

NEWS

New honour for charity worker hit by racial hate



Maya Amangeldiyeva celebrates her award with Kent Big Issue seller John

Nathan Bevan
BBC News, South East

28 January 2025

A Kent charity worker targeted in alleged hate attacks has been named in a new poll as a leading force for good in the UK.

Maya Amangeldiyeva, who runs a food bank and a free shop in Herne Bay, features in The Big Issue magazine's 100 Changemakers list, published on Monday.

A Pride of Britain Award-winning fundraiser, the 36-year-old from Turkmenistan was reportedly the victim of a racist assault and suspected arson last year.

She described this latest recognition as "making me all the more determined to never give up".

Ms Amangeldiyeva made headlines in 2015 when she started providing meals to the homeless and those on low incomes from her cafe, Maya's Community Support Centre, in the town's centre.

In 2023 she also set up a High Street store where donated items, such as clothing and furniture, were made available to those in need for free.

That same year she was honoured at the Pride of Britain Awards, along with winning the title of Food Bank of the Year.

But, last August, someone reportedly tried burning down her food bank, pushing a bottle of liquid stuffed with a smouldering rag through the letter box.

She said she was also racially abused by three masked men as she sat with her partner on the town's seafront.

The incident left her with minor injuries and was reported to the police.

"I'm proud of myself and everything my volunteers have achieved," said Ms Amangeldiyeva, who, alongside her team of helpers, ensured 5,000 free meals and 1,000 gifts were given out in the local area last Christmas.

"I wish there wasn't a need for places like food banks, but while there are hungry and homeless people out there we'll continue to do all we can."

Nominated by its readers, The Big Issue's annual list "recognises and praises notable activists, agitators and grassroots figureheads making an impact on society".

It includes those who have raised millions for charity, supported those living in extreme poverty and fought for changes to the law.

Editor Paul McNamee said: "Against the backdrop of a madder, more divisive world, [these people] stand out for their selfless pursuit of justice and kindness for others."

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