# Bright young business brains bring ideas to life

**Friday 17 July, 2026**

Young Cumbrian entrepreneurs showed off their innovative business ideas, from AI virtual assistants to African food, at two celebration events this week.

Fifteen young people from Furness and West Cumbria aged 14 to 25 were selected to take part in the Positive Enterprise programme back in January.

The programme, developed and run by Cumbria Community Foundation and the Centre for Leadership Performance (CforLP), helps young people go into business.

Participants were each given a £1,000 grant at the start of this year to launch or develop their own business. Their innovative ideas ranged from pet photography and a mobile make-up service, to fragrances capturing the smells of Cumbria and a gutter cleaning business.

They all received six months of mentoring from an experienced local businessperson, and skills and leadership development opportunities from CforLP.

Celebration events were held this week at the Carnegie Theatre in Workington and The Bridge in Barrow, where the young people gave a presentation about their business, explaining where their idea had come from, and talking through the successes and challenges they had faced.

Two from each area were chosen by the judges to receive a further cash injection into their business.

Impressing them most from the West Cumbria cohort was Maria Ferreira, 21, of Workington, who refurbishes and reupholsters furniture through her business Ferrocious Furniture. She received an additional £1,000 in funding which she plans to spend on running workshops to teach others how to upcycle and breathe new life into old items.

“I want to show people that you can find pieces in your home that you can give a new lease of life to, rather than just throwing them away,” she explained. “Sometimes it feels like there aren’t many career opportunities or creative outlets for people in places like Workington. I want to show people that you can do it if you try. This is something I want to do for the rest of my life as a business.”

Maria was mentored by Rachel Stewart, who has now volunteered her time and expertise on the programme for three years. “It has been great,” she said. “My friend is an upholsterer, and my dad restores furniture too, so Maria has been able to learn from them too. It has been a real team effort. I’m so proud of her.”

Runner-up was 20-year-old Holly Chamberlain of Cockermouth, who received an additional £500 towards her business Un Petit Rêve – a sewing and knitting pattern studio. Holly designs, makes and sells clothes, patterns, and knitted items, and runs workshops so others can do the same.

This is the fourth year of the Positive Enterprise programme, which was funded in West Cumbria this year by Sellafield Ltd, through the Transforming West Cumbria programme, Thomas Graham & Sons Ltd, the Printers Inc Social Mobility Fund, and a private donor.

Stuart McCourt, Senior Social Impact Manager at Sellafield Ltd, said: “We were delighted to support Positive Enterprise for the fourth year running through our SiX social impact, multiplied programme. Very well done to all of the participants, it is really inspiring to see how they have taken an idea and developed that through into reality. It’s fantastic to hear about their progress on the programme and I’m excited to see them take their next steps.

“Whatever the future holds for them, I’m sure the skills that the participants have gained and the network they have built will help them enormously. Positive Enterprise is a real team effort between the participants, delivery partners, business mentors and funders and shows what can be achieved when we work together.”

Positive Enterprise ran for the first time in the Furness area this year, funded by the Printers Inc Social Mobility Fund and individual donor Jan Ambler.

Travis Drake, 25, of Barrow, was chosen by the judges to receive an additional £1,000 grant towards his

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business Buzz Trackers – a device to help people find items they have mislaid, such as TV remote controls. He was mentored by James Batchelor.

Travis said: “The funding from Positive Enterprise really did help but the best thing has been the people I’ve met along the journey. James has been a great mentor throughout, helping me think outside the box and try new ideas.”

Runner-up for Furness was Rukky Jokoh, 18, with her Nigerian food business Rukky’s Naija Hub. She said: “The programme has helped me turn a passion into a sustainable business, bringing authentic Nigerian food to more people.”

The programme is delivered by the Centre for Leadership Performance. Executive Director Catherine Eve said: "Positive Enterprise goes from strength to strength. The ideas, energy and creativity of the participants this year was next level and we are confident they all have very bright futures ahead of them.

“The programme has given these young people invaluable help from their mentors, practical workshops and a tailored programme of support, enabling them to develop key employability and entrepreneurial skills such as negotiation, time management, and business knowledge.”

Annalee Holliday, Head of Grants Practice & Programmes at Cumbria Community Foundation, said: “Thank you to all of the mentors who give up their time and the donors who have funded this truly transformational programme, which will no doubt have a lasting effect on the young people involved throughout their careers.”

Applications for Positive Enterprise 2027 will open later this year but anyone keen to be involved as a participant or mentor can register their interest now by emailing grants@cumbriafoundation.org.

For more information visit www.cumbriafoundation.org/transforming-west-cumbria/positive-enterprise/

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