

## Mary Macleod

*Special Adviser, Secretary of State for Scotland  
Patron, London Women's Forum  
Former MP for Brentford & Isleworth, 2010-2015*

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Dear Sir/Madam,

### **NATIONAL DIVERSITY AWARDS 2016 – Community Organisation Award**

I wanted to give my unequivocal support for the Community Organisation Award nomination for **WeAre1** in Hounslow, west London.

I was the local Member of Parliament from 2010-2015 and had the pleasure and privilege to meet and work with the team from WeAre1 over that time. I was there at the start when the Council closed the Acton Lodge Day Centre and The Star Centre, and saw how distressed the service users were at feeling they would have nowhere safe to go in west London and that they would be alone in the world. Ronnie and Katrina then decided to set up WeAre1 to ensure that these vulnerable people would continue to get the support and help they needed. They became the lifeline locally for people with learning disabilities and mental health needs, preventing isolation and deterioration in health and wellbeing.

The WeAre1 team has always been a massive inspiration to me and others around them. They started from nothing... just a vision and a desire to help those most in need. They put everything on the line to get this service set up with no financial support and it was tough. They have grown from there to creating an outstanding and successful organisation that is making a real difference to lives on a daily basis, breaking down barriers in the community and creating aspiration where previously there was none.

WeAre1 is based in one of the most deprived and ethnically diverse housing estates in west London, but the minute you go through the door, it becomes a home from home with an extended family, where there is genuine warmth, friendship, care and a spirit of hope. And it is more than just a fun environment. They work with service users individually to help them with benefits, housing, application forms, skills building and creating a better future for them. They have also changed perceptions locally, getting the wider community involved to help them, through action, understand about diversity, inclusion and that people with disabilities are just like the rest of us. It is helping take away the stigma of mental health – where locally there is an increasing need for support amongst youth as well as adults.

Ronnie and Katrina, who lead WeAre1, make an outstanding team and are amazingly committed, positive, focused, engaging and dedicated. They continually communicate with stakeholders to keep them involved and have always had the courage to ask for help from the local MPs, Councillors and the business community when needed. They are also supported by excellent volunteers.

This award will make a great difference to them as an organisation, as it will emotionally encourage them through the difficult times when funds are tight but they know that what they have achieved is recognised and appreciated. This award will hopefully encourage the Council to work with them in a more formal, partnership way, seeing that they are recognised on a national basis and maybe will stop charging them for use of the community centre! This award will also allow WeAre1 gain additional media coverage, which will increase awareness of what services are on offer, allowing other people with disabilities in London to benefit and to have hope for the future.

WeAre1 are definitely worthy of this award. The team has made an outstanding contribution to West London over the last few years, due to their leadership locally on diversity, their focus on social inclusion and their perseverance and commitment to delivering support and encouragement to those with learning disabilities and mental health issues.

Their courage, perseverance, humility and leadership are an inspiration not only to the people they support, but also to others who have come into contact with them, like myself. I am proud of what they have achieved and see them as genuine role models for how to make a difference in the local community. I wish there were more like them!

Please get in touch with me at any time if you need more information.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary', written in a cursive style.

Mary Macleod