



## Winner// JANE AUSTIN

This award celebrates a C-Suite executive leader who has championed mental wellbeing at the highest level.

From the moment Wave was founded in April 2017, Jane Austin, HR Director and psychology graduate, positioned wellbeing as the company's core value. Alongside the CEO, she helped establish Wave as a start-up with a purpose: a workplace where people could thrive, not just perform. Over eight years, Jane has embedded wellbeing into every facet of the business, linking it seamlessly with social value and community engagement. Her dedication has not only transformed Wave's culture but has influenced the wider SME sector, earning over ten national awards and a voice on the National Forum for Wellbeing at Work.

### Driving Change and Innovation

Jane's approach blends empathy with practical solutions. Early challenges, such as no budget for an occupational health provider, became opportunities to innovate – leading to the creation of



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a free, high-quality early intervention scheme. Within six weeks of Wave opening, she was breaking down stigma around mental health, introducing initiatives like menopause training (2019), financial wellbeing support during lockdown, and now an innovative financial wellbeing app.

Her programmes are carefully layered: if a speaker shares lived experience, follow-up sessions with consultant psychologists equip employees with coping strategies. Jane's initiatives include the Living Library, peer-led support groups, and campaigns addressing burnout, suicide prevention, cancer, baby loss, and



Jane Austin, HR Director of Wave

gambling. By listening to employees and embedding their feedback, Jane has created a culture of trust, openness, and empowerment.

### Real Impact and Influence

Jane's work delivers measurable results: employees feel supported, engaged, and empowered to prioritise wellbeing. Lucy Darch, CEO, highlights that Jane "knows it's the people in our business that deliver for our customers... her support is invaluable." Employees praise her leadership for securing professional therapies, fostering personal development, and reducing stigma around mental health. Jane also shares wellbeing

insights externally, inspiring other organisations through seminars and consultations, such as her highly impactful session at the North East Employers Network.

Through her vision, storytelling, and compassionate leadership, Jane Austin demonstrates that executive sponsorship can transform culture, influence an entire sector, and make wellbeing a strategic business priority – creating lasting, meaningful impact for employees and communities alike.

## Judges' comments

- + Demonstrates the value of vulnerability in guiding change.
- + Impressive integration of wellbeing into business operations.

### HIGHLY COMMENDED

→ Carolyn Cole, Lucion

### SHORTLISTED

→ Carolyn Cole, Lucion

→ Jon Bevan, A&O Shearman

→ Mark Whitehead, Accenture