

BIRMINGHAM DRAGONS PICK SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

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40 year old Lorraine Hawker from Great Barr has emerged triumphant from a Birmingham-based 'dragon's den', having secured financial backing and business support for her idea 'R They Safe' related to working with parents to improve child safety.

(Lorraine Hawker with Sarah Crawley, Chief Executive of iSE)

Lorraine was one of nine budding entrepreneurs who pitched their ideas for a social enterprise, or not-for-personal-profit business, to a team of three potential 'investors' in a contest based on the popular BBC TV series Dragon's Den.

The event, organised by iSE (Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs), offered the winner access to £2,400 from UnLtd, £1,500 from Business Link, a laptop, incubator space at iSE's recently opened Social Enterprise Hub and business support from iSE.

Lorraine is now working on setting up a CIC (Community Interest Company), with the aim of starting to deliver training sessions for parents from April. "Winning this competition has given me a real boost," she says. "iSE has been so responsive and supportive and having a laptop and the money has enabled me to get admin support and really get the business off the ground."

The judges were Tony Clabby from UnLtd, Paul Warwick from Business Link and Cheryl Garvey from Make Your Mark.

"Lorraine's proposal for 'R They Safe' stood out," said Cheryl Garvey, "as she had clearly done her homework and successfully identified a market need and potential customers."

Tony Clabby added, "I was particularly impressed with Lorraine's articulacy, identification of the market for her service and her commitment – evidenced by her decision to go part-time and invest her energy in developing her enterprise idea."

Paul Warwick commented, "Although we felt that Lorraine's idea was closest to being realised with the help we were offering, we were very impressed by the passion, desire and commitment to social impact exhibited by all the contestants."

Ideas pitched to the 'dragons' included proposals to: support individuals with disabilities to be empowered and engage with the employment market; train and empower young people; use arts, design and crafts to support mental wellbeing; promote healthy eating; and support individuals in making funeral preparations.

The overall standard of applications was extremely high and iSE is looking forward to working further with Lorraine as well as the other contestants to support the growth and realisation of their social enterprises. "The idea has worked well," says Sarah Crawley, Chief Executive of iSE, "so we may well look to repeat the activity in another six months, giving others the opportunity to pitch to receive a boost to their start up process."

To find out more about how iSE supports social enterprises and entrepreneurs see www.i-se.co.uk.

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