

## Who is being nominated?

Sharon Laing

## Organisation

Vibrant Communities, East Ayrshire Council

## Award Details

### Category

Category 8: The Untold Story 2019

### Q1: Overview

In the word of the Young people of Easy Ayrshire, Viv Clelland, Activity Motivator is :

- “funny, energetic, cuddly, full of laughter and wears bright trainers”,
- “a lovely person who cheers you up”
- “like a mammy figure”
- “someone you can turn to”

Viv started off her career in health and social care working within Kilmaurs children's house. She then worked in sports and leisure, undertaking a community sports course. Viv moved on to support adults with disabilities in community-based sports and activities.

Viv then had two daughters, however, she remained keen to support other people within East Ayrshire. Consequently, Viv decided to become a community volunteer. She reflected, “I wanted to keep my hand in, to help people, while bringing up my children”.

She then undertook casual paid work within the authority with a focus on running sports and kids' clubs. From there, Viv had an extensive career supporting children in residential care.

Viv shared, “I felt I had a connection with the kids. I was able to break down barriers because of my past (Viv was in residential care during her childhood)”. Viv feels like a supportive “granny or auntie” for the children

### Q2: What did you do?

Viv has been supporting our looked after young people and families in our community for many years. She is the true personification of relationship based practice through using activities, sport, therapeutic play and arts and crafts to connect with our young people. Through engaging in these activities with Viv we have seen our young people grown in confidence, self-esteem, reduce their levels of stress and increase their activity levels, resilience and wellbeing. Viv notes that using play allows young people to explore their emotions and help them make sense of their world

Would Viv see herself as an “unsung hero?”, absolutely not. For Viv the joy of her job is “My weans...my weans”. We would love her song to be heard and recognised for the positive impact it has on our children. Viv does one-to-one and group gym work, helping children to learn how to use exercise as a means of supporting their physical and emotional wellbeing. However, Viv says “I’ll do anything” which can include rugby, football, swimming and badminton- whatever suits the needs and wishes of the child.

Beyond sports, Viv also undertakes therapeutic play with young people. This supports children to share emotions, with a focus on supporting stress. She finds doing this through play is less stressful for those whom she supports. Work can include drawing, arts and crafts, and clay work.

Viv recognises that a traditional classroom environment can be difficult for some of the young people she works with. However, this does not stop her commitment to ensuring that children are recognised for the

strengths they have. Viv is a strong contributor to and supporter of Dynamic Youth- a project which helps young people get qualifications and recognise their achievements. She reflected, "It's education without them thinking it's education...How can you go to school if there's no food in the cupboard, or mum is at risk of domestic violence?" As always, Viv thinks about the 'whole child or young person' drawing on an understanding of socioeconomic factors to inform how she practices.

Viv also supports Vibrant Communities' Play at Home service. She supports children and parents to play together. While this is designed to be a 12-week course, Viv states that she has supported a boy who experienced parental substance use from Primary one to starting secondary school. She reflected, "I was the consistent figure in his life...he did go to secondary and he seems to be doing well...I was the only one to 'shine a light' on him".

Viv is keen to support children to have strong relationships with family members, even under very difficult circumstances. For example, she has helped fathers in prison maintain relationships with their kids and supporting their bond.

### **Q3: What did you achieve?**

Viv supported a boy through Dynamic Youth. She recalled that he experienced poor mental health throughout his childhood which really impacted on his educational attainment. However, through relationship-based practice, Viv supported him to get fitter via Zumba classes, gym work and other exercise. From this, the young person then grew in confidence and learned how to travel independently, opening a whole new world up to him. Viv states, "work was all led by him", however, it's apt to acknowledge that without Viv's guidance and support, that this young person may not have been able to build the skills needed to enjoy a valued life.

While Viv only has the capacity to work with a certain amount of children, she acknowledges the special relationship she has with young people, and how scary it can be when her work with them is coming to an end. She reflected on a 10 year old young person who was "scared of losing me". Viv remained committed to the child and as a means of supporting a therapeutic end to his work, she supported him to create and perform a show at his former residential house to thank the staff for their love and care.

Viv states that she is still working with a 22-year-old care experienced man. She believes that Corporate Parenting is for life.

Viv also supported a young man aged 19 who experienced time in residential care. He moved out of the house into his own tenancy, maintaining a college course and applied to Vibrant Communities for sessional work. She helped him through his gender transition, and by being there for him, he knew he was loved, and always had someone to talk to. She shared that this young man still calls her, particularly when he falls out with his girlfriend!

Viv is care experienced and one of her achievements is using her experience to "break down barriers with young people" but she recalls the importance of the relationships she had when she lived in residential care: "There are times when you just need to be loved. I needed this when I was in care. My keyworker gave me that. I still see her today...I don't know what I would have done without the residential house".

Today Viv notes "I love these children and have love to give...even if it is only a close connection for five minutes- that's huge!"

### **Q4: Why should you receive an award?**

Unsung Hero Viv should receive the award because as one of our young person tells us "I feel warm and happy when I'm with her" and while that is reward enough for Viv, we think she deserves more. Viv shared, "I seem to connect with the children with the most complex needs". It's clear that Viv has a great passion for building relationships with children who can find this very difficult. She is very motivated in getting to know the child's every need, even if this takes time. 'Stickability' is a word that springs to mind when we think of Viv.