

Big-hearted student wins business award

17-year-old's firm gave all its profits to charity

By Anna Edwards

anna.edwards@essmedia.co.uk

MEET Paula Clerkin - Croydon's Young Achiever of the Year.

The enterprising schoolgirl has scooped the prestigious award in a borough-wide competition which searches for young entrepreneurial talent.

Paula, 17, was awarded first prize in the contest run by the Young Enterprise group, with fellow Coloma students Claire McCoy and Nina Peronius taking second and third places respectively.

More than 200 young people from across Croydon were put into teams of 10 to 12 to set up their own business as part of the Young Enterprise scheme.

The three Coloma girls, all in Year 12, were selected independently from different teams for their commitment to their projects and for their entrepreneurial spirit.

Paula said: "I entered Young Enterprise completely open-minded, unprepared for the steep learning curve I'd encounter."

"It was a challenge to integrate within a group of

people who had not met before. But we learned to work together as a group of aspirational people who thrive within a competitive environment."

Paula said she found her Apprentice-style challenge tough at times, but it was worth it in the end. She added: "It was hard to be innovative and full of enthusiasm all of the time, but the rewards far outweighed the obstacles."

Handmade

Paula's team, Pro Active Croydon Enterprise (PACE), sourced leather wristbands, which they individually stamped with metal letter templates to create handmade designs for their clients.

The company donated all its profits to children's hospice Demelza House. The girls also negotiated that their donation be matched by the team's mentor company, Croydon Churches Housing Association.

Young Enterprise, which has been in Croydon for 34 years, is backed by a host of local businesses, including Nestlé, Croydon Conference Centre, Croydon Business Ventures and Jury's Inn.



ENTERPRISING: Young Achiever of the Year Paula Clerkin with her trophy and certificate