

## Pause for Thought: Ian McInnes Award

During Volunteers Week earlier this year Volunteer Edinburgh created a new award for Volunteer Involving Organisations. The Ian McInnes Award is to be awarded annually to a Volunteer Involving Organisation in memory of Ian McInnes who passed away in 2017 in recognition of their contribution to improving equality and accessibility in volunteering.

This may be as a result of their creative approaches to reaching and recruiting volunteers; their flexible and inclusive ways of engaging with and supporting volunteers or how they share these techniques with other organisations to improve volunteering for all.

I was asked to introduce the award at this year's annual Volunteer Award Ceremony hosted by the city of Edinburgh here in the City chambers during Volunteers Week.

I was struggling to find the words that best explained why we had created this award but then realised I was going about it the wrong way. What I needed to do was to share Ian's story. Once you understand Ian you understand the award.

Quite simply Ian was a star. A person who made a deep and positive impression on all he met and I have no doubt provided wide ranging inspiration to many. I for one feel incredibly lucky and privileged to have known him.

For those of you who never had the good fortune to meet Ian the most obvious thing about him was his disability, however anyone who got to know him to any extent quickly realised that his condition made him into the extraordinary man he was.

He was born in Edinburgh on 13 August 1969 and at the age of 7 was diagnosed with a life limiting condition caused by an extremely rare gene mutation. At that time the life expectancy of an individual with this condition was considered to be early 20s. Ian was to have his own opinion on that!

He never once questioned why it had happened to him and was determined to live life to the full. He had a resounding belief that his life was in his hands and his condition would neither define nor limit him.

In his own way Ian was a bit of an adrenaline junky. He would regularly get into scrapes with his wheelchair - which he saw as nothing more than an occupational hazard. Apparently his neighbours would often be able to hear the words of Freddie Mercury singing "I want to break free" being played through the walls.

He once proudly remarked that he had visited all of the world's continents bar two - South America and Antarctica. His greatest travel adventure memory was crossing the Alps in the footsteps of Hannibal - complete with Elephants - as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Gold award which he was successful in completing.

But Edinburgh was home and if Ian had one crusade it was to improve the access for disabled people in the city and he liked nothing better than to bring the council to task. To quote a colleague from the Access Panel, as some of you may remember:

*"I will always have fond memories of him as he snapped at the heels of Council representatives like a persistent terrier! He was a very strong team player and a brilliant champion of the equality cause."*

His other passion was his volunteering which included:

- > Being one of the first people to engage in a pioneering project for volunteers with physical disabilities in the late 1980s.
- > A gardener at Sprout Horticultural Project at the Astley Ainslie Hospital
- > A puppeteer with PHAB
- > 9 years as a Director with ECAS
- > Edinburgh Access Panel, Edinburgh Transport Forum and the Living Streets Network
- > Young Carers Board Member
- > Trustee with the Ataxia Society
- > A Volunteer Ambassador with EaRN the Equality and Rights Network
- > 27 years with Citizens Advice Bureau during which time he received 2 Lord Provost Awards and seemingly earned a reputation for being able to keep a sense of order to those coming into the centre.

He even managed to reach out internationally through volunteering when someone he met was inspired to set up sports clubs for disabled people in Cambodia as a result of getting to know Ian.

To quote Ian when being interviewed about his volunteering in 2014:

*"Because of my volunteering, I'm hardly in my house. And to be quite frank with you, I would not want to be in the house. I'm not one that likes staying in. If I stay in, I get cabin fever and as my grandfather always used to say my aim is to die of exhaustion not boredom!"*

It seemed only right that Ian was recognised for his volunteering and he was incredibly proud to have been selected as a Queens Baton Bearer for the Commonwealth Games in 2014.

Ian acted in a key role in helping improve services that involved volunteers and was regularly interviewed for research projects and funding applications.

Ian touched so many people in so many ways. His family are immensely proud of him and of all that he achieved. Achievements which, were not for self-aggrandisement or material gain, but in the service of others.

When interviewed for one of the equality projects he volunteered for he said that if he could be remembered for one thing it would be for making Edinburgh more accessible for disabled people.

To Ian this wasn't just about improving physical access, but also about using his presence to challenge the stereotypes, prejudices and lack of equal opportunities he came across during his volunteering – some subtle, some more obvious like the time a member of the public walked straight past him at the reception desk looking for someone who could help them. He would rarely get angry or upset when things like this happened but try to use such incidents to provoke discussion and learning. He knew he had a presence and took every opportunity he could to voice his opinions. To quote:

*"I want counsellors, politicians and people in power who can make a difference, to see the difference volunteering has made to my life and others like me and to acknowledge the part many organisations have played in this. If I can repeat the message enough times maybe I will get them to sit up and pay attention and achieve something worth shouting about."*

And it is with these very words in mind I am standing here today asking you to support us keep his memory alive.

Thank you for listening.