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QUEEN THANKS *JUST DROP-IN* VOLUNTEERS FOR CHANGING LIVES IN MACCLESFIELD

There were smiles and even a few tears as volunteers from Macclesfield's charity for young people, Just Drop-In were presented with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – the MBE for volunteer groups. The Assembly Room at Macclesfield Town Hall was full on Friday 22 September to hear David Briggs, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire tell volunteers "*You change people's lives and are worthy winners of The Queen's Award*".

Mr Briggs went on "*Today is the Queen's way of saying thank you. This is all about volunteering. This charity has only three full-time staff, several part-time and more than 60 volunteers: so this is what I call a true charity. That's what the Queen is looking for, people who give of their time and skill for free to help needy people.*"

Just Drop-In was one of just four out of 4000 charities in Cheshire to be honoured this year. From premises on Duke Street, Macclesfield it provides information, support, counselling services and training in life-skills for 12-25 year olds.

Last year volunteers dedicated 4,600 hours to helping mainly disadvantaged young people to 'find their feet'. Chair of Trustees, John Stephens said "*usually young people are centre stage, but today - for one day only - volunteers are the stars of the show*".

There has been a significant increase in the demand for Just Drop-In's services - last year almost 400 young people sought help on nearly 2,500 occasions. "*We're so thrilled and excited to have won this award. Even walking here today, I kept being stopped in the street by young people who have been helped by the volunteers who are here today*". Front-line work is done almost exclusively by volunteers and Chief Officer Ann Wright is quick to point out that this is one of the organisation's strengths: "*Being mainly volunteers but that does not mean we are not professional*".

One of the young volunteers revealed that she had used Just Drop-In's service herself: "*I went through a tough time and they helped me through it. It was the only safe place I could come to - nowhere was safe. As soon as I got through the door they made me feel so at home. I went from being really, really low to feeling ok and that I could cope again. Not every town has one [Just Drop-In]. They did so much for me and I just want to be able to do the same for other people.*"

There have been more than 300 volunteers since Just Drop-In was set up by Churches Together as a Millennium Project. The longest serving volunteer, trustee Steve Oliver, a Project Manager in the aerospace sector received the award on behalf of Just Drop-In: "*I care passionately about helping young people fulfil their potential. I've had some dark times myself in my youth and so I know what it's like feeling lost. I wanted to make a difference*". Asked what advice he'd give to anyone thinking of volunteering, Steve said "*Don't hesitate – do it*".

Just Drop-In is extremely grateful to its funders Cheshire East Council, Children in Need, Cheadle Royal Hospital Trust, Cheshire Community Foundation, William Wates Memorial Fund, Macclesfield churches and individual donors.

For more information about Just Drop-In or volunteering visit www.justdropin.co.uk or telephone 01625 665079.