

Knitters use their wool power to mark Metro's 40th year

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A community group has joined forces in lockdown to knit a special birthday tribute to the Tyne and Wear Metro.

The knitters, from North Tyneside, took up their needles and wool to create a colourful 12ft Metro carriage, piece by piece – celebrating the network's 40th anniversary.

More than 30 volunteers worked on each individual piece, before it was carefully sewn together by local artist Kelly Sheridan.

Whitley Bay Big Local's Community Development worker, Sarah Sutton, directed the Stakeholder Relations Team at Nexus, to the Knit and Natter Group to undertake the project, which has culminated with their woollen wonder going on public display at the art gallery in Tynemouth Metro station.

"I knew that our knitters would love this challenge. They love to use their skills to support local efforts," said Sarah, who set up the Whitley Bay based Knit and Natter group five years ago.

Nexus said that the finished work was a wonderful tribute to Metro's 40 years. It was one of only a few anniversary events to come to fruition due to lockdown.

Customer Services Director, Huw Lewis, said: "This is a fantastic community project that celebrates Metro's 40th year in a really fun and creative way.

"Metro is part of everyday life in the communities that it serves, so it's great to see a local group coming together to showcase their talents, despite all of the challenges posed by lockdown. It stemmed from an idea from one of our Stakeholder Relations Officer's who heard about Knit and Natter and thought it would be great if the group could work together to knit a train.

"Our iconic Metro train has been so carefully recreated in wool by a group of knitters who have had to rely on meeting up over Zoom calls during the pandemic. My congratulations go to everyone involved in producing such a wonderful tribute to Metro's proud heritage.

"It's fitting that we have been able to display the finished knit in the gallery at Tynemouth station for people to be able to see it for themselves as they pass through."

The Knit and Natter group, who have been meeting up on Zoom during lockdown, were determined to make the project a success after they were approached by Nexus.

But it was going to be a huge undertaking so they enlisted the help of Barbara Lowe, a local knitting expert and owner of Ring-a-Rosie wool and crafts shop in Whitley Bay to create the pattern, order in the wool, and co-ordinate the allocation of packs to local knitters.

Over 30 local people collected packs to take home to create one of the many panels that would be joined to create the knitted Metro, complete with its iconic colour schemes from the dawn of the years.

Local Artist Kelly Sheridan came into to pull the project together as part of Whitley Bay Big Local's Creative Civic Change project. Kelly joined all of the panels together, backing them on felt and creating the lettering using a range of needlework techniques. Wendy Helps, another Whitley Bay Artist working with the Creative Civic Change project was drafted in to install the Metro and additional adornments in the station for the launch.

Kelly said: "One of the great things about this project is the community effort that went into it. Each panel is slightly different, showing the individuality of each knitter. Some contributors knitted, crocheted or French knitted meters and meters of black piping which became the rubber seals around the doors and windows.

"It's been a great effort, bringing local people together in a creative way during lockdown."

Photo credit: Tyne and Wear