

Winner of the RE:LEAF Acorn Award:

Mark Gazaleh, W1W Tree Planting Initiative

The award was given for an individual member of the public who has made a particular contribution to promoting or conserving trees

Mark won for his long term, unwavering work to improve the environment in the Marylebone and Fitzrovia area. He has engaged local individuals, businesses and the community, as well as attracting a high PR profile for the project. His contribution was clearly recognised, with numerous nominations from a range of people.



Mark Gazaleh, (centre) with W1W partners, having received the award from John Simpson, BBC World Affairs Editor (right) and Matthew Pencharz, the Mayor's Environment Advisor at the London Living Room, City Hall on the 15th May 2013

Mark said:

"I am delighted to see our project's ultimate tree planted in the Marylebone area and to receive a personal award is a great honour. The project's successes wouldn't have been possible without the passion, commitment and generosity of local people, businesses and amenity societies. The support of Westminster City Council and Westminster Tree Trust has been crucial to deliver this wonderful result."

Mark Gazaleh

Mark is a project manager and long term resident of Marylebone, who drove the promotion of tree planting in the area since 2008. The W1W Tree Planting Initiative was

set up and in 2009 delivered its first project when 40 trees were planted on Hallam Street.

With the help of Mark's commitment, enthusiasm and ability to engage with all sectors of the local community, it has since grown and now planted over 600 street trees across Marylebone which have already transformed the local environment.

Hallam Street, the first tree planting in 2009



Whilst the programme is dependant on the commitment of others, none of this would have been achieved without Mark's energy and commitment. He used his extensive network of contacts to develop good working relationships with local residents, local businesses, institutions, the Borough and political leaders.

This included major landowners such as the Portman Estate and Howard de Walden Estate, local medical institutions such as the Princess Grace Hospital and Harley Street Clinic, educators such as the University of Westminster and many of the local schools, residents groups and amenity societies.

Mark was able to enthuse not only local people but also senior representatives who he recognised would be crucial to deliver a large scale programme of tree planting; they were key decision makers and budget holders.

The level of transformation that Mark envisaged was, to those used to the hard architecture of the area and current lack of trees, quite challenging - but his excellent negotiation and persuasion skills helped overcome these issues to deliver a programme that everyone supported.

Many of the planting projects included high profile events including well known people such as Robert Winston, John Simpson, Barbara Windsor and Alan Titchmarsh.

In addition, events attracted Local Councillors, senior officials from government departments such as Tim Rollinson and Sir Harry Studholme of the Forestry Commission, and Defra ministers. These high profile events helped raise awareness of the initiative and generated more momentum for more planting.

A crucial aspect of the initiative was securing Local Authority approval for the planting, raising funds to plant the trees and ensuring long term funding to ensure the trees are maintained properly.



Mark with Barbara Windsor at a planting event on Weymouth Street

Through close working with the Westminster Council Tree Section, the location of planting and selection of suitable tree were agreed that met the desires of the local people. Funding for the planting was secured through fundraising events, the Big Tree Plant and the Mayor's Street Tree Programme. The Council have agreed to add these new trees into their tree maintenance programme, so there is confidence that the trees will establish and be looked after in the long term.

What can be learned from this?

The W1W Tree Planting Initiative and Mark Gazaleh's achievements highlight some key success factors that are needed to deliver similar programmes elsewhere:

- Commitment is needed from the range of people in the area – individual residents, businesses, institutions, schools and the Local Authority. A good knowledge of those networks and key contacts is vital
- Gaining the commitment of local people requires the passion, vision and energy of individuals like Mark
- Support from key decision makers and budget holders is crucial
- Persuasion and negotiation skills to deal with potential barriers
- Ensure a sustainable model is developed that ensures the long term maintenance of the project



Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; assisted by Tim Rollinson, Director General, Forestry Commission; Alisdair Douglas, Chair of the Board, The Tree Council; Mark Field MP, Cities of London & Westminster; and Julian Maslinski, Chairman, Westminster Tree Trust plant the first new trees on Great Portland Street in November 2009

Further information

- [W1W Tree Planting Initiative](#)
- [Westminster Tree Trust](#)
- The [RE:LEAF Partnership](#)

The 2013 Awards were organised by the Forestry Commission and Mayor of London, received sponsorship from Gristwood & Toms, Woodland Trust and Barcham Trees, and had assistance from a range of RE:LEAF partners

