



WINNERS' STORIES

EPIC YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR

AWARDS 2023

EPIC | AWARDS
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EPIC FUTURE: OUR STORY

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EPIC was conceived in 2018 and borne out of a passion and desire to empower entrepreneurial young people to realise their business dreams. Since the start, its purpose has been to close the gap that can exist for some young people due to adverse life factors and provide them with real, meaningful opportunities and the chance to fulfil their potential.

Being part of the Martin James Foundation and its global network of organisations, the team already had a long and successful history of creating inclusive communities by improving outcomes for young people and families globally. This experience, coupled with the desire to empower more young people utilising the business start-up expertise of its founders and resources from across the Martin James Network, created the focus of EPIC to do something more locally and give back to the community in the West Midlands.

EPIC initially started via a partnership with the Birmingham Care Leavers Association as a place to refer young people who had a dream and the will to set up their own businesses. Funding was raised from corporate sponsors and events, mentors were identified from leaders within the Martin James Network, and

services were allocated from the Network's businesses as part of their CSR strategies. This approach enabled the team to provide young people with the incubation support they needed, from legal advice to branding and budgeting.

Since then, the team has helped more than 40 young people to launch their business ideas. In addition, many more young people have been empowered with small grants during the COVID-19 pandemic and to create educational content through a partnership with BeatFreaks.

With a passion for continually enhancing the programme, in early 2022, the team structured the Young Business programme. It now provides three core aspects of support: skills masterclasses, which equip young people with the knowledge and information to be able to nurture and sustain their businesses; mentoring from a specialist who has experience and connections of working in a sector aligned with their business venture; and funding to help with initial start-up essentials. More than 15 young entrepreneurs have graduated from the Young Business Programme.



A MESSAGE FROM EPIC'S FOUNDERS

"As we reflect upon another year of growth and inspiration, it becomes clear how the ripples of passion and ambition can transform entire communities. Through our work with the Martin James Foundation, we have consistently recognised the immeasurable power of nurturing and solid support structures in shaping the lives of young people.

We have experienced how the journey from a dream to realisation is filled with challenges and triumphs. Some young individuals face daunting obstacles, which only makes their successes remarkable. This ceremony celebrates your journeys - from the beginning to the middle and all that lies ahead.

We are genuinely thrilled to see the growth of EPIC over the last few years. It has been nothing short of inspiring. Not only have we witnessed an incredible display of entrepreneurial spirit and resilience from the young entrepreneurs, but we've also seen the tenacity of those who support EPIC, such as our partners, including the Arconic Foundation, many sponsors here this evening and volunteer mentors, and the dedicated team, including Calum, Marc, and Hannah.

EPIC's growth from Birmingham to other parts of the UK is a testament to our unwavering commitment to supporting young people's dreams. We are filled with hope and excitement about the future as we look ahead and are more committed than ever to our vision that every young person, irrespective of their background, should have the opportunity to embrace entrepreneurship, and we are here to build the bridges that make this possible.

As we move forward, know that every achievement celebrated today is just the beginning. Together, we're shaping a brighter, EPIC future."

Ayyab & Jim // Founders of EPIC

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COMMUNITY IMPACT



SPONSORED BY
**ARCONIC
FOUNDATION**

This category recognises young entrepreneurs who have dedicated their business to improving the lives of people within their community, this could be through social enterprise or a business that supports any aspect of community strengthening and/or development.



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Arconic Foundation collaborates with nonprofit and community organisations to strengthen communities by promoting education, environmental sustainability, and social equity through skill-building learning experiences.

The Foundation, independently endowed, invests in charitable organisations to advance its mission and fortify the communities where Arconic Corporation operates. This effort is amplified by the thousands of Arconic employee volunteers who dedicate their talents and time to make a meaningful impact in their communities.

Through the Arconic Foundation's support, EPIC has successfully engaged with educational faculties and youth centres around Kitts Green and surrounding areas. This funding has been hugely impactful, dramatically increasing EPIC's ability to provide targeted support to young entrepreneurs in East Birmingham, with further impact to be realised in the months and years to come. The significant and rapid uptick in referrals received into the EPIC programme after each successive awareness event provides clear evidence of the current and ongoing need for support services for young people in this region.

AWARDED TO ETHOS NETWORK



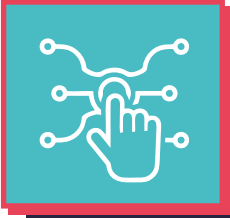
THE WINNER'S STORY

In 2020, 19-year-old Alejandra de Brunner felt she was missing a place to find dedicated information on social matters and subsequently founded The ETHOS Network as a first-of-its-kind online community. With its focus on Gen Z, Alejandra has stated that she chose this group focus because 'young people have a passion for driving positive change and are passionate advocates of social change.'

The Ethos Network's unique proposition lies in merging social media with social activism. It empowers users to create profiles centred around social issues they are passionate about while discovering new causes that might pique their interest. At its core, The Ethos Network is a dedicated space for all those issues that draw young people together, providing a safe space to have those discussions.

With a pre-money valuation of £2.74m, Alejandra has raised more than £1.5m in seed funding to date. Discussing whether she'd faced any additional challenges as a female entrepreneur, she shared, "I'm very grateful to have met very supportive people from the beginnings of ETHOS. However, my colleague and I (who both identify as females) have had times where we wish we hadn't disclosed our gender so that we'd be taken more seriously, particularly in outsourcing work. Perhaps part of the issue was that we were 19/20 years old as well. For now, I continue to initially reach out to most people as "Alex" rather than Alejandra – as this has repeatedly proven to be more successful. Fortunately, there are many people out there working on these disparities, fighting against the many other exclusions too."





DIGITAL DISRUPTER

SPONSORED BY

BUCKT

This category recognises young entrepreneurs who have disrupted their business marketplace through digital innovation.



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Buckt is the UK's only mystery ticket subscription service. It presents an avenue for adventure and spontaneity by offering five mystery tickets to premium attractions and activities in a user's locale every month. Whether it is alpaca walking, sumo suit wrestling, cinema experiences or dining adventures at remarkable restaurants, Buckt encourages its subscribers to embrace new experiences.

Inspired by the concept of a bucket list, the service facilitates easy and affordable adventures, fostering a culture of exploration and newfound passions. Currently operating in eight prominent regions, including London, Greater Birmingham, Greater Manchester, and Liverpool, it continuously seeks to expand its horizons backed by recent investments from the Birmingham-based venture capital firm Midven.

Buckt looks forward to potentially bringing its unique service to enthusiasts worldwide, encouraging more individuals to fall in love with the unexpected and cultivate enriching experiences.

AWARDED TO **BETA BOOSTER**



THE WINNER'S STORY

Anuj Ashar, a 22-year-old aerospace engineering graduate, is a serial tech entrepreneur and the Founder/CEO of Beta Booster, created by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs to lead future and 'never done before' applications for artificial intelligence. This initiative aims to tackle technical challenges faced by high-growth potential startups. At 18, Anuj created A-Pay, an open banking app developed with a modest £200 budget. This achievement led to an invitation from Innovate UK to collaborate with the United Nations in South Africa, where he digitised payment systems for rural communities, earning him a £10,000 award and global venture capitalist investment offers.

Building two successful tech startups by 21 inspired the creation of Beta Booster, an artificial intelligence

(AI) platform that eliminates entry barriers for non-technical, low-budget entrepreneurs, SMEs, and startups. By harnessing the latest AI advancements, Beta Booster uses an automated process leveraging natural language processing (NLP) to guide clients through pertinent questions, slashing development costs by up to 95%, improving quality, and cutting development time from five months to two weeks.

Currently, Beta Booster has a network of over 150 developers and a rapidly expanding customer base, projected to grow by 300% this year. The company has also received accolades, including the LeicestershireLive Innovation Awards, and was a finalist in the Nachural Summer Business Awards. Additionally, Anuj was named a finalist as a Rising Star (Niche Magazine Awards) and Startup Entrepreneur of the Year (Real Entrepreneur Awards). The EPIC Awards would highlight Anuj's achievements and Beta Booster's technical capabilities, supporting their mission to expand national innovation and establish a leading startup in the AI field.





FRESH TASTE

This award recognises nutrition-based businesses. This could be young entrepreneurs who have, through their own culinary skills or facilitating access to others, created new routes to market or presented new products to the food and nutrition market.

SPONSORED BY



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

After moving to the UK for studies, Yuru Gio noticed the absence of authentic meals from her home country in the high street, despite a thriving behind-the-doors food scene featuring incredible cooks from diverse cultural backgrounds. Inspired, she founded 'Hey! Food is Ready' in 2021 at Durham University with co-founder Frankie.

The venture is a marketplace for cooks from around the world residing in Britain to serve their food at events, promoting diversity, inclusion and local food economies. It provides a platform for refugees, immigrants, stay-at-home parents, retirees, and cooking enthusiasts to share their native cuisine, culture, and stories and earn meaningful income. The initiative also aims to foster workplace diversity through food, highlight minority ethnic food cultures, and support local cooks.

After winning the EPIC Community Impact Award last year, Yuru returned as a judge this year. Yuru shares, "It is a pleasure to recognise and celebrate impactful projects contributing to our communities, and we take pride in being part of initiatives that champion positive change and innovation."

AWARDED TO **BRAINY BAR LTD.**



THE WINNER'S STORY

Brainy Bar is on a mission to raise the bar on optimal nutrition through hand-made, all-natural, raw-ingredient energy bars. Brainy Bar sources locally in the UK and is focused on sustainability in the supply chain and works with students, athletes and communities to discuss health and nutrition.

Niki and Dom (Dominik Kulscar) have formed a powerful partnership, and Dom's impact on the business since joining has been significant. They have secured grant funding from the BSEEN programme, advice from the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, participated in several bootcamps and pitching competitions, and will be stocked in the university Student's Union shop shortly. They've done all this while studying a full-time undergraduate degree programme.

Dom was awarded the Entrepreneur of the Year 2023 (Aston University Business Cohort' 23) and won the most recent Aston University Student Pitch competition and people's vote.

Dom comments on the EPIC Awards: "I believe this is the next stepping stone to celebrating our team's resilience, commitment and perseverance of bringing a truly innovative health and nutrition bar product to market within eight months of operating."

He continues, "We are due to be stocked in our first retailer this September, and this award could be the golden ticket to differentiating ourselves in this crowded market and gaining the credentials necessary to be recognised as a young leader within our industry."

Dom adds, "This [award] will allow us to spread our message of the benefits of proper nutrition and its impact on health and wellbeing. I have never nominated myself for an awards category and would like to try something new, inspire other young people to get started on their ideas, meet like-minded young leaders and bring awareness to the power of proper nutrition. Thank you for this opportunity."





HEALTH & WELLNESS CHAMPION

SPONSORED BY



This category recognises young entrepreneurs who are committed to improving the physical and/or mental health and wellbeing of their community through their business enterprise.



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

HYPE Fitness is a London-based boutique fitness studio offering fun, flexible and unique group fitness classes whilst promoting body positivity and confidence. HYPE was founded by Hannah Al-Khaldi in 2010 on the principle that everyone should have access to facilities and support to achieve their best physical and mental health and well-being.

By sponsoring this award, HYPE Fitness celebrates champions in the health and wellness field and reinforces its commitment to creating healthier communities while inspiring and motivating individuals and organisations to prioritise their overall health.

Hannah shares, "Promoting health and well-being extends beyond the boundaries of gym walls -- it's about supporting holistic wellness initiatives and finding creative and different ways to inspire people to prioritise their own health. Together, we can create a movement that empowers people to make healthier choices, ultimately leading to happier and more fulfilling lives. We look forward to celebrating and supporting those who share our dedication to health, wellness, and the well-being of all."

AWARDED TO THE PERFORMANCE STUDIOS



THE
PERFORMANCE
STUDIOS

THE WINNER'S STORY

The Performance Studios (TPS) was founded by Ciara in 2020 at age 20 and has two theatre locations in Lancaster and Settle. Their theatre spaces and trained team help children explore their passion on stage and recognise their potential through acting, singing, and dancing. TPS operates with five core values: Individuality, Exploration, Professionalism, Community, and Respect.

Ciara's journey began at age 11, when she joined the Liverpool Empire Theatre Company and performed in numerous Musical Theatre shows before joining the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts. Ciara comments, 'Whilst studying at LIPA and becoming

a member of The Everyman Theatre Company, my passion for Performing Arts meant I didn't just want to stop there, I had a burning desire to keep learning and growing. This led me to become a volunteer at a local theatre school in Liverpool known as 'Stage Door'.'

After sixth form, Ciara acted in several roles, then joined Lancaster University to study Theatre and Entrepreneurship. This combination incited TPS's vision. In her final undergraduate year, Ciara launched TPS, which has grown despite the global pandemic and other hurdles.

Asked for advice for young entrepreneurs, Ciara said, "Do what you love and follow your passions. I adore my job, and when you do what you love, it is easy to roll out of bed in the morning as it never feels like work! Having recently returned to Lancaster University as a Teaching Fellow and Entrepreneur in Residence, I can share this important message with the students I engage with."





INCLUSION CHAMPION

SPONSORED BY

MJN

MARTIN JAMES NETWORK

This category recognises young entrepreneurs who have trailblazed awareness of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion issues and provided methods to enhance individual, community and organisational inclusivity.



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

The Martin James Network (MJN) was built to support the growth of companies and entrepreneurs who contribute to a better, more inclusive society where individuals are valued, and communities grow and thrive cohesively.

All the companies across the Network use human-centred practices and innovative technology to have a positive impact on families and vulnerable individuals.

Ayyab and Jim Cockburn, founders of MJN, MJF and EPIC, believe in inspiring others to be bold, kind and courageous and are hugely proud to sponsor the Inclusion Champion category.

Ayyab shares, "The Inclusion Champion category has great significance for the Martin James Network as it perfectly aligns with our 'Fearless Future' vision, and we congratulate the award winner for breaking down barriers whilst celebrating their culture and heritage. We are also inspired by the winner's passion for women's education whilst also offering support and mentorship for other entrepreneurs in the community."

AWARDED TO **ART BY ZAKIA**

The logo for Art By Zakia, featuring the words "Art By" in a smaller, cursive font above the word "Zakia" in a larger, more prominent cursive font. The entire logo is set against a white background with a red border.

THE WINNER'S STORY

Zakia's journey in developing ArtByZakia was filled with ups and downs. At 16, she bravely initiated the planning for ArtByZakia despite needing some knowledge, skills, and resources required for the fashion industry. She commenced selling her original artwork and prints when she was just 17 years old, even letting go of her first piece, which took over 15 hours to create, for a mere £20—a sum she humorously considers a steal!

Zakia has been running ArtByZakia for several years while pursuing a full-time university degree, advocating for the Asian community, and raising a young family.

ArtByZakia aims to craft a unique place in individuals' lives by providing tailor-made gifts with a distinct,

handmade touch. The constantly expanding portfolio of ArtByZakia products offers opportunities to showcase one's heritage, gift personalised presents to loved ones, or indulge in self-care.

Zakia shares, "The Asian Community looks down on the art industry, and I was told constantly by multiple people that it was a waste of time and wouldn't lead me anywhere. Despite being told this, I still sold my artwork and did not stop believing in my dream. I owe it to my mum for supporting me since day one, believing in not just my art but me too and helping to take ArtByZakia from the beginning to where it is now and where it is destined to go. I truly believe that without her help and support I wouldn't be where I am today!"

Zakia is passionate about women's education and allocates a part of her profits to organisations that promote this objective in Pakistan. Additionally, she has collaborated with fellow women entrepreneurs, offering guidance, support, and mentorship.

She was a finalist in the Saverah Women in Business Awards 2023 in the Young Businesswoman of the Year category.





INSPIRATIONAL FOUNDER

This category recognises young entrepreneurs overcoming significant adversity or championing a particularly exceptional cause as part of their entrepreneurship.

SPONSORED BY



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Ormerod Rutter (OR) is proud to support the EPIC Awards for a second year and has been heavily involved in mentoring and supporting many entrepreneurs in the EPIC Young Entrepreneur Programme.

OR's inspirational founders, Pete Ormerod and Garry Rutter, started OR nearly 40 years ago from Pete's spare bedroom. They have built up their business on a foundation of unwavering core values, including building strong, lasting relationships and always having the best interests of their clients and community at heart. Their motto, Big Firm Capability, Family Firm Personality, is still at the very heart of Ormerod Rutter as they continue to grow.

"It's an honour to be part of recognising someone who has overcome adversity to realise their goals or has made a significant positive impact in their community. It was truly inspirational to hear the stories of this category's nominees and, as with all of the categories, it was difficult to decide on a winner from such a fantastic group," shares Dina O'Brien, Senior Accounts Manager at OR.

She continues, "The winner of the Inspirational Founder Award has shown resilience, resolve, empathy, and compassion to get to where they are now. Their hard work has not only shattered the barriers that they have faced, but has also led to many others now being able to realise their own potential."

AWARDED TO **ONE/THIRD PROJECT CIC**

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THE WINNER'S STORY

Hannah's unwavering dedication and relentless pursuit of empowering young individuals with non-traditional backgrounds through her organisation, the One/Third Project, are remarkable.

From a young age, Hannah experienced firsthand the challenges many young people face across the country. A traumatic incident forced her to leave school at 14, shattering her dreams and leading to mental health symptoms. However, she turned her adversity into a catalyst for change, creating a haven of inclusivity, innovation, and creativity with the One/Third Project in 2021, where young individuals with disrupted or disadvantaged backgrounds could find solace,

support and the tools they need to thrive, through her workshops, outreach initiatives, and collaborative endeavours with local organisations.

Hannah's impact goes beyond education. In the first year alone, she single-handedly helped over 900 young people, breaking barriers, misconceptions, and the silence that once suffocated young voices. Her work has empowered young individuals to reclaim their worth and sparked a revolution of empathy, understanding, and compassion throughout the wider community.

As an inspirational founder, Hannah's story is a beacon of hope for all facing adversity. Her entrepreneurial vision and commitment to championing a cause greater than herself have created a lasting legacy of inspiration. She embodies the essence of the EPIC Awards, being a visionary and a catalyst for change. Her dedication to improving lives across the West Midlands and beyond and her pursuit of educational equality and mental well-being make her the epitome of the Community Impact and Inspirational Founder categories. Her story demonstrates the transformative power of belief in the potential for change and the ability to create a more inclusive world.





PRACTICAL PRODIGY

This category recognises young entrepreneurs who have exemplified true hands on skill, providing practical solutions using a specific and developed skillset. This could be working in a creative or construction trade, as a craftsperson or anything else which requires a physical application of their individual skills.

SPONSORED BY



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

UK Fire Training is the UK's Number 1 fire training provider, with workplace fire training delivered by knowledgeable firefighters. They work with businesses and organisations across the whole of the UK to keep business premises and, most importantly, employees safe from the threat of fire.

Jon Hughes, Managing Director of UK Fire Training, shares, "The world of business can be a minefield for even the most experienced of business leaders. The support and guidance EPIC offers young entrepreneurs as a guiding light is priceless, which is why UK Fire Training is both proud and delighted to partner with EPIC to sponsor the Practical Prodigy Award. As a training organisation, we felt a natural synergy with an award recognising young entrepreneurs who have exemplified hands-on skill, providing practical solutions using a specific and developed skill set."

AWARDED TO **HAUSBOTS**



THE WINNER'S STORY

In 2020, at age 20, school friends Jack Cornes and Harry Smith founded Hausbots. They had a vision of building robots to make maintaining and inspecting buildings and infrastructure faster and more cost-effective while eliminating the danger of working at heights.

Jack shares, "The whole idea is fuelled by our desire to help out in any way we can. We really want to see houses springing up to help people afford their own property."

The duo began working out of Harry's parents' garage in Rutland on the prototype. They have since moved to the Custard Factory in Digbeth, where they employ six people and are supported by multiple Venture Capital funds, including the British Design Fund.

Hausbots has diversified service offerings to include Industrial Inspections, Thickness and Half-Cell measurements, Ground Penetrating Radar and Exterior painting, all utilising their innovative and patented Hausbot (HB1) technology under their Robots as a Service (RaaS) proposition.

Jack and Harry have been successful in tenders with Highways England, named in the Top 50 Robotics List by BuiltWorlds and were finalists in the AkzoNobel Paint the Future Global Startup challenge in 2022.





JUDGES SPECIAL RECOGNITION

SPONSORED BY
MILLS & REEVE
Achieve more. Together.

This category is for those young entrepreneurs who, through any category nominations, have been highlighted by the judging panel as deserving special recognition for their achievements.

ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Based in Birmingham, Mills & Reeve is a leading law firm offering a full range of legal services. They strongly believe in building connections with clients, employees, and the communities they operate in to achieve great things, encapsulated in their guiding principle: "Achieve more. Together."

Mills & Reeve is delighted to return as a category sponsor at the EPIC Awards, recognising a fantastic array of businesses.

Mills & Reeve know the power that a great network can bring to a developing business and have seen so much evidence of the links that all applicants have developed in the first stages of their corporate life. As a firm, they are committed to helping early-stage businesses via their LaunchPAD offering and Technology Law Toolkit, which offers free access to key legal documents that start-ups may need.

They are hugely impressed by all applicants and will be thrilled to present the Judge's Special Recognition Award to its deserving recipient.



AWARDED TO **MARTY SUPPLIES**



THE WINNER'S STORY

Leo runs Martin and Simpson, a marketing agency specialising in scaling Amazon brands. In addition, he operates a thriving Amazon FBA business, Marty Supplies, selling private label products and partnering with brands as strategic retail collaborators.

He embarked on his entrepreneurial journey at the onset of 2021, reselling products on Amazon and forging a path for himself. By the close of that year, Leo had transitioned to his second office and began establishing vital connections within the industry. The first half of 2022 marked a significant growth phase for him, tripling his turnover and opting to merge his business with an associate, Luke.

Subsequently, the decision was made to relocate the business to Ilminster, Somerset, where they acquired a warehouse complemented by an office space. Facing

challenges in the ensuing months, Leo opened his marketing agency as a supplementary source of revenue. Despite initial hardships, the agency secured noteworthy clients with whom they maintain an outstanding rapport.





ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

This category reflects public recognition of inspirational accomplishments and is determined by a public vote.

We are excited to launch this new award category in 2023, where the winner is selected by a public vote online. All eligible businesses that were nominated have been displayed on our website, with active voting right up to the night of the awards.

The winner will be announced on stage at the EPIC Awards, and further information about the winner shall be published on our website and social media channels following the awards ceremony.



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

The EPIC Entrepreneur of the Year Awards 2023 have been made possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors. Their commitment to fostering innovation and championing young entrepreneurial talent has been instrumental in bringing this celebration to life. We deeply appreciate their belief in the next generation of business leaders.



MILLS & REEVE

Achieve more. Together.



MJN

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