

PRESS RELEASE



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DEVON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION HONOURS VOLUNTEERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTY

Over 140 guests gathered at Exeter Castle on 21st October to celebrate the achievements of volunteers from across Devon at the second annual 'Volunteer of the Year' staged by local charity, Devon Community Foundation.

To date, Devon Community Foundation has given £7 million in grants to over 2,500 local community and voluntary groups that are on the front line in helping vulnerable local people and building better local communities across the county.

The work of the Foundation and the groups it supports has become increasingly important over the last year as the voluntary sector takes on an even greater role in filling the gaps caused by public sector spending cuts and as the need to support the most vulnerable in our local communities increases.

Martha Wilkinson, Chief Executive of Devon Community Foundation explains, "The 'Big Society' is not a new concept, it's already happening on the ground with the thousands of volunteers who give up their time for free each and every day to help others in Devon. We wanted to honour and recognise these volunteers and to show how with our support, they can continue to do this vital work."

Eric Dancer, HM Lord Lieutenant of Devon and president of Devon Community Foundation presented the awards and short DVDs of the winning volunteers in action, made by Will Halfacree with support from Two Four Group, were shown. Ashfords LLP sponsored the 'Helping Young People' award.

Winners were chosen from some 660 groups supported with grants from Devon Community Foundation this year and included the following:

Helping People with Disabilities: Coach and chairperson, **Sharon Hawkins** for her volunteering work with Exeter based **Devon Racqueteers Wheelchair Badminton Club**. Sharon has helped to build the club into the largest Wheelchair badminton club in the UK, coached 5 players to represent England at the 4 Nations Disability Championships and helped players to achieve 10 gold and silver medals in national competitions. The Club is open to wheelchair users of all abilities and has been supported with a £3,900 grant from the Foundation to buy two new specialist wheelchairs.

Young Volunteer of the Year: **David Feindouno** for setting up **Plymouth Hope Football Club** which is designed to bring people from all cultures together in Plymouth, to break down barriers and to challenge popular misconceptions about asylum seekers and refugees through coming together to play football. A £1,000 grant from the Foundation helped to buy equipment and train a mini-bus driver for the club. The club now has members from over 20 different countries, including local people from the City.

Helping Young People sponsored by Ashfords LLP: **Carol Benn, Chairman of Kids Who Care, Unite Mid Devon Carers** for her work over the last 7 years supporting young carers in Mid Devon, fundraising, securing a new office for the group and helping to secure money to

train mentors for the young people. There are approximately 7,000 young carers in Devon. The average age is 12 and they will have spent 4 years caring before they get any support. 56% of young carers live in a single parent household. A recent grant of £4,000 from the Foundation helped to pay rent on the office for the Kids who Care project.

Helping People with Different Needs: Paul Tregunna from Plymouth Foodbank and Andrew Davies from the Oasis project (joint winners).

Despite suffering from schizophrenia and depression himself, Andrew uses his catering skills to teach cooking to others with mental health problems, adults with learning difficulties and children, as well as cooking for a weekly lunch club. He encourages those who come to the class to focus on what they can do. Paul had a liver transplant two years ago due to severe alcohol addiction. He wanted to give something back to the local community so now helps to run the Plymouth Foodbank, supporting others suffering addiction who might use the Foodbank in their own recovery. Last year Plymouth Foodbank supplied over 2,000 individuals in crisis with short term food supplies. 643 of these were children. A recent grant of £1,480 from the Foundation helped set up the cookery class project at the Oasis centre.

The evening was rounded off with a prize auction hosted by local auctioneer, Robin Barlow with prizes kindly donated by the following: Burts Potato Chips, Antonia's Kitchen, Exeter Chiefs, Cary Arms, Devon Life, Exeter Golf and Country Club, Lymptone Marine Base, Rob Doughton and Dartmoor Zoo.

Mike Bull, Chairman of Devon Community Foundation adds, "These are ordinary people doing extraordinary things, giving those in Devon who are most vulnerable not just a hand out but a hand up. Without the work of these volunteers many people in our local communities would simply fall through the gap. There's never been a more important time to support Devon Community Foundation and to ensure these groups and the work of local volunteers continue through the current economic crisis."

To find out more about Devon Community Foundation visit www.devoncf.com and make a donation.

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EDITORS NOTES:

Devon Community Foundation is Devon's local charity for local people, supporting small voluntary and community groups which help local people in need and build better and more inclusive communities for everyone.

It provides a cost-effective and personal way for individuals and organisations to invest in local community projects which are making a big difference to the lives of local people. It is one of 56 Community Foundations across the UK which currently act as the UK's 5th largest independent grant maker.

Volunteers: There are 73,000 voluntary and community organisations in South West carrying out 11 million hours of formal volunteering in the region each month – this equates to £720 million man hours per year. 33% of the South West's population volunteer once a month and 62% of South West population make an average donation of approx £16 per month. There are 17,200 registered charities in the South West – highest proportion of charities per head of any English region. (Source: State of the South West 2008, South West Observatory)