

Bikes for Refugees founder honoured for pandemic work

The Bikes for Refugees founder, Steven McCluskey, will be honoured along with a dozen other champions of community work in Scotland with a unique handcrafted bench.

McCluskey's bench will be placed in Glasgow Green on the Sustrans National Cycle Network (NCN75) which links Glasgow to Edinburgh where the charity has community cycle hubs.



Bikes for Refugees (Scotland) founder, Steven McCluskey, pictured with his awarded National Lottery bench in Glasgow Green park for his hard work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,

providing bikes and essentials for refugees and key workers.

PHOTO: Sean Ames/BeatMedia

The benches were created by TV presenter and furniture restorer Jay Blades to honour those who have devoted their time and efforts to support some of the most vulnerable people during the pandemic.

The National Lottery provided the funding for them, as it has provided funding for community projects in Scotland. The idea for the benches followed new research which The National Lottery conducted. The study revealed that almost half of people in Scotland feel that one of the most positive things to emerge from the pandemic is the community spirit. Over half of those asked said they have an increased appreciation for community workers.

Bikes for Refugees (Scotland) founder, McCluskey, recognised quickly at the start of the coronavirus lockdown, the charity needed to broaden its scope, lending bikes to essential workers in health, social care, education and other key roles. They also used National Lottery funding to provide emergency food aid and other essential supplies to isolated and vulnerable New Scots (refugees and asylum seekers).

Steven said: "The last four or five months have been particularly challenging, not just for us as a project but for our community in particular. After lockdown many asylum seekers found themselves very isolated and experiencing a wide range of mental health difficulties. Bicycles provide freedom of movement and a free means of travel supporting people to access essential community services and activities as well as protecting and promoting mental health and wellbeing. We also provided bikes to key workers in essential roles who have been trying to keep safe and healthy throughout the pandemic."

Jay Blades said: "Like most of us, I have witnessed inspirational acts of selflessness and kindness this year as people have adapted their lives to help others. It has been an

honour to hear about the 13 people whose work is being honoured today with a bespoke bench being placed in their local area. Each bench represents the person's personality, passions and the impact they have had on others in their community. It is hopefully a fitting tribute to their efforts this year – efforts that too often go unheralded but never unappreciated by those they help – that these benches can be places where others can find out more about their work."



Dawn Austwick, CEO of The National Lottery Community Fund said: "For 25 years The National Lottery has helped make amazing things happen, but never in such extraordinary times. People and communities have found themselves facing myriad challenges and pressures but have still found the passion and drive to support each other in so many different ways. These bespoke community benches are a fitting tribute and show that their incredible work has not gone unnoticed and is in fact recognised, valued and inspiring others more than ever before."

The National Lottery is running a campaign in dedication to

previously unheralded individuals who have responded to the challenges the pandemic has had by helping make other people's lives a bit more bearable, comfortable and enjoyable, just when they needed it most. People who may not feel that their actions and efforts are anything special but have had a positive and profound impact across the arts, community, heritage and sport sectors around the UK.

The National Lottery contributes around £30 million to good causes in the UK every week. With the help of this funding, thousands of people across the UK are supporting their communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These efforts are making a huge difference to people's wellbeing, particularly those who are vulnerable and isolated.



The plaque on the bench given to Bikes for Refugees (Scotland) founder Steven McCluskey in Glasgow Green park. The bench was awarded by The National Lottery honouring his hard work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. PHOTO: Sean Ames/BeatMedia