

# Q&A with Ruth Ottley, Head Coordinator of the VINCI UK Foundation

We spoke to Ruth Ottley, Head Coordinator of the VINCI UK Foundation, to find out how the charity partnerships work, the value she and her fellow sponsors get from participating, and some of the charities that have touched our hearts at VINCI Energies UK & RoI.



*Sponsors Ruth Ottley (third from left), head coordinator for the VINCI UK Foundation, and Bruno Seguin (second from left), communications manager for VINCI Energies UK & RoI, present a cheque to Coventry Cyrenians staff in 2016.*

## When was the VINCI UK Foundation set up?

The original VINCI Foundation was established in France in 2002 and 12 other foundations have been set up across Europe since then. Our VINCI Energies UK & RoI CEO, Rochdi Ziyat, was very keen to have a foundation in the UK and was the main driver in launching the VINCI UK Foundation in 2016.

## Why was social exclusion chosen as a cause?

VINCI has always been a very people-oriented and caring company – and we want to leave a lasting impression on the local communities surrounding our businesses. Social integration and cohesion are crucial for thriving communities, and there are many small, often underfunded charities furthering this aim – ensuring fair access to training, employment, housing, healthcare, or recreational activities for society’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged. It’s an honour to support the incredible work these charities do and make a difference to our local communities.

## How has the VINCI UK Foundation developed

## over the years?

We are proud to have donated almost £1 million to 130 local charities and community projects since 2016. The original VINCI Foundation in France gave us some funds to start off, but we now draw all funds from our UK businesses. VINCI Energies UK & RoI grows mainly through acquisitions and every time a new business joins, our CEO, Rochdi Ziyat, encourages them to put something in the pot. We've also been getting more of our employees on board as sponsors, who provide practical help for our chosen charities. More than the financial contributions, this human involvement truly builds the connection between our businesses and their local communities.

## What is the nomination and selection process?

We invite charities to submit applications for grants between January and March each year. The applications are then summarised for our selection committee who meet in June to discuss which projects to support and how much to give. We want to help as many charities as we can, so some won't receive the full amount they've asked for, but we always check whether the project could still be completed without full funding. It could be a large project where we can still cover a part. The selection then goes to the board of directors for the final seal of approval, the charities are informed, we sign the partnership agreements, and the donations are paid.

## Is it tough to decide which charities should receive funding?

All the applications we receive are deserving, but we prioritise smaller, lesser known projects that may not receive so many funds from elsewhere. We also require the charities to purchase something tangible with the money, and after four years of doing this we have developed some precedents for where we can realistically help. For example, we know that if a charity is looking to purchase a second-hand van for transport, a £10,000 grant will do the trick. Overall, it's a fairly smooth process. Each of our UK businesses is represented on the selection committee and we all want to do the best by each charity. We also have an external expert to help us with any concerns or questions.

## How does the sponsorship element work?

Beyond the monetary contribution, our employees offer their professional skills as sponsors over 12 months – many even continue to support their charities privately afterwards. It's fairly unique in terms of foundations, I'm told. Some of our sponsors already have a personal or family connection with their charity; others go out and research a charity they would help and encourage them to apply for funding. And there are charities who apply without a sponsor and we match them up with one during the selection process. But we never make a donation without the involvement of at least one sponsor.

## What difference does having sponsors from within the business make?

It's extremely important for strengthening relationships with our community. The charities are always thrilled by the interest our sponsors take and the valuable skills they have to offer. It means a lot to them, especially when the charity is deeply personal to that sponsor. For our employees, it can be a humbling experience and very rewarding to have personally done something to give back to the community.

## Have you been a sponsor yourself?

Yes, in 2016. Homelessness is a big issue in my city, Coventry, so I got in touch with [Coventry Cyrenians](#) to see if there was anything they needed and how I might be able to help. Cyrenians offers temporary housing, support and training to people who have lost their homes mainly through bad debt and other social difficulties. Every three months, I helped organise a clothing and bric-a-brac collection from local businesses, which the van paid for by the VINCI UK Foundation grant came and picked up. I also went to them at Christmas to pack care boxes for homeless people in the city – and we still collect socks and toiletries for them in the office and wrap them up every year. It was a privilege to be able to do something like that for my city. I was born in Coventry, so it felt really special.

## What are some of your other fond memories of working with the foundation?

I get a lot of satisfaction from coordinating the VINCI UK Foundation – it's an honour and a great project management job. It is like running a small business and has developed me so much as a person. There are things I do now that I would never have been comfortable doing before. I also love meeting the amazing people running the charities. Last year I went to Arts4Wellbeing in Wales to see how they bring vulnerable and socially excluded people together through arts and crafts. It's a wonderfully supportive social network.

## Which charities is VINCI Energies UK & RoI sponsoring this year?

This year we are sponsoring:

- [Birmingham Impact Football Club](#), a group that brings together boys of different ethnicities through sport, with VINCI-branded kit and funds for days out;
- [Chuckle Productions](#), a special needs teaching centre in Staffordshire, with a new sensory room and facility repairs;
- [Coventry Haven Women's Aid](#) refuge with laptops for the safe housing;
- [Firefly Cancer Awareness & Support](#) in Doncaster with a new patient transport vehicle;
- [The Family Haven](#) day centre for vulnerable families in Gloucestershire with a new mobile-friendly website.

All our sponsors are new this year, as are the charities, except for Chuckle Productions, which we supported three years ago. The sponsor was our Actemium UK Director Chris Hutchinson, who sadly passed away last summer. His son was part of that programme, so it was extremely close to his heart. It means a lot to us to continue Chris's work with the charity in his memory.

## What are your ambitions for the VINCI UK Foundation in the future?

£200k a year is a fantastic amount to be able to give and I would like to maintain that. Of course, the more successful we are as a business, the more charities we can help. Regarding sponsors, we have been very lucky with the number of employees wanting to get involved and I hope it continues. Our sponsors become ambassadors of the Foundation and they then share their experience with other employees and what it meant to them. Some potential sponsors might not feel they are able to help a charity during work time, but it's encouraged by the company and they have full management support. It comes from our CEO, so couldn't come from any higher. Sponsors are very important and without their support, there would be no VINCI UK Foundation.

Find out more about the VINCI UK Foundation at [www.vinci-uk-foundation.co.uk](http://www.vinci-uk-foundation.co.uk).

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