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# Woman who started losing her sight aged just seven runs her own successful soap business

Alex Mackie's soaps will be on show at the Maker Faire 2018 at the Life Science Centre in Newcastle

By

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Alex Mackie (Image: handout)

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Among the hundreds of makers and producers showcasing their creative talents at a Tyneside event will be soapmaker Alex Mackie.

Behind her participation in the Maker Faire UK 2018 at the [Life Science Centre](https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/all-about/centre-for-life) in Newcastle on April 28-29, is an uplifting story.

Alex, 26, who lives in Durham runs her own company, The Blind Soapmaker.

She has been losing her sight for years after being diagnosed with rod cone dystrophy at seven.

She was also diagnosed with kidney disease at five and at 17 underwent a kidney transplant with her mother Alison the donor.

Despite the health challenges she has faced, Alex went back to college after recovering from surgery and then to university in York.

After graduation she was keen to work despite the difficulties that blind and partially sighted people have securing jobs in a workplace.

She realised self-employment was her best route and decided soap making is a business she could start from home.



Alex Mackie (Image: handout)

Alex has created her own sheep mould for soaps and also makes other animal shaped bars as well as hand cream, hand gel, bath bombs and other products.

Helped by parents, Alison and Peter Mackie, who live near Alex in Durham, Alex can make up to 100 soaps a day.

Her aim is to continue to grow her business with an ambition to be able to employ others.

Alex is also involved in VICTA - a charity which helps to support young blind people.

She said: “Blind people are very aware of the scent and feel of a product so my products are made to smell and feel great - not just in the minute you take them out of their wrapper but throughout the time in which you use these products.”

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Alex added: “I’m really looking forward to Maker Faire UK and meeting other makers and members of the public throughout the weekend.

“I was pleased to be approached by Life Science Centre to take part as it’s a great showcase for my products at a time when my business is starting to grow. Only one in 10 blind people in the UK are employed in the workplace, so self-employment is a great practical solution for me to build a career.”

The Newcastle event will bring together more than 450 makers to demonstrate their creative talents.

Dr Lucy Rogers, TV’s Robot Wars judge and founder of the Guild of Makers, said: “I’m excited to be attending Maker Faire UK in Newcastle.

“Events such as this are great showcases for ideas and they inspire us all to look again, reuse, recycle, celebrate traditional skills and learn more about, and even contribute to, cutting-edge technology.”

**Highlights for 2018 include:**

* “Rustang Sally” and “Clampasaurus” - two vehicles created by Mutoid Waste’s Joe Rush, which visitors might recognise from their appearance at the 2012 London Paralympics closing ceremony
* LED light painting by Waterlight Graffiti – a six metre-long LED light wall, which illuminates when visitors use water to draw
* Giant penny farthing steam punk bicycles
* Battling robots, which visitors can control
* A roaming herd of mechanical animals made by Foolpool

YouTube star Colin Furze who will demonstrate his “Ejector Bed” and X-Men Magneto-style magnetic boots, which allow him to walk on the ceiling.

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Regulars will be pleased to find that more than half of this year’s Maker stalls are new to the festival this year, so there’s plenty to discover.

New makers include local craft groups, beautifully textured and scented soaps created by Durham-based The Blind Soap Maker, a glass blower, a chainsaw carver and a local Dalek builder.

Tickets for Maker Faire UK are at MakerFaireUK.com. Prices: Adult £8, concessions £7, child (age five to 17) £6, family (two adults and two children or one adult and three children) £24.