**20 July 2020**

**Avanti West Coast employee joins family and friends to sew for community during COVID-19 pandemic**

* *Customer Service Assistant teams up with family and friends to get involved in making scrubs, ear protectors and accessories for those in need*
* *Nearly 1,000 items made and donated for hospital staff in Cumbria*

An Avanti West Coast employee has put her sewing skills to good use by helping to produce hundreds of accessories for NHS workers in Cumbria.

Diane Forrester, a Customer Service Assistant on board Avanti West Coast’s trains based out of Carlisle, joined family and friends in supporting North and West Cumbria Scrub Hub – a voluntary community group making scrubs and accessories for NHS staff and frontline workers in Cumbria during the coronavirus pandemic.

After hearing stories about the shortage of scrubs for NHS staff, Diane teamed up with her family and friends, including her mother (a seamstress), sister-in-law and niece to dedicate their spare time to creating accessories for local hospital workers and help fulfil orders received by the Scrub Hub.

Between them they have made and delivered 550 scrub bags, 140 ear protectors and 210 headbands to NHS workers in Cumbria – utilising Diane’s hoard of fabric and materials donated by fabric and haberdashery store chain, Abakhan, and her local sewing shop, Superior Sewing Centre in Carlisle. They also posted items out to hospital workers further afield.

With appeals from a children’s hospital ward and local Food Banks the group continue to volunteer their time, alongside their regular jobs, home-schooling and shopping for their family, to make items for those in need. In addition, Diane has recently started to make face masks for family and friends.

Diane said: “I did not need to give any thought to help during the pandemic. The NHS were going through a crisis we have never experienced in our lifetime – the stories of the shortage of personal protective equipment and staff being separated from their families to keep them safe was heart-breaking. It has been an amazing joint effort to support NHS workers – it’s unlike anything I have ever done before and I’m proud to be a part of it. I loved being able to make a small difference and it’s great to help other areas of the local community who need support during this time.”

ENDS

**About Avanti West Coast**

Avanti West Coast, operator of intercity rail services on the West Coast Main Line, is a joint venture between FirstGroup and Trenitalia, delivering a cleaner, greener railway that drives the West Coast forward.

We’re on a mission to revolutionise train travel, linking together the towns and major cities of the UK to create an iconic railway the country can be proud of. We’ve got big plans including a fleet of new intercity trains, as well as the complete refurbishment of the existing Pendolino train fleet. There will be 263 more train services every week by 2022 with new routes added, and a much-improved onboard service with enhanced free Wi-Fi, plug sockets, 25,000 brand new seats and improved catering. Since 8 December, passengers have benefitted from improved passenger compensation, available for journeys delayed by just 15 minutes.

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