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Awards Category: Category 2: Bright Spark

Awards Entry Number: C20041

Name of project, service, individual entering or nomination,
: David Clarke

1. Overview

Please provide a short introduction to the person, project or service. Briefly mention any aims and objectives if you think they are relevant. You must clearly outline how it relates to the [category](#) you are entering. You should answer any questions we have asked in the [introduction](#) for this award category.: David Clarke is a 4th year student at GCU. He is an exceptional student and individual. As a man who experienced kinship care as a child he has drawn on his experiences to inform his understanding of the difficulties children experience when they do not live with their parents. Prior to undertaking his social work degree, David gave up a lucrative and successful career in the financial sector to become a foster carer. At the time, David and his wife were the youngest approved foster carers in Scotland within their particular agency. David initially undertook a degree in social work to enhance his capacities as a foster carer. He has continued to be a foster carer throughout his degree. During his studies, David has also made a substantive contribution to Scottish Government commissioned research into the public understanding of social work. David's relational approach, commitment, values and integrity have underpinned his approach to his work with service users. He has been able to engage where others have failed through a mix of determination, patience and persistence. David has decided to remain in practice and he is looking forward to graduating and being able to proudly tell people that he is a social worker.

2. What did you do?

Please describe the work carried out and explain how it meets the [criteria](#) we have asked for in the '[what we are looking for](#)' section for this award. Highlight any practice which was distinctive, innovative or creative and include details of on-going work still in progress.: As a student who is nearing completion of his final placement, David's nomination for this award is supported by myself as his academic tutor, his current practice teacher and Professor Stephen Webb. David meets the criteria for this award in multiple ways. Firstly, David's current practice teacher has highlighted that David is an outstanding student practitioner. During his current placement within a statutory children and families team he has been described as being instrumental in enabling many service users to make positive changes to their lives. He is described by his practice teacher as 'a natural' and has enabled change through a persistence, determination and commitment which is underpinned by a strong value base and ethic of care. He has been able to engage service users who have been resistant to social work intervention through remaining patient and taking the time to really understand their situation with genuine empathy. An example of this has been his work with a young mother who previously would not engage with social work. There were considerable concerns around this young mother and her child. David's initial attempts towards engagement were unsuccessful and he was constantly kept 'on the doorstep'. He was persistent but reassuring and gently built a relationship with the young mother in which he was able to work with her to provide supports for her and her baby. David's practice teacher considers that this young mother was able to transform her life and that of her baby's. The young mother does not accept that she could have made the transformation herself. She stated that 'she could not have done it without Dave'. David has been consistent and committed to every vulnerable family and individual he has worked with during his placement. There are many examples of positive changes which contain within them a narrative of dedication and commitment. David himself considers that there are no 'real keys to his success' with the families he has worked with and 'no glorified examples of practice'. We would differ in our assessment of David. What David has recognised is that it is the small things that matter - small

things that have immeasurable impact but which above all facilitate families to make the kinds of changes they want to make. David has described these 'small things' as ranging from driving to Glasgow to buy a bargain vacuum cleaner because it was instrumental to improving the living conditions of family and then watching someone hoovering with a joy he has never seen to driving for hours on a weekly basis to visit a young person in residential care who was regularly abusive and routinely refused to talk to him. The driving may well have been 'a small thing' but he persisted because she had been rejected throughout her life and he did not want to add to her pain. David goes 'the extra mile' because he does not give up and because he does the 'small things'.

3. What did you achieve

Please describe and provide evidence of how the work has made a positive impact to the lives of those you have helped to support. Evidence can include research, practice, wisdom, service data or lived experience. Aim to reflect the criteria in the ['what we are looking for'](#) section where possible.:

There are many examples of David's achievements during his time on placement. David has made considerable changes to the lives of families through a relational style which empowers and enables. His practice teacher in her observations of his practice describes David's style as characterised by an 'unconditional positive regard' which has facilitated engagement with clients where there were existing issues of mistrust with social work services. He has managed a complex caseload which is beyond that usually expected of a student at this stage and is described as presenting as an experienced professional. His value base has also been integral to the development of strong relationships within his team and he has become a valuable member. David, has also been making a difference to lives through his fostering. David has stood out as student because he has continued, alongside his wife, to provide foster care. In this capacity, he has continued to support children who have experienced various forms of abuse, neglect and other adversities. He describes foster care not as something you 'work in' but as something 'you live in'. Academically, David has excelled but his success has been entirely motivated by an ethical imperative which recognises that what he can learn academically strengthens his practice. He strives towards developing as an evidenced informed practitioner who draws on research and theory to enhance and underpin his practice. He believes that he can serve clients better through ensuring that he develops his knowledge base. David is very autonomous in his learning and he is well respected and regarded amongst the student group he is part of and amongst the staff group within the university who recognise David as outstanding academically and in practice. He will undoubtedly receive a 1st class degree.

Alongside his studies and commitments as a foster carer, David has provided research support to Professor Stephen Webb of GCU and Dr Trish McCulloch of Dundee University on a government funded study into the public perception of social work. The draft report which he has co-authored has just been submitted to the Scottish Government.

David initially undertook his social work degree to strengthen his capacities as a foster carer. While he wishes to remain a foster carer he has made the decision to remain in statutory social work. He has stated that his placement in statutory social work has been 'all that he hoped it would be' and that: 'It has been a privilege to build these relationships with clients. In acts of trust, they have shared their life stories, thoughts, concerns, tears and joy with me within their own homes. I feel truly blessed to do what I do, no longer experiencing the anxiety and lows of a career where I built relationships with people with the sole motivation of taking something from them by the end of the sales appointment. I have found joy in giving, and I now look forward to graduating, whereby I can proudly tell people that "I'm a social worker".'

4. Why should you receive an award?

Please summarise the reasons you feel this person, project or issue deserves an award in no more than 100 words.: Students - individuals like David are humbling. He has balanced his studies, his placements, his research involvements and his fostering commitments. That he has managed to balance all of this whilst achieving outstanding academic results, transforming the lives of families and supporting the children and young people he fosters is remarkable. He stands out from the crowd. His endeavours are however all connected by a genuine commitment and drive to make a difference to the lives of others. He may achieve this through a series of 'small things' but what he has achieved is by no means small.

