****

# YMCA North Staffordshire wins prestigious Queen’s Award for Enterprise: Promoting Opportunity 2021

A North Staffordshire charity is celebrating today after receiving a prestigious national award. YMCA North Staffordshire, which has operated within the city for over 170 years, was selected for the Queen’s Award for Enterprise in its Promoting Opportunities category.

Now in its 55th year, the Queen’s Awards for Enterprise are the most prestigious business awards in the country, with winning businesses able to use the esteemed Queen’s Awards emblem for the next five years. The Promoting Opportunities category, in which the charity was successful, recognises organisations that have supported people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in improving their job skills and their chances of finding work.

The charity’s win was in recognition of its ‘Creative Youth Minds’ programme which was first established in 2015 with the support of the Bertarelli Foundation. The programme, which focuses on young people aged 16 – 24, seeks to develop young people by offering them a series of activities which are meaningful and engaging and help to build their confidence levels in order to lead successful lives.

With activities centered predominantly around arts, and widening learning and participation, as young people engage, they are then supported to participate in life-changing opportunities such as UK-based residentials and international projects. The programme also provides young people with bursaries to help unlock their potential. YMCA North Staffordshire was able to demonstrate that as a result of the programme design, young people were able to develop their skills, progress their education and secure employment.

The ‘Creative Youth Minds’ programme presented a natural progression for the charity as over the past ten years, it has strived to move away from what it terms a ‘deficit’ approach to delivering services to an asset-based community model through which young people, their families and their communities have opportunities to learn and thrive. Across all of its services, YMCA North Staffordshire is committed to promoting a culture of possibilities. As part of that commitment, the charity has forged increasingly strong relationships with residents, community and voluntary sector groups, and businesses to ensure that young people have the opportunities and life chances to grow, with eight young people progressing on to full time degree programmes in 2020 alone.

Commenting on the award, Daniel Flynn, Chief Executive of YMCA North Staffordshire said:

*“YMCA North Staffordshire is an inclusive community of people with incredible gifts and talents. This amazing gift from The Queen’s Award is fantastic recognition of the work that of all of our staff,*

*volunteers and partners do and it shows that by working together we can thrive; as a YMCA, as a community and as a city.”*

Mel Sheldon, a young person who engaged with the programme, said:

*“When I moved into YMCA I engaged with the Creative Youth Minds programme on a Thursday and Friday evening. Different artists came in from around Stoke on Trent such as the Cultural Sisters and B-Arts creating a local network. They delivered workshops such as ceramics, sewing, printmaking, film, music and drama. It built on my skills and confidence and I started volunteering which led me into full-time employment within youth work as part of the activities team. As part of this, I deliver my own art workshops like textiles and mosaics. Without the Bertarelli Foundation funding the Creative Youth Minds programme I don’t know where I'd be.”*

Kirsty Bertarelli and Ernesto Bertarelli, Sponsors of the Creative Youth Minds Programme said:

*“This Queen’s Award is no less than the amazing YMCA North Staffordshire deserve. It has been a joy and privilege to have got to know a community so full of talent and energy and compassion. YMCA North Staffordshire transforms lives, unlocks potential and creates new pathways to success. Kirsty Bertarelli and the YMCA share a vision that the creative arts can be fundamental in achieving these goals, offering new and different experiences and opportunities, igniting new interests and passions, and making exciting new futures possible, and our family's Foundation has been proud to support putting this vision into reality.*

*“What the YMCA does for the young people in its community is a story that demands celebration, far and wide. We are delighted that, with this award, they are receiving the sort of recognition that they have truly earned. We send our most heartfelt congratulations.”*