

Blackwood Appoints New Board Chair

Independent living specialist Blackwood has appointed a new Chairperson who has pledged to continue its innovative approach to transforming the lives of people with disabilities and older people – particularly through greater use of design and technology.

Julie McDowell has more than 20 years' experience working in healthcare and with charities, and first joined the board of the Edinburgh-headquartered organisation two years ago.



Julie McDowell

Her role will see her build on Blackwood's focus on using pioneering technology to enable people with disabilities and older people to live as independently as possible.

Formerly a practicing lawyer in New York and Washington, Julie has always had a keen interest in responsible and sustainable investment and social issues. She has held roles at Standard Life Investments as Head of Sustainable and Responsible Investment and served on NHS Lothian Health Board for eight years.

Julie said: "I first heard about Blackwood through its reputation as a top-quality organisation several years ago, so

when the opportunity came up to be on the board, I did more research and that confirmed my understanding that Blackwood is a great organisation, with a terrific culture and excellent CEO.

“I’ve worked in sustainable and responsible investment and addressing key social issues is a strong interest of mine, which is exactly what Blackwood is doing in really innovative and leading ways. They’re ahead of the curve with a vision of supporting people towards independent living with technology.

“What I’d like to do as Chair is continue to focus on our core goal of maintaining a financially strong organisation which can support people to live independently.

“I’m also keen to build on our successes in providing good service with excellent customer satisfaction and creating a model of living that looks at all of people’s needs, not just care needs.”

Julie will drive forward the organisation’s 2021-26 business strategy, while expanding and extending the organisation’s aims to develop a modern standard for beautiful, accessible, affordable and technology-enabled homes. She takes over the reins from Max Brown, who became Chair in April 2017.

She added: “I look forward to taking on the role. Max has been a very safe pair of hands for the organisation and an excellent chair, who will be a hard act to follow.”

Max leaves behind a strong legacy of being instrumental in the organisation’s first highly innovative, accessible homes, its “Blackwood House”, and driving its focus on technology-enabled care through its CleverCogs™ digital system.

He said: “I’m so proud of the organisation and its staff, and how far we’ve come in my four years as Chair. In particular, taking the Blackwood House from conception to a reality and seeing that work coming to fruition over the years is an

incredible achievement for everyone involved.

“As an organisation, our response to Covid was also momentous – the staff really did stand up to that challenge extremely well.

“Julie has an enormous opportunity to shape Blackwood for its next phase and further the organisation’s mission; I wish her all the luck in the world. I’m looking forward to remaining a member of Blackwood, keeping in touch and supporting as much as I can.”

Fanchea Kelly, Chief Executive of Blackwood, said: “I’m excited to work with Julie as our new Chair, and I’d like to also thank Max for his leadership and support for Blackwood so that we are in a great position to build on the progress we’ve made in the last five years. .

“I know Julie’s expertise and experience will be incredibly valuable to us as we move forward with our ambitious new business strategy.”

Blackwood aims to help people live their life to the full, by providing services which support them to live independently.

As Blackwood works in 29 of Scotland’s 32 local authorities, it is more widely dispersed than most other care or housing providers and has used its investment in innovation in design and technology, combined with great staff teams, to offer more choice and control to customers across Scotland.

<https://www.blackwoodgroup.org.uk>