

Leading Edinburgh business signs up to the LGBT Charter and puts equality firmly at the heart of history

One of Edinburgh's leading tourism businesses is putting equality firmly at the heart of living history during Pride Month, as it declares LGBT Youth Scotland its 2019 Charity of the Year and signs up to the LGBT Charter.

Throughout 2019, the award-winning storytellers at Mercat Tours will support Scotland's national charity for LGBTI young people through donations, fundraising events, empowering storytelling training sessions and supporting the charity at Pride Edinburgh (22 June). The highly respected 5-star walking tour operator has also signed up to the LGBT Charter to proactively include LGBTI people in every aspect of their work, protect their staff and provide a high quality service to their customers. Some of the Mercat Team have signed up to Tough Mudder (16 June) to fundraise for the cause.

Announcing their Charity of the Year, Kat Brogan Managing Director of Mercat Tours said: "I'm delighted to announce that this year we are awarding our Charity of the Year title to the fantastic LGBT Youth Scotland and signing up to their LGBT Charter. As a family business, our business investments are firmly rooted in our ambition to look after and nurture our people and our community, so we very much support LGBT Youth's goal of making Scotland the best place to grow up for lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people.”

“A happy, fulfilled team and community is loyal and proud of giving visitors to Edinburgh/Scotland the best possible experience. We are a product of, and thrive, because of our team and our local relationships. Recognising every individual’s human rights and treating everyone equally with dignity and respect is a fundamental part of this. Being a responsible business is not a strategy, it is in Mercat’s DNA.”

“A healthy, interdependent, ecosystem between visitors, residents, community groups, council and employers, is vital to building opportunity and growth for all. To maintain this, it is important that we build connections and support local community organisations that champion inclusive values, like LGBT Youth.”

Jane Griffin, Head of Partnerships at LGBT Youth Scotland said: “We are really pleased that Mercat Tours has named us their Charity of the Year and that they have signed up to the LGBT Charter. Through their support they are demonstrating a true commitment to diversity and the creation of inclusive working environments. It also sends a strong message of inclusion to the entire business community.”

Mercat’s Charity of the Year is selected by their whole team. Around nine charities were nominated by staff this year with LGBT Youth Scot taking the majority vote. The cause is particularly close to the hearts of some team members who have been discriminated by workplaces in the past.

Lyall, a Visitor Services Assistant at Mercat, found one of his previous work places was not at all LGBT friendly, and this had a hugely detrimental impact on him and workplace productivity: “The anxiety I felt while trying to figure out whether or not I could be my real self put quite a strain on my work life. If you’re constantly worrying about mentioning

your partner or worse having to defend yourself against some form of judgement, it can really get to a person. It definitely contributed to me feeling depressed and changing jobs.

“At Mercat Tours, the management team is constantly working to create an atmosphere of inclusivity where everyone can be themselves. This means that we are much happier and everyone works better because of it.

“As it’s a small company everyone has an equal share and responsibility when it comes to maintaining an inclusive environment and I think that we manage to do that. Everyone we have working in Mercat shows each other respect regardless of their gender or sexual orientations and that’s important”

Mercat Tours is a family business committed to helping the Edinburgh community which has sustained and supported the business for 34 years.

As long term partners, the business supports the Grassmarket Community Project (GCP) with donations, venue hire and storytellers for fundraising events, contributing £7,000 to the centre in 2018. The Mercat holiday home is also given free of charge for the GCP to use for their members.

Macmillan Cancer have raised £850 by raffling stays at the Mercat holiday home, tickets to their events and the creation of unique tours to promote their work.

Looking to the future, Mercat will give equal priority and attention to the next generation of employees, as to the current. Annually, they offer paid placements to Queen Margaret University and/or Napier University students.

The five-star tour company is particularly proud of their ‘Day In Edinburgh’ project, which they launched in 2016 to inspire local pupils to consider

tourism as a career choice. The initiative showcases the incredible variety of jobs available through a collaborative, practical approach.

So far, Mercat has worked with Holy Rood High School and Craigroyston High School and has hosted 685 students and 120 staff alongside 24 organisations in Edinburgh. Mercat aims to build on this success in the year ahead.

