



Alex Brown with partner Jane Dawson at Fine Studios

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Undergraduate Champions the Healing Art of Entrepreneurship

A Northumbria University business student motivated by family illness is striving to improve the lives of those affected by debilitating conditions by using the power of art.

Alex Brown from Morpeth has launched “*Art for the Brain*” to help those who suffer from dementia. The 20-year-old has also received a generous £1,000 grant from locally based charity The Greggs Foundation to help build his business.

Alex is currently an undergraduate on the Entrepreneurial Business Management (EBM) course at Newcastle Business School, where students learn by setting up and running their own businesses. As part of the course, Alex began to consider possible ideas and was soon seeking inspiration from his personal experiences.

He said: “Every project must start with an idea. I was thinking about what was important and what most mattered to me in my life. My gran had recently been diagnosed with dementia and I was becoming increasingly aware of the unique and difficult challenges that this was presenting, not just for my gran but for all of us close to her.”

For sufferers of dementia and other conditions, which can influence mood and behaviour, social interaction can become problematic. Yet social activity is also a key factor in reducing feelings of stress and isolation in those living with such serious health problems. Alex’s idea was for art classes to provide the tools and space for dementia sufferers and their loved ones and carers to express themselves freely in ways they may have felt unable to before. At a Dementia Friends event, Alex met Doctor of Psychology and former Northumbria University Postgraduate Student, Jane Dawson, who also had a studio. They became business partners and have now launched ‘Art for the Brain’.

As a team, they started to plan the first classes and Alex began seeking funding to help make the idea a reality. The Greggs Foundation, a grant making charity which improves the quality of life in local communities, were the first supporters of ‘Art for the Brain’ and were instrumental both in helping to get the initiative launch and in securing a starter series of classes. The first classes are underway for those affected by dementia and traumatic brain injury and are well attended. However, Alex is already looking to progress the idea further.

He added: “You can see some similarities between the two conditions; dementia and brain injury, but they are fundamentally different at their core and they would be best served by separate classes. Similarly, from seeing the results we are getting we believe that the classes can provide a valuable form of escape and therapy for many more patients, such as those affected by stroke and trauma. We are now fundraising with a long-term aim to develop tailored classes for different conditions, running every day of the week to help even more people.”

The dedicated team of founders and volunteers of 'Art for the Brain' are now working hard to reach their next funding goal by tackling the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge.

Kellie Forbes-Simpson, Lecturer in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship at Newcastle Business School, has coached on the EBM course for two years. She said: "Everyone involved in the EBM course is phenomenally proud of Alex's progress so far. We see Alex as an outstanding example, not only as one of our students and what they can achieve, but of how entrepreneurship is about more than just making lots of money; it can address serious societal issues and support those in greatest need."

The Entrepreneurial Business Management (EBM) course at Northumbria University is ideal for students who are keen to start and run their own business or businesses. The programme is based on a Finnish model of education, called Team Academy, and Northumbria was one of three UK universities to pioneer this approach in the UK.

You can learn more about available courses, including the EBM course, at www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria

If you would like to support Alex and his colleagues in their fundraising please visit their gofundme page at www.gofundme.com/trecking. Find out more about 'Art for the Brain' on Facebook at the Fine Studios at Fine House Farm page, under 'events' or call 07738 803418. Classes are held at Fine Studios, Kiln Pit Hill, Durham.

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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