

Edinburgh entrepreneur reaches UK finals of women's awards

Edinburgh-based Sara Hawkins joins 20 women from across the UK as a finalist in the 2019 NatWest everywoman Awards.

The founder of The UK's first wellness centre to combine fitness, yoga and mental health services, Projekt42, in the city's Leith Walk, is in the running to win the Gaia Award.

Awarded to the most inspirational and successful female founder of a social enterprise who has combined strong community benefit with a sustainable business model, Sara set up Projekt42 in 2016 following personal experience.

She said: "For my work at Projekt42 to be recognised this way is great for not only me but can hopefully inspire other women who are thinking of trying to build a business that can change communities to also act. I'm in the running against two other inspirational women and I'm hoping to bring the accolade back to Scotland when the results are announced in December."

Six years ago, Sara was diagnosed with PTSD, unable to work and placed on long mental health waiting lists. Determined to improve her health, she self-funded fitness, counselling and life coaching sessions. Having seen the difference it made, Sara set out to help others and established Projekt42 by selling her home and donating the money to buy equipment.

With fitness classes including yoga, Pilates and boxing, a key component of its offering is its holistic approach to wellness – it now has the largest team of community counsellors and

psychotherapists in the city outside the NHS.

Sara added: "Projekt42 is a unique offering. It was the first wellness centre to combine fitness, yoga and mental health services.

"We recognise that many people out there need counselling support right now but are stuck on waiting lists in the health system.

"With over 400 different classes each month to suit all ages and abilities, to our wellness services which include counselling and life coaching, we're committed to helping everyone.

"After all, mental health isn't something that some people have – we all have it in various degrees."

The Gaia award will be announced on 3rd December.

Helen Pattinson, co-founder of Montezuma's Chocolates which sponsors the Gaia award, added: "We love supporting the NatWest everywoman Awards and in particular the Gaia award as it provides a completely different perspective on business.

"I have really enjoyed judging the winners of our category – as founders of social enterprises, all the women are truly inspirational ladies whose motivation goes well beyond making a profit."

Sara has also been shortlisted for the NatWest Wise100 One to Watch Award. The winner will be announced on 28th November and is awarded to a CEO or senior manager relatively new in their social enterprise career, with experience building revenue and social impact.