

Visually impaired volunteer wins award for community work

A Musselburgh woman has been recognised for her efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of the blind and partially-sighted community by organising regular Health Walks.

Shona Black has been honoured as the winner of Health Walk Volunteer of the Year at [Paths for All](#)'s Volunteer Awards 2022.

The 57-year-old has been instrumental in creating Health Walks in the area for visually impaired individuals – with Shona herself being registered blind using both a cane and guide dog – and also wheelchair users and individuals with learning difficulties.

Health Walks are designed to reduce social isolation while improving fitness, supporting mental health and encouraging socialisation – with walks taking place fortnightly with plans to expand to weekly walks.

Shona started the group after working with RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) to identify that many vulnerable members of the community were not getting adequate levels of exercise.

She said: “Many people who suffer from sight loss can feel really isolated which is what inspired me to initially start the group. Being able to come together and walk is a fantastic

way for everyone to socialise, make new friends and get outside into the fresh air.

“Through these group walks, people feel supported and going out for a walk doesn’t feel as daunting.

“It’s lovely to be recognised for something which I have so much joy in doing.”

The East Lothian woman was commended at Paths for All’s prestigious annual awards ceremony at the Scottish Parliament on 28 September.

Paths for All supports the Scottish Health Walk Network which delivers over 800 regular Health Walks across Scotland, catering for all ages and abilities.

Hosted by BBC Scotland’s Fiona Stalker and sponsored by Paul MacLennan MSP, the event recognised 11 groups and individuals throughout Scotland who have gone the extra mile to keep their communities active.

Public Health Minister, Maree Todd has championed the awards, she said: “Encouraging and supporting people in Scotland to walk and wheel is a key part of our vision of a country where more people are more active more often.

“A huge number of highly motivated and skilled people are helping us deliver this vision, not least the passionate and dedicated volunteers who do so much to help others overcome challenges to participation.

“They are an inspiration and I am delighted that their contribution is being recognised by Paths for All in these Awards.”

Paul McLennan who sponsoring MSP has commended the work of the volunteers, he said: “My congratulations go the inspiring group of volunteers awarded this evening.

“The range of talent across the country is extremely impressive, and this is reflected in the passion of all the volunteers towards supporting health, wellbeing, social inclusion and the many other benefits of getting out and about.

“Scotland’s outdoors are stunning and varied. My own patch, East Lothian, has stunning coastlines a few miles away from the rolling Lammermuir hills. It’s brilliant to know that across all of Scotland’s diverse outdoor spaces there are people like the volunteers recognised this evening who are working hard to make those spaces accessible and inclusive to all who live here.

“I’d like to commend the work of the volunteers and the team at Paths for All for going above and beyond to promote active travel and leisure. I look forward to seeing what the next year brings!”

Paths for All is a national charity that champions everyday walking for a happier, healthier, greener Scotland.

It manages a range of [grant funds](#) that support projects aiming to increase participation in walking, active travel, and to improve community paths for travel and recreation.

Kevin Lafferty, Chief Executive Officer at Paths for All, said: “Individuals like Shona represent exactly why we host the award ceremony every year.

“Giving your time and energy to a cause without financial reward – may seem like a big ask but our volunteers continually go above and beyond in local communities across Scotland and never fail to make it look effortless. Even though we all know an immense amount of work goes on behind the scenes.

“The work carried out by volunteers is directly improving the nation’s physical, mental and social health, reducing social

isolation and loneliness and helping people make more environmentally friendly lifestyle choices.

“This year we returned to an in-person event at Holyrood. It has been brilliant socialising with our amazing volunteers and to hear first-hand about the invaluable contributions they have been making.

“Our volunteers’ stories are always inspiring – and this year seems that little more exceptional knowing how many challenges have been faced along the way. Thank you to everyone for their efforts and ongoing dedication.”

Paths for All works with the Scottish Government and 30 partners to support and deliver national policies, such as the National Walking Strategy and other active travel initiative to improve the mental, social and physical health of the country.

The charity awards thousands of pounds worth of grants to worthwhile projects that improve health, promote walking and improve environments for people to be active in.

www.pathsforall.org.uk/healthwalkfinder

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



Shona right out for a walk