

High praise for social work as Scottish National Gallery hosts SASW awards

Tribute was paid to the “life changing” work of social workers at the Scottish Association of Social Work Awards, held at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh on World Social Work Day.

Scotland’s Minister for Children and Young People Aileen Campbell joined hundreds of guests to recognise the skills and professionalism of frontline practitioners nominated in three categories – Student of the Year, Residential Care Worker of the Year and Social Worker of the Year.

James Berry landed the Social Worker of the Year award for his practice with Fife Council’s Older People’s Service. He was nominated by a carer who praised his “positive, sympathetic and supportive nature” helping them cope with their elderly father’s health issues.

After receiving the award, he said: “I am very grateful to the carer who nominated me. I have been in social work 28 years and it is just incredible that someone would do that. It is important for social work to be recognised in this way. It is good to let the public see what we are doing and hopefully it encourages people to come forward for services when they may be a bit hesitant to do so.”

Highly commended in the category was Victoria Berry, who works for North Lanarkshire Council, a social worker of only three years who impressed with her ability to handle highly complex cases.

Winner in the Residential Care category was Ruth McDonald, Residential Care Worker with the Aberlour Family Support Service in Glasgow, recognised for her work helping people suffering substance misuse.

Karen Wood was highly commended in the category for her “sensitivity, humour, fun and warmth” working with children with severe and multiple disabilities in a respite care unit in Inverness for Highland Council.

The Student of the Year award went to Clare Edmondson, described as a “skilful communicator” who is not satisfied by “good enough”. She works for Highland Council with people with complex health and social care needs. Allyson Johnston, an Open University student working with Kaleidoscope, a charity for people experiencing mental illness in Dumfries & Galloway, was highly commended in the category for her professionalism and sensitivity.

Ruth Stark, Manager of the Scottish Association of Social Work, said: “The richness



The award winners, Clare Edmondson, James Berry and Ruth McDonald

of the praise we have heard about good practice will not be lost. It is evidence we will take to people like the children’s minister and tell them what social workers do and what they do well and the impact it has on the community.

“We will use all this information to make people understand what social work does to contribute to the richness of Scottish society.”

Ms Campbell said: “As a minister, I visit many services and meet with people in many different contexts. And I am continually inspired by the dedication, compassion, drive, resilience and creativity demonstrated by those who work in social services.

“Social work is truly life changing work.

And it is also one of the most demanding and complex tasks which we as a society ask any group of people to do on our behalf. This ceremony each year provides a particularly positive and uplifting way to hear about the work done by you and your colleagues.”

Ms Campbell used the event to call for a rethink of welfare reforms, which she said will unfairly impact upon the most vulnerable.

She said: “I urge the Westminster Government to understand the impact welfare reform will have on the most vulnerable.

“One of the biggest causes of concern is the bedroom tax. That will cause a lot of upset to people across Scotland.”

Jim’s support changed our lives

What the person who nominated James Berry for Social Worker of the Year said about the work he did with a 92-year-old in need of extra support

“Until Jim Berry was allocated as my 92-year-old father’s social worker my life was incredibly stressful as I tried to cope with his needs. His stubbornness and fiercely independent character made communication between us extremely difficult. I was in awe and admiration from day one for the way in which Jim took charge of our situation and for the way in which he was able to communicate with my father in a firm, but reassuring and compassionate way, resolving issues with a sense of humour.

“With dignity and respect he was able to make Dad realise that there were areas in his life which could be easier by bringing in carers, aids for bathing etc, but he also openly voiced admiration for Dad’s independent traits. Eventually Dad agreed to accept the help and let down the ‘drawbridge’ to allow carers access. A weight had begun to be lifted from my shoulders! Work was co-ordinated and I gained a better understanding of his condition.

“I honestly don’t know what I would have done without Jim coming into our lives. Jim always had time to listen, always asked how I was coping and somehow managed the tricky task to mediate between my father and I which gave me a strong sense of support.”