



Workers are not alone

Self-employed record attempt at festival

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PEOPLE who work on their own were given colleagues for the day when an office for lone workers was set up as part of an offbeat arts festival.

The event held at Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society was part of the Wunderbar Festival and attempted to break the world record for the most self-employed people working together.

To mimic the conditions of a traditional office environment, there were strictly-enforced working hours, a lunch break and even after-work drinks.

The participants were able to enjoy informal "water-cooler chats", which they miss out on by working alone, as well as coffee and biscuits with their fellow workers.

Ellie Harrison, who devised the Work-a-thon, said she got her inspiration for the event from her own experience as a self-employed artist.

"There has been a huge increase in the number of self-employed people in the last 15 years," she said. "There are more people working in isolated environments without a social network or workplace solidarity.

"For them, there are no employee benefits like sick pay, holiday pay or anyone to regulate working hours.

"Self-employed people exploit themselves by working long hours, and so the Work-a-thon is a fun way of drawing attention to the more negative side.

"It tries to deal with serious issues in upbeat ways, and to offer positive solutions."

The record which was broken yesterday was set at the first Work-a-thon in London, which was attended by 57 lone workers.

Wunderbar's creative director Ilana Mitchell said: "The event was brilliant and there were far more people than I thought we'd get.

"It was really lovely to see laptops, and



NICE TO SEE YOU From left, Beckie Darlington of Haus Projects, Carl Rosati of The Cloud Commission, artist in residence Ellie Harrison, Jack Tarling of Shudder Films and Bettina Nissen of Bettina Nissen Design at the record attempt for the most self-employed people working together

also a typewriter and a massage area, to show all the aspects of self-employed work.

"It is both a celebration of the self-employed culture and also an attempt to address the negative aspects of isolation and overwork."

Work-a-thon participant Jake Wilson Craw makes hand-stitched craft items from recycled tyres, which he sells online and in a shop in Heaton, Newcastle.

He said: "I've been twice as productive working here - at home I'm easily distracted."

The Work-a-thon was designed to encourage people to address their own working conditions and to set up a communal working environment.

Festival producer Beckie Darlington said: "I run my own company so I would have come to this event even if I wasn't

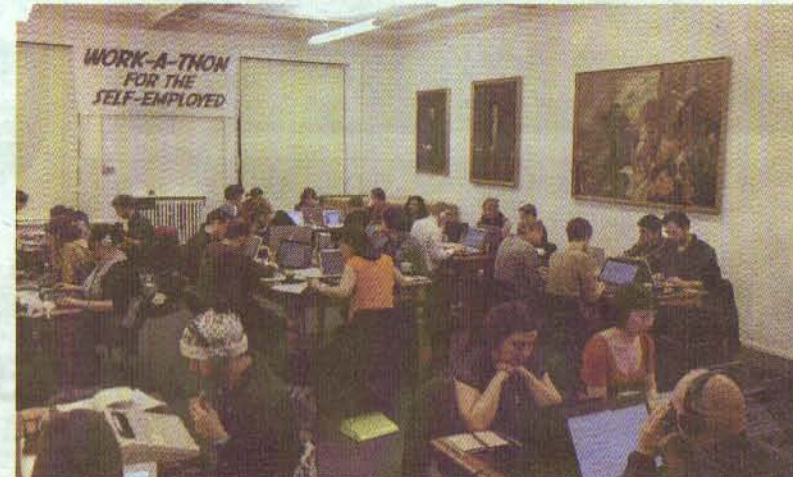
helping to organise it. The event highlights the irregularity of the job and focuses on the balance between work and play."

As another, perhaps more fun attempt to redress the work/life balance for the self-employed, Ellie Harrison will host a Wunderbar Desk Chair Disco today in an empty office at the Pandon Building, Trinity Gardens, Newcastle Quayside.

It is billed as "a roller disco with a difference" and an opportunity to "reclaim your ordinary office furniture and take it out on the town".

There will be disco music to dance to sitting down, hotdogs, popcorn and free admission to anyone turning up with their own wheeled office chair.

Before the disco, there will be a desk chair parade leading to the venue from Baltic Square.



ALL TOGETHER NOW The participants worked together for the day

Picture: Lewis Arnold www.journallive.co.uk/buyphoto ref: 00567494