

Newcastle paraplanner scales Kilimanjaro to help charity and colleague's dreams of independence

Monday August 19 - A NEWCASTLE paraplanner overcame her fear of heights to conquer Africa's highest mountain Kilimanjaro – and raise thousands of pounds for a cause close to her and her colleagues' hearts.

Robyn Gerencser, 21, endured a gruelling six-day trek to the 5,895metre summit of the famous Tanzanian mountain in July.

The East Boldon resident completed the climb in aid of County Durham-based Learning for Life, which provides education and care for adults aged 16 plus with high support needs, special educational needs and disabilities.

Robyn's employer, Lycetts, is an avid supporter of the charity, with one Learning for Life student, Christopher Adams, securing a one-year work experience placement with the Lycetts team at their Newcastle office.

Speaking about the climb, Robyn said: "My fear of heights kicked in during my training but I knew that I would be alright when surrounded by professional mountaineers. I found the challenge extremely difficult, both mentally and physically – when we first caught sight of the summit, it seemed a million miles away.

"But the celebration we had at the end made it all worth it, to be surrounded by everyone who had helped us achieved this massive goal was just surreal."

The keen kickboxer raised almost £1,600 for charity Learning for Life, which helps its students learn practical skills, such as shopping, food preparation and home management skills, onsite and in the community.

Ecclesiastical Insurance Group (EIG), the parent company of Robyn's employer Lycetts, has agreed to match Robyn's donation, bringing her fundraising total to just over £3,000.

"Learning for Life is a charity we all feel close to in our office and the incredible support the charity has shown me solidified my reasons for choosing them," said Robyn, a former student at Whitburn Church of England Academy.

"I received so much support from friends, family and charity supporters. The number of anonymous donations I received was incredibly touching. I am also extremely grateful to Ecclesiastical for its amazing gesture. I wouldn't have been able to reach my target without this added supported."

EIG has an aim to donate £100million to charity over a five year-period ending in 2020 – a target it is on track to achieve.

Consett-based Learning for Life is one of EIG's chosen charities, but its support goes beyond monetary donations.

Twenty-year-old Christopher, from Sunderland, currently works at the Lycetts office for a half a day a week, accompanied by his Learning for Life teacher, Michael Quinlyn-Nixon.

The Sunderland FC and Harry Potter has contributed to the workplace, particularly with his alphabet and tea-making skills, and the placement has benefitted Christopher by helping him grow in confidence, learn new skills, take pride in his achievements and enjoy job satisfaction.

Charles Renwick, head of management services at Lycetts, said: “While EIG’s £100m target remains a driving force for our business, we are mindful that charities can be supported in a number of different ways. It is for this reason that we entered into a partnership with a small, but brilliant charity, which aims to make the lives of those young people that they support better and more meaningful.

“Christopher has become part of our team at Newcastle, and, as much as it may be rewarding for him, it has been just as positive an experience for us. Christopher has been a great addition and we hope that this will be the first of many such placements in the future.”

Marie Matthewson, Learning for Life principal, said: “We really are overwhelmed, not only by the financial support but by the care, consideration and support Lycetts staff give Christopher on a weekly basis. The staff are also eager to get to know Christopher and learn about his disability. Barriers have been broken down, and knowledge and skills have been gained.

“We are delighted to say that, thanks to the skills that Lycetts has helped Christopher to develop in the workplace, and the hard work and determination he has shown, we have managed to grant another year’s education for him, which is very unusual.

“The team is made up of incredible people, like Robyn, and, to us, the partnership is truly amazing.”

Lycetts will also be making a donation to Learning for Life at the end of the year, in line with amount Christopher would have earned for his placement.

For more information about the work Learning for Life do, visit learninglife.org.uk or contact Marie on m.matthewson@learninglife.org.uk or 07743189302956.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Lycetts

- The Lycetts Group was founded in 1961 and has grown to become one of the UK’s leading independently-operated insurance brokers.
- Lycetts specialises in farm and estate insurance and also provides bespoke financial services, household, commercial and bloodstock insurance advice. It has 17 offices in the UK, with its headquarters based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
- Lycetts Risk Management Services provide a comprehensive range of health and safety services to the agricultural sector, including health and safety policies, risk assessments, fire risk assessments, asbestos management services and general health and safety training.
- All available profits from Lycetts are passed onto the company’s ultimate owner, the charity Allchurches Trust, which in turn invests them back into the community. This structure offers security and business stability for Lycetts while fostering an ethical and long-term approach and a high-level of client trust.