significant development for the town has also received funding support from Homes England.



Bracken Grange

Building homes and partnerships

We're delighted to be working in partnership with Vistry Partnerships North, the housing and regeneration specialist, which is building 350 new homes in a £62 million development on a 29-acre site, close to James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough.

Supported by grant funding from Homes England, Thirteen is taking 100 of these homes; 78 for affordable rent and 22 for Shared Ownership. Sigma Capital, which specialises in homes for private rent, will offer 80. The other 170 homes will be available for outright sale through Vistry's housebuilding division, Linden Homes.

Last year we were pleased to be named a strategic partner by Homes England, one of only two housing associations in the North East. This means we can build more affordable homes and the Bracken Grange development is the first to benefit.



Newholm Court

Factory-built in Yorkshire to be occupied in Hartlepool

The final stage of a revolutionary housing scheme in Hartlepool is underway. The development at Newholm Court features houses for affordable rent. Remarkably, they've been manufactured off-site in a controlled factory environment by ilke Homes in Yorkshire. They were then transported to the Hartlepool site where they're being completed.

The scheme includes 31 modular homes, a mix of two and three-bedroom properties, all highly energy efficient. As well as providing Hartlepool with much-needed homes, this pioneering scheme has also brought additional investment and jobs.



South Bank

Supporting independent living

Work is underway in South Bank to build 28 new bungalows. The affordable new homes will improve the Redcar Road area of South Bank and complement the design of the popular South Bank Eco Village.

These bungalows, which will help us meet the needs of our ageing population and support people to live independently, should be available to rent in spring 2022.

To find out more about any of the schemes on these pages, visit www.thirteengroup.co.uk or keep your eye on social media.

With Thirteen Academy you could take the leap like Lindsey

A Thirteen Academy scholarship covering course fees at Teesside University is a fantastic opportunity for those who live in a Thirteen home and are on a low income - as Lindsey discovered.

"I've lived in my Thirteen home in Stockton for nearly eight years, and now I'm studying Psychology at Teesside University. I had wanted to further my education and career for some time, and hearing about the opportunity that Thirteen was offering just added to my determination to go to university.

"So in 2019 after some tough times I decided it was the right time and took that leap for myself and my family. When I found out I had been awarded a scholarship, I was really proud of myself. That in itself was an achievement, even before passing anything at university, and only confirmed I had made the right decision.

"I was still working a lot at the time I completed a foundation year, but I decided to scale back on that for my first year of the degree. Little did I know what was ahead with the situation we find ourselves in now. This first term took some getting used to.

"Winning the scholarship through Thirteen also takes some of the financial burden of the future off my shoulders, knowing that I won't have so much to pay back once I leave university. It has made a massive difference."

Scholarships are now open

Undergraduate courses we're supporting include:

School of Health & Life Sciences

Any nursing, midwifery or health profession programme, health science or food and nutrition programme.

School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Law Any social work programme or education, early childhood and youth programme.

Teesside University Business School

Any accountancy, marketing and enterprise programme.

The application deadline date is 31 May 2021. To apply please visit

www.tees.ac.uk/sections/fulltime/scholarships_thirteen.cfm

If you you'd like to find out more about Thirteen Academy, please call Thirteen's governance support team on **0300 111 1000** or email **governance.compliance@thirteengroup.co.uk**

Thirteen Academy

thirteen
Managing and building homes

U Teesside
University

Helping you stay safe



Your safety is our first priority and we carry out your annual gas safety check to keep you and your family safe and spot any issues you might not be aware of.

Every five years, we also carry out an electrical safety check to make sure the mains electrics in your home are safe and meet the legal requirements. This check is able to detect any faults which could cause a serious injury or a fire in your home.

In this era of social distancing and PPE, safety has never been a bigger priority. While the national restrictions due to the pandemic are easing, we want to reassure you that anyone carrying out work in your home will be following the very latest health and safety guidance at all times.

If we contact you about gas or electrical safety checks and you're self-isolating or shielding, don't worry. Please get in touch so we can work together and plan to carry out the checks when it's safe for both you and our colleagues.

This weekly test could save lives

Checking your smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms is down to you and it's important to check them every week. Alarms save lives. In the event of a fire or carbon monoxide incident, they can give you valuable time to escape and call 999 if it's an emergency.

Only an alarm can reliably detect carbon monoxide. That's because this highly poisonous gas has no colour, taste or smell and can be produced by appliances that use wood, gas, oil or coal.

How to test your alarm

Find the test button on your detector, usually next to an LED light that flashes. Press the button. If the detector is working, the alarm should sound for three to five seconds before automatically turning off. This will be pretty loud, so you might want to cover or plug your ears.

Top tips to keep you and your family safe

- ✓ Set a reminder in your diary or on your phone - make weekly testing of your smoke and CO alarm part of your routine
- ✗ Whatever happens - never remove a battery out of an alarm
- ✓ Make sure everyone in your home knows what to do in the event of an emergency
- ✓ Recognise the six signs of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning - headaches, dizziness, breathlessness, nausea, collapse and loss of consciousness
- ✓ Unsafe gas appliances can put you at risk of CO poisoning, gas leaks, fires and explosions. If you smell gas, think you have a gas leak or are worried that fumes containing carbon monoxide are escaping please call the free Gas Emergency Services emergency line immediately on **0800 111 999**
- ✓ If you haven't had your annual gas safe check carried out and have an outstanding appointment, please contact us at **customerservices@thirteengroup.co.uk** or **0300 111 1000**



Life in a refuge during a pandemic

Warning: contains sensitive content

Needing a refuge from domestic abuse is tough enough, but what's life like in these toughest of times? Vicky Johnson, a Thirteen support service co-ordinator, gives us a glimpse inside our Newcastle Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) refuge where over 50 women have stayed since the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020.

We know that times have been tough for everyone living through the pandemic, so we've worked extra-hard to make time in the refuge as positive as possible for everyone that stays there.

Because face-to-face group activities weren't possible, our dedicated colleagues have been giving support over the phone to help the women and their children from becoming lonely and isolated.

To ease their move into the refuge, we provide families with soft furnishings, welcome packs and food hampers, thanks to grant funding. At Christmas, donations from the local community meant gifts for the women and children, and a few luxuries too, so that they could still celebrate.

"Knowing that I will wake up to a message from someone who cares, and is asking me how I'm doing, means a lot," said Linda**, one of the women staying with us.

"I've had a lovely time knowing that I'm in a safe place. The COVID-19 restrictions have been hard... but we feel so blessed and special in NIDAS.

"Being in a refuge has helped a lot knowing that me and my child are very safe, I've been going through a lot but it's all settling down now. My plan for the future is taking good care of my daughter. I'm all she has and she's looking up to me. I'll do my best to give her all the best."

Amy moves on

Amy** entered the refuge during the pandemic, fleeing her ex-partner. The NIDAS team made it possible for her children to visit and sometimes stay overnight, and she was able to carry on working part-time.

Then she contracted COVID-19. She had to self-isolate in the refuge for two weeks. We kept in daily contact to check her symptoms, her mental health, basic needs and general wellbeing. As well as shopping for essentials, colleagues lifted her spirits with new pyjamas, underwear and clothes as she couldn't use the shared laundry areas.

Following her recovery, Amy left the refuge and moved into a three-bedroom new-build home. Not only did she gain so much confidence and improved self-esteem from staying with us, but she's been properly reunited with her children who now live with her.

NIDAS continued to offer support as part of Amy's resettlement plan with grant applications for redecorating her new home and donations of duvets, bedding and soft furnishings.

Staying positive

We also offer outreach support and so far during the pandemic, have had over 220 referrals. We've delivered our 'new beginnings' awareness and recovery programme virtually, so much-needed work could carry on.

And what about Linda? She's planning to start college to study health and social care, because she wants to give back "all the care and love you guys showed me".

**We've changed names for privacy reasons

Supporting local businesses 'seams' a perfect way to help you too!



Lisa (right) from Elizabeth's Embroidery with Nathan Butler (left)

At Thirteen, we work with lots of local businesses to help find them the right candidates for their vacancies. One of these is local family-run business, Elizabeth's Embroidery, based in Stockton. Established in 1990, the firm supplies more than 150 schools and many local businesses with branded clothing.

Our employer engagement team held a virtual meeting with the company and matched Robyn, a 17-year-old college student looking for part-time work, into a role there as a retail assistant. With the team's support, Robyn got the job after her first ever interview!

Lisa Halligan, partner at Elizabeth's Embroidery, said: "I'm over the moon that the team at Thirteen managed to quickly find a candidate that was a superb fit for our business and we're really pleased.

"We've had to change our business model since the first lockdown and have been using Zoom for parents to speak to us to make sure they order the right sizes of uniform for their children. While our high street store has been closed, our manufacturing unit has stayed open so we've still been able to trade and support parents and other businesses.

"When the Prime Minister made the announcement about schools returning on 8 March, we had more orders overnight than we'd had in the previous three months. Robyn has excelled in her role and already made a huge impact, helping with the massive team effort to fulfil those orders."

Nathan Butler, employer engagement officer at Thirteen said: "We love working with customers and local employers and feel a great sense of pride when we're able to match the right person with the right role. If you'd like some free support as a customer or local business, please do get in touch."

Could this be you?

Do you run a local business and want free support to find you the right candidates?

Maybe you're a customer that's worried about job security, or have lost your job?

Perhaps your hours have been cut, or you're looking for an extra part-time role like Robyn.

Whatever your circumstances, drop the team an email at **employability@thirteengroup.co.uk** or call them on **01642 947840** to find out more.

Or you can fill in a self-referral form if you visit **www.thirteengroup.co.uk/page/employment-support**

Competition time!



★ Thank you to the hundreds of you that took the time to enter our Issue 3 wordsearch. The missing word was, of course, 'Touchpoints'. The full solution is on page 2. ★

Take a look at the feature on the page opposite this one, to get a real feel for this fun competition! All-but-one of the words listed below are hidden in this wordsearch, but can you find out which one's missing? There's a £50 shopping voucher up for grabs! All of them are connected in some way to **BRICKS**, our customer involvement framework. Words may be forwards, backwards, upwards, downwards or even diagonal! They may overlap too.

BUILD	REVIEW
INTERACT	CONSULT
KNOWLEDGE	SHARE
ACCOUNTABLE	VOICE
LISTENING	CUSTOMERS
DIVERSITY	EMPOWERMENT
COMMUNITY	RESPECTFUL
SUPPORT	INVOLVEMENT



To enter, all you have to do is solve the wordsearch and tell us which word is missing from the grid. You can then either email us at **communications@thirteengroup.co.uk** with the answer, or post it to: **Together magazine, Thirteen, 2 Hudson Quay, Windward Way, Middlesbrough, TS21QG**

Entries close on Friday 28 May 2021. One winner with the correct answer will be chosen in a random draw and notified within 28 days of the closing date.

The missing word is: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address or mobile number: _____

YOU'VE GOT TO BE IN TO WIN!



Make sure you're home for your planned repairs, gas or electrical safety check appointments and you'll be entered into our monthly prize draw to win a

£500 Shopping Voucher



Be more than just a customer; be an influencer

Did you know you can influence change for the better, by making your views felt with Thirteen?

We really do want your involvement, so we've designed a framework to make it happen. It's called BRICKS and it sets out ways for you to help make a difference.

- **B**uild relationships
- **R**evise services
- **I**nteract with all areas of our business
- **C**onsult with customers and stakeholders
- **K**nowledge gained and shared
- **S**hare findings and recommendations

Below is a snapshot of just some of the things our valued customers have been involved with recently.

Community Fund

Lots of great causes apply to the Community Fund, and every few weeks there's a meeting, which includes customers, to choose which to fund. To date we've funded 56 applications totalling £84,576.50. Recent ones include The White Feather Project, providing emergency food and care packages across Teesside; Green Sky Fitness for a project helping people with Parkinson's; Bright Minds Big Futures for their refill and reuse environmental campaign.

Why 'Together with Tenants' means together with you

Together with Tenants is a National Housing Federation initiative focusing on strengthening the relationship between residents and housing association landlords.

Thirteen is proud to be one of 130 early-adopters who've been working with residents to develop a four point plan for greater accountability. Thirteen and the other housing associations have agreed on six commitments for relationships, communication, voice and influence, accountability, quality and what to do when things go wrong.

Our BRICKS framework allows residents to scrutinise services and performance at all

Projects

Repairs and maintenance project After a presentation of the customer services nine-point action plan, involved customers were consulted with on days and hours of repairs, and customers' own responsibilities in their homes. We're now developing a project plan and will meet again soon.

Community resilience This is a brand-new service to aid communities to withstand pressures and come out stronger. We'd like to recruit a customer community resilience champion to come to meetings and help to make presentations internally and externally with the head of community resilience.

Performance monitoring

We hold quarterly meetings to monitor performance at Thirteen. This has recently included discussing repairs and voids and the measures in place to further improve these services. We've also looked at the new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and how Thirteen is making improvements to how it deals with complaints.

This isn't even everything! There's so much great work you could be involved with. We'll focus on our other three project streams in the next issue.



levels, consult on policy and strategy development and ensure compliance. Each of the framework's streams of work is led by an involved customer to help make sure work is completed on time and customer findings and recommendations are heard at Board level.

Get involved

If you're interested in anything on this page, our customer engagement team is as ready as ever to hear from you. Simply email customer.engagement@thirteengroup.co.uk to find out more.

Got a query?

my
thirteen

Manage your account whenever you want, wherever you are, 24/7 with My Thirteen. Just visit **www.mythirteen.co.uk** to activate your account.

Alternatively, you can contact us on:

-  **www.thirteengroup.co.uk**
-  **customerservices@thirteengroup.co.uk**
-  **0300 111 1000 from 8am to 7pm**

COVID-19 latest updates

For the latest updates on our response to the ongoing pandemic, please click on 'COVID-19 Coronavirus update' on the homepage of our website: **www.thirteengroup.co.uk/covid19**



This is updated regularly and has FAQs on our services, information on scams to be aware of, links to support in local communities and lots of other helpful information.



You never know what's going on behind closed doors

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone. It isn't just physical and it doesn't just happen to women. We offer a range of support for customers that are experiencing domestic abuse so please don't suffer in silence. There are lots of ways you can get in touch.

- Speak to a Thirteen colleague at your scheme in complete confidence.
- Call **0300 111 1000**
- Call or text **07464 655 582**
24 hours a day, 7 days a week and someone from our tenancy support team will respond during working hours.
- Scan the **QR code** to go to our website.



See it - report it

We want everyone to help make their community a better place to live, so if you see it - please report it.

Fly-tipping is a crime, it's dangerous and irresponsible.

Help us to help you by reporting fly-tipping.

You can do this anonymously at **www.thirteengroup.co.uk/flytipping** or call **0300 111 1000** and ask to speak to a member of the estate services team.

thirteen

Managing and building homes