Successful Awards expand to triple the number of charities supported in the UK

Monday 11 January, 2016

Weston Charity Awards to give strategic business support to charities across the North and Midlands

Following its success across the North last year, the Weston Charity Awards are now expanding to support a larger pool of charities in the region and, for the first time, in the Midlands in 2016. The Garfield Weston Foundation says it is determined to grow the Awards and help more organisations become more effective and resilient as the current economic climate continues to hit front-line charities across the country.

The Garfield Weston Foundation's Director, Philippa Charles, explains:

"Independent evaluation from the first year shows that giving charities access to bespoke support has a positive long term impact on their sustainability. It's about giving charities the tools they need to move forward. Charities are doing remarkable work in their communities and the demand for their support is growing, which is why our Trustees have expanded the Awards."

The Weston Charity Awards will help charities working in Youth, Welfare and Community across the North of England and the Midlands, including cities and rural areas from Coventry to Carlisle, Huddersfield to Hartlepool. In 2016 eighteen winning charities will have access to a team of senior business leaders through Pilotlight, which will help them plan for success.

Pilotlight's Chief Executive, Gillian Murray, says:

"You'd be surprised to see how many small organisations are delivering services they have no funding for, but people depend on them so they can't walk away. Of course, this is not sustainable. By harnessing the expertise and strategic vision of a team of senior business executives, charities have the opportunity to look at the bigger picture, operate more effectively and become sustainable as a result."

To date, six charities from the North East have already completed the year-long Awards Programme and the evaluation, undertaken by Dr Beth Breeze, Director of the Centre for Philanthropy at the University of Kent, demonstrates multiple positive impacts from all the participants. These include improvement to their strategic vision, staff morale and increased confidence in the future, and Dr Breeze concluded that the Weston Charity Awards are *"clearly an innovative, successful and well-received programme".* A further twelve organisations are currently participating in the Awards Programme across the North.

Steve Clark, Centre Manager at Horden Youth & Community Centre said the Awards came at the perfect time:

"This has been a game-changing experience for us. I was always the financial worrier – thinking how are we going to pay this core cost? How will we afford that? However the business team really supported us in putting a new financial infrastructure and long-term strategy in place. We are now able to expand our services and our income is rising as a result. We are fighting fit and that's a great feeling."

Dawn Henderson, Manager of Caring Hands explains the impact the Awards had on their organisation:

"As a result of the Weston Charity Awards we are currently streamlining our procedures, promoting our services and of course, developing our fundraising plans. It's all about adapting in our changing environment, getting to grips with becoming business minded for some parts of the organisation and remaining the caring charity we always were."

Charities working in the North and Midlands are invited to apply to receive a year of strategic planning support through Pilotlight and unrestricted funding. A total of eighteen winners will be selected to work with Pilotlight to help them achieve their goals.

Applicants can access the website www.westoncharityawards.org to find out more – the deadline for applications is 15th January 2016.

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