New Start Highland Awarded £210k to Support More Volunteers

Wednesday 5 June, 2024

Inverness-based charity, New Start Highland has been granted £210,000 from the Garfield Weston Foundation which will allow more people to embark upon its supported work placement program than ever before.

Every year the social enterprise works with almost 1,500 families and individuals experiencing vulnerability in a range of ways including providing practical work experience and qualifications which help them achieve employment. These volunteer and placement opportunities help people learn key life skills and build friendships when they're feeling stuck, be it because of mental health issues, loneliness or social isolation.

James Dunbar, chief executive of New Start Highland, said:

"We are very proud of our supported placement program, which helps break down barriers to personal progression. Currently there is an unprecedented need for this type of support service. It is delivered by a brilliant mix of employees, trainers, mentors and peers.

"We have seen real transformations in the people who have completed placements with us, whether they've been working in our gardens, workshops, warehouses, shops or offices. We are hugely grateful for this funding which will allow us to continue these placements so more people can learn skills and gain confidence which enable them to start their journey towards a brighter future."

Mary-Anne Morrison was referred to New Start Highland by her occupational therapist and has never looked back. She said:

"New Start Highland has saved me. Without these gardens and these people, I would not be anywhere near where I have got to in my recovery journey. I am forever grateful, my family will be forever grateful. I have my life back, I have purpose, I have balance and I don't just have colleagues, I have true friends."

Neil Davidson, who volunteers in the Gardens and in the joinery workshop echoed Mary Anne's sentiment. He said:

"The support and sense of community for people from different backgrounds is second to none here. I just don't know where I'd be if I didn't have the sense of purpose to come in each day and be part of the team. Over the years I've come to realise that in life, people need community to be able to thrive. They need a connection to nature. The New Start Highland Gardens provide both and when combined, they can be pretty powerful and life changing."

The charity has five retail outlets located in Inverness, Thurso and Dingwall with exciting expansion plans on the horizon. Last year alone, the shops, which provide low and no cost furniture and household items, saw a footfall of over 80,000 people. All items instore have been diverted from landfill, benefitting not only the climate but thousands of families as they build a safe and comfortable home.

Profits from New Start Highland's various enterprise activities, which include removals, storage and house clearances, are reinvested back into the organisation, to help fund its charitable services.

Over the last year, the charity has served the Highland community over 103,000 times. 9,000 items have been diverted from landfill and 540 furniture packs have been distributed. In the past month, 265 households have been supported maintaining a tenancy.

To find out how you can get involved with New Start Highland, please visit newstarthighland.org

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Notes to Editors:

About New Start Highland:

New Start Highland is a dynamic and evolving organisation which was set up by James Dunbar in 2000. It is committed to a triple bottom line where social and environmental factors are just as important as financial outcomes.

Through a programme of re-use New Start Highland provides furniture and household items, with aims for social implications as well as positive environmental impacts.

The social issues tackled by New Start Highland are three-fold. Along with furniture and household item re-use, a housing support service is in place, combined with a programme of employment training, helping people in the community who face barriers to securing a job. Through its multitude of services, New Start Highland has saved the public purse millions of pounds since its inception.

New Start Highland Enterprises funds the organisation's charitable activities. It includes a refurbished bike outlet in Inverness and runs professional, commercial services such as order fulfilment, house clearance, removals and storage services operating in the wider Highland area.

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