

Royal recognition for HARP!

Southend's Homeless Action Resource Project (HARP) has received The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

News of the prestigious honour was announced by Her Majesty the Queen today (Friday 1st June) to coincide with her Diamond Jubilee celebrations. Staff and volunteers at HARP were overjoyed to learn the accolade was being bestowed upon them especially as they were also celebrating their 10th year of operating services in the borough.

The charity was nominated for the award by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and visited by the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Lord Petre, as part of the assessment process. He recommended approval to a local assessment panel which sent a citation to the national Award Committee, a body made up of volunteering experts from across the UK. They in turn endorsed the nomination and sent it through to the Cabinet Office where it was forwarded to the Queen for final approval.

HARP, which provides a day centre service based in Valkyrie Road, Westcliff, also operates a range of services for the homeless and people who have difficulty in retaining housing tenancies as well as emergency night shelter and supported housing for 72 people.

The charity, which has 26 paid staff and 35 volunteers, provides day and night facilities for rough sleepers and the homeless. It also gives life skills training to service users and funds supported accommodation for people receiving treatment for substance abuse. Staff and volunteers act as trustees as well as performing cooking, cleaning and reception duties, distributing food and clothing and helping to run organised activities.

Last year alone HARP helped more than 1,500 people to overcome their problems and return to a normal life in the community.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Deputy Leader, John Lamb, who is responsible for grants to the voluntary sector, said he was delighted to hear news of the award. He said: *"What a fantastic achievement it is for HARP to receive the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. I see the award as testimony to the fantastic dedication and hard work of HARP's staff and volunteers. We were delighted to nominate them for the award and we're very proud that Her Majesty has seen fit to bestow it upon them."*

HARP's Chief Executive, Gill Garwood, said: *"HARP was initially created by a volunteer board of trustees and went on to evolve into the wide-reaching comprehensive service for the homeless that it has become today. Volunteers are the absolute backbone of the entire charity sector, so along with our skilled and dedicated staff and trustees our volunteers continue to make a huge difference to countless disadvantaged people within our community. HARP's volunteers bring great qualities with them and we recognise that they work tirelessly throughout the entire organisation. However, we will always be very grateful to them because most importantly, they bring their hearts".*

The Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Lord Petre, said, *"HARP provides a comprehensive, professional and essential service to the homeless in Southend. Volunteers, supported by a*

small, well-led paid staff team, provide a night shelter, supported accommodation for many vulnerable people, a day hostel, a large charity shop, outreach medical facilities and daily meals for over 6,000 people each year. Many of the volunteers have previously benefited from the service provided by HARP which creates an understanding and caring environment for those using the service. Without HARP the lives of many would be blighted without the hope, the critical support and a pathway to a better life. HARP provides an outstanding and essential service to a vulnerable and needy sector of the community in Southend”.

Background to The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service

112 outstanding UK voluntary groups on 1st June were honoured as recipients of The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Services 2012. Now in its 10th year, it has given out 1,092 Awards in total. This unique UK National Honour was created by Her Majesty to mark her Golden Jubilee in 2002 and to recognise the outstanding contributions made to local communities by groups of volunteers; it has the equivalent status to that of a single MBE.

This prestigious UK National Honour recognises and sets, the national benchmark for excellence in volunteering, with the work of those awarded being judged to be of the highest standard. Those receiving the Award were selected from 250 groups nominated across the UK this year by members of the public who have seen the difference the volunteers have made to the lives of others or witnessed the benefits of a group’s work in their community. The Award is overseen by the Office for Civil Society, in the Cabinet Office. Nick Hurd, Minister for Civil Society, who said:

“It gives me great pleasure to congratulate all this year’s winners of The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service. The work of our volunteers makes a huge difference right across society, and they are an inspiration to others to get involved and make their own positive impact.”

Winners will receive a certificate signed by The Queen and an exclusive commemorative crystal, presented by Her Majesty’s Lord Lieutenants in their Counties at special ceremonies arranged by the Lieutenancy offices and in the Countries of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The Lieutenant Governors of the Islands of Jersey and Guernsey will also make individual presentations.

Group representatives will also have received invitations to attend Royal Garden Party events and some will have had personal presentations to Her Majesty during her Royal Tour of the regions of the UK.

To find out more about volunteering for HARP and the roles available, please see our website’s dedicated volunteer page, contact in us on 01702 615000 or email info@harpouthend.org.uk