



PRESS RELEASE

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Rural women help local charity

BUSINESS women from across Cumbria have donated £440 to a local charity proving they are still going strong despite the changes in funding to the Rural Women's Network 18 months ago.

The Rural Women's Network held a charity auction and raffle at their countywide networking event at the Castle Inn Hotel, Bassenthwaite in aid of Hospice at Home Carlisle North Lakeland.

The event attracted more than 60 female business owners and hosted display stands of local female owned businesses together with representation from the 10 women's network groups within Cumbria

Established by Voluntary Action Cumbria in 2001, Rural Women's Network provided business support and training to women. And today the legacy lives on as local groups have gone on to become independent women's networking organisations.

Voluntary Action Cumbria Project Support Officer Ruth Evans said: "The hugely successful Rural Women's Network is going strong and has successfully adapted to changes in funding.

"Now, at the end of their first 18 months, seven of the original groups continue to run independently and three additional new groups have also been formed around the county.

"The core promise to provide networking and support opportunities for women involved in small businesses has not changed, but the groups of today have taken on their own identities and ways of running their groups and supporting each other.

"Through VAC, the Northern Rock Foundation offered the groups the option of applying for up to £500 funding per year over a period of two years, to assist with running costs with a goal of becoming totally self sufficient by the end of the project.

"The popularity of the Countywide Networking Event has highlighted how strong RWN is today. As well as the local groups, we also have a website and we are actively working to support a sustainable future.

"The success of RWN has led to the development of other projects and ways of meeting the needs of women in business. VAC is currently involved in new projects that are helping women in business, A4E – Action for Employment a new business start up support

programme, and a recently completed INTERREG IIC TOWER Project entitled Inspiring Women Entrepreneurs involving over 40 female entrepreneurs from Lyon, France; East Central Sweden and Cumbria, UK..

“As well as our national success, people are using RWN as a model internationally. RWN's reputation for supporting women in business was an inspiration for the Australian RWN and also Japanese Agricultural news who interviewed us because they wanted to know how we helped develop the roles of women in business to support economic growth in an agricultural area.

“And the future is looking positive. In the last 12 months we have seen three new groups form in Cumbria and it is one of these that highlights how well these network groups can work. The Cumbria Weddings and Events Network group has attracted interest from a very eclectic but connected group of people and, although it is only a few months old, they already have over 30 members supporting each other's businesses, ranging from stationery to singers and cake and dress makers to toast masters and wedding hire firms.

“Carlisle also has a Women in Business group currently meeting at the therapy centre, which, in turn, is associated with the Complimentary Therapy Group. In its launch, the Carlisle group were supported by the Brampton group and is another example of how well these women's networking opportunities can help grow something new.”

And Cumbria's RWN are supporting Hospice at Home Carlisle North Lakeland. Chair and Trustee of VAC, Leonard Coulthard and Ruth Evans handed over the cash raised to Charity Manager Sheila Thompson.

Hospice at Home Carlisle North Lakeland is celebrating its 10th anniversary and has launched an appeal to raise as much money as possible to secure the future of the service, which covers 1,500 square miles and a population of 188,000 from the Scottish Border in the north to Stainmore in the South and from Allonby in the West to Alston in the East. On average Hospice at Home nurses 300 patients, free of charge each year and though the charity receives some NHS funding it must still raise 70% of costs. Currently 80p of every pound donated goes directly to the nursing service.

Sheila said: “The charity relies on public donations, and without the support of people like Rural Women's Network and everyone who gives to Hospice at Home, we would not be able to provide the service we do. We are very grateful to everyone involved. It makes a great difference to many people's lives.”

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