Press Release

23 November 2023

Avanti West Coast employee receives Heart of Gold Award for efforts to help others

- *Runcorn Team Leader, Laura Warwick, named 'Rail Hero' at industry awards*
- *Laura recognised for efforts to help colleagues, customers, and local community*
- *Work as Community Champion is dedicated to raising awareness of mental health*

An Avanti West Coast employee has received a prestigious industry award for her efforts to support colleagues, customers, and the local community with their mental health.

Laura Warwick, Team Leader at Runcorn station, was named as Railway Benefit Fund's 'Rail Hero' at their Heart of Gold Awards 2023, which celebrate those working in the rail industry who have made a real difference in their workplace or community.

Described as an "absolute inspiration" by Railway Benefit Fund (RBF), Laura was recognised for her work to squash the stigma associated with mental health, which includes repurposing a waiting room at Runcorn station into a community space that offers local people help with their wellbeing.

Laura also volunteers as an Avanti West Coast Community Champion to back causes that matter to most local people and this honour is the latest of her achievements.

It follows recognition at the Women in Rail Awards – where she was named 'Unsung Hero' for going above and beyond to support local charities with a focus on mental health – and reaching the shortlist in the Outstanding Personal Contribution category at the National Rail Awards.

Laura's efforts to raise awareness of mental wellbeing and get people talking have seen her make connections with local organisations as well as groups that provide regular help and support for people.

Runcorn station's community space now hosts drop-in sessions by peer support group, It's Good 2 Talk, weekly Age UK events, and welcomes a Ukulele group for rehearsals.

Laura's dedication to helping those who are struggling has also seen her save the life of a woman experiencing a mental health crisis by talking to her and arranging specialist support.

Reflecting on her achievement, Laura said: "I am beyond thrilled to receive the Rail Hero Award. There were so many deserving nominees and I just want to acknowledge every one of them. They all keep the railway safe - going above and beyond for those who use it.

"I would like to thank the RBF for acknowledging the work I have been doing to support our communities, customers, and people at Avanti West Coast. This award is dedicated to them all, as they've all contributed to this incredible journey we're on to create a space for support and community groups to use that help with loneliness, mental wellbeing, as well as many other everyday issues we may all face at some point in our lives."

Andrea Thomas, Avanti West Coast Station Manager at Runcorn, said: "Laura has made such a positive difference at Runcorn by creating a safe environment for people to take care of themselves, look out for others and get the support they need. She's dedicated her time volunteering as a Community Champion to raise awareness of mental health and illustrate it's the little things that can make a difference. At Runcorn we've seen first-hand the positive impact her efforts are having on those who are struggling.

"Laura's proactive, compassionate, kind-hearted, and community minded. We're incredibly proud of all she has achieved and it's so brilliant to see she's been recognised as a hero in the rail industry."

Jo Kaye, Railway Benefit Fund CEO, said: "Laura truly epitomises our Heart of Gold Awards. Through her community work, she has made a real difference to staff and customers at Runcorn station, and we are delighted to present her with this award."

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About Railway Benefit Fund

The Railway Benefit Fund, also known as RBF, is a charity which provides support to current, former and retired railway people and their families across the UK. We've been here for railway people since 1858 and today, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we're able to offer help to those who need us.

Supporting Railway People & Families | Railway Benefit Fund (RBF)

About Avanti West Coast

Avanti West Coast, operator of intercity rail services on the West Coast Main Line, is a joint venture between FirstGroup and Trenitalia, delivering a cleaner, greener railway that drives the West Coast forward.

We're on a mission to revolutionise train travel. Our refurbed Pendolinos are returning to the rails, with a £117m investment that's delivering best in class comfort. Rebuilt using sustainable materials wherever possible, including tables made from recycled plastic bottles, our upgraded fleet offers 25,000 brand new seats, free Wi-Fi, onboard recycling and much more.

New Hitachi trains are set to replace our Voyager trains from 2024, leading to a 61% cut in carbon emissions. Quieter and roomier, with more reliable Wi-Fi, wireless charging for electrical devices and a real-time customer information system, the new 23-strong fleet is the result of a £350m investment in sustainable travel.

We're tackling climate change wherever we can, from reducing energy and water use to training drivers in eco-driving techniques and sourcing food and drink from local suppliers. Our goal is to be net zero carbon by 2031. We're on track.

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Press Office: 0845 000 3333