

Oration for Rashid Bhayat, being awarded Hon DLitt

To be read on Friday, 18th January 2019, 11am, by

Vice-Chancellor Stuart Croft

Our honorary graduand, this morning, leads Positive Youth Foundation (PYF), a Coventry based organisation that supports and gives hope to thousands of vulnerable young people in Coventry and across the Midlands. I am delighted to introduce the founder and CEO of the charity, RASHID BHAYAT.

Rashid is a “Cov kid” born, bred and still living in the city. Like so many other successful entrepreneurs he left school early to set up his first social enterprise – a Community Sports initiative for Coventry City Council – at the age of 17. In 2011, Rashid left the council to become founder and CEO of the Positive Youth Foundation – a new social enterprise that would come to be Rashid’s passion, combining his commitment to young people with a restless entrepreneurial spirit to deliver high quality youth services in the city differently.

PYF’s core mission is to support young people in challenging circumstances – suffering the effects of poverty, a lack of positive role models, challenging

family or care situations, the lure of gangs and radicalisation amongst others.

PYF offers innovative and personalised provision to help these young people move towards positive destinations: bespoke, flexible learning programmes promote educational attainment; there are sporting and cultural programmes, employment-focussed programmes, programmes promoting health and well-being and community safety; mentoring and support for the many young refugees who have come to settle in Coventry.

Rashid is tireless and tenacious in his commitment to the young people of Coventry, never giving up on an idea, a project, a person. He provides strong moral and ethical, as well as practical, leadership: a successful social enterprise requires a leader who is trusted and respected by stakeholders.

Above all, he understands the needs of the young people PYF serves. 'Young people need mentors and models,' he says. 'They need a safe place to go and adults they can talk to regardless of their circumstances.' Rashid's work in responding to these needs has earned him the respect of all who work for and with him.

But Rashid would be the first to say that it is the PYF team and wider youth partnership in Coventry that deserves the recognition and respect for what they do daily to improve the life chances not just of the young people that they work with but for all of us who benefit as a society from the successes of this approach. It's not just a job. For Rashid, it's the fulfilment of a moral and social responsibility for those in need. Rashid still regularly works night shifts on the front line, supporting his colleagues on the street and in safe places in the City.

At a time of severe reductions in funding to local authorities, Coventry like other cities struggles to maintain basic services for young people. By developing a social enterprise investment model to deliver youth services, infused with his own commitment and belief in young people's potential to rise up and be the best they can be, Rashid has inspired and encouraged those who work with him, raised over £2m funding in the last five years for special projects, and worked with 2.5 thousand young people in 2017.

Rashid has developed an organisational ethos and strategy that is regionally and nationally recognised for its excellence. In 2016 PYF was awarded Gold Standard - Investors in People on its first application. In 2018, PYF received

the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and - Rashid and his wife Rumana were invited guests at the royal wedding last year.

Warwick has come to know Rashid and Positive Youth Foundation through the University's support for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 and the development of a 10 year cultural strategy for the city. Coventry won the bid partly because of the creative potential of its young and diverse population.

Rashid and PYF are seizing this opportunity to surface young and diverse talents, showcase their strengths and give them recognition and ambition.

As a fellow board member for the City of Culture Trust, I have grown to admire Rashid's principled determination, tenacity, and skills in ensuring that the voices and needs of young people in the city are foregrounded and that they are given a place on the Trust and in the design and delivery of the City of Culture year. This man feels, thinks, acts on behalf of those he serves. He is a change-maker, an entrepreneur, a dreamer and above all a good man doing a good job for us all.

Rashid is here today with his family, Rumana and his children Humzah and Esa.

Esa is studying for his A levels and Humzah is studying genetics at University. I

know that Rashid will be very proud to be the first doctor in the house.

Vice-Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the

degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, RASHID BHAYAT.