

# Charity expert Marie to lead inspirational innovator awards

## Experienced third sector operator will champion search for design excellence

An inspirational design competition has a new cheerleader after a charity expert was appointed to help drive as many entries as possible.

Marie McQuade will now devote herself to raising awareness of the Blackwood Design Awards, which aim to transform the lives of those who need support to live independently.

The Dragon's Den style competition has helped uncover a host of innovations to help people with disabilities or age-related conditions – but was put on hold for two years during the pandemic.

Now it is hoped Marie's appointment will help relaunch the refreshed competition which typically attracts innovation and design breakthroughs from all over the world.

She said: "In Blackwood's 50th year, it is more important than ever to celebrate and showcase the amazing inventions that have the potential to accelerate the industry and provide significant benefits to peoples' lives.

"Every year individuals and organisations from around the world send in their thoughtful designs and we are really looking forward to seeing who will submit what and from where.

“This opportunity is hugely exciting and I am really looking forward to organising this unique and highly impactful competition that will see new designs, technologies and adaptations come to life.”

Marie joins Blackwood with over 25 years’ experience in the charity sector, having worked in diverse roles, supporting causes including Victim Support Scotland and the Scottish International Development Alliance.

She previously held a senior role at THINK Consulting Solutions, an International fundraising specialist which has worked with charities all over the world, developing fresh, innovative solutions to boost not for profit funds in a competitive landscape.

She has also supported Third Sector Organisations to grow their insights, income and impact at charities such as Changing Faces UK, Maggie’s Cancer Caring Centres and Mencap, where she gained a wealth of knowledge in fundraising, events and communications.

Colin Foskett, Blackwood’s Head of Innovation, who kickstarted the Design Awards, said: “Marie comes with a tremendous amount of experience and knowledge in the charity and fundraising sector and is perfectly equipped to deliver the Design Awards to the highest standard.

“She has already thrown herself into the jobs at hand and we are both really looking forward to welcoming this year’s wonderful selection of up-and-coming innovators.”



Marie McQuade

Marie's work will include approaching universities, innovation hubs, tech incubators and other organisations with a stake in design, engineering and technology to encourage them to enter the awards.

She will also play an instrumental role in organising the event, including attracting sponsorship and recruiting members of the judging panel for the Dragon's Den style competition, which will see entries evaluated on their ability transform lives.

Previous winners have included an app that helps make living spaces safer for people with dementia and inventor Grant Douglas' "spill proof" spoon – the S'up Spoon – designed for those affected by conditions which cause them to shake. Key categories include Best Collaborative Project, Best New Concept and Best New Aids, Equipment or Accessible Technology.

Groups or individuals can apply for the Blackwood Design Awards which are open to both seasoned professionals and gifted amateurs, meaning that both technologically advanced and those simpler, yet often most successful designs, are equally welcome.

The awards will mark Blackwood's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, since it was founded by Dr Margaret Blackwood, a respected campaigner for improvement to help people with disabilities to live more independently.

Blackwood now operates more than 1500 properties across 29 local authorities, and invests in innovation and technology to help people live life to the full. The charity has already built two developments of tech-smart 'Blackwood Homes' in Glasgow and Dundee which use a "CleverCogs" digital system to make life easier for older people and people with disabilities.

For more information or to enter the awards, please visit [www.bespoken.me](http://www.bespoken.me) or e-mail [bespoken@blackwoodgroup.org.uk](mailto:bespoken@blackwoodgroup.org.uk).

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