

## **A social worker's alternative New Year's Honours List 2023**

In a first of a new annual tradition for PSW, Eddie O'Hara BEM dishes out his personal gongs to those he believes make a world of difference.

Well, it is that time of year again, the Social Care Awards season is over, and the new King is just about to announce his first New Year's Honour's list for 2023.

No doubt amongst the usual celebrities, the rich, the famous, the sporty, senior public officials, and errant politicians who will be receiving awards.....there will also be a small selection of our unsung community heroes.

Like me last year, when I received the British Empire Medal for 'Services to Children and Families / Campaigning Work': most ordinary folk who receive awards will have no idea who nominated them, are incredulous that their efforts have been singled out for recognition, feel a little bit embarrassed and coy about being singled out, engage in a symbolic justification of acceptance and then embark on a surreal process of imposter syndrome!

As a social worker myself with republican, socialist, and anti-imperialist leanings, just accepting the award involved some uncomfortable mental / moral / political gymnastics which I must confess pushed me to stretching point. More than once was I advised by close and wise friends not to accept the award because it would come across as though I support a society built on privilege, inequality, and entitlement. However, I finally did so in the hope that by accepting it I might use it to reach a wider audience in my campaigning work for children. On that point alone, I am not entirely sure I have had any great successes.

However, what this last year has really reinforced for me, is how arbitrary, opaque and exclusive most professional and civic award processes and ceremonies are and how little they reflect the breadth and depth of inspiring, courageous, selfless, kind, and caring work carried out by our family, friends and colleagues who go the extra mile every day.

So, with the above in mind, I decided to celebrate the achievements of some of the people I know by creating my own transparent 'Alternative New Year's Honours List'. I should note at the start, that, every award list has its weaknesses and will inevitably fail to include all of those who it should. For that, I apologise in advance... if you did not make this year's list you might make someone else's list next year!

In addition, all lists are written from the viewpoint and experience of the author and so my list is predictably concerned with those wonderful folk I have had the enormous pleasure, privilege and at times joy of working with this year and who have all inspired me in different ways to carry on doing the work I love.

Finally, for fear of favouring anyone I have compiled my list in alphabetical (surname) order with a short citation to highlight the reason for my choices.

So, without further ado and the powers invested in me as a minor member of the royal household (!), I happily award the following people the most prestigious award of being an '**Inspirational Role Model**' (**IRM**)' to others, which in my professional opinion is the greatest accolade anyone can have from their peers:


- **Pam Byrne and Cailin Gallagher** (My wonderful little sister-in-law and beautiful niece, Warwickshire): For two amazing people have put their heart and souls into making dozens of beautiful handmade crocheted blankets and lovely well stocked toiletry bags for the young parents and children I work with across the Midlands. What is especially inspirational for young people, is that Cailin, is one of the very few people in the UK who has Hao-Fountain Syndrome.
- **Shaun Campbell** (Founder of the Arthur Wharton Foundation, Darlington): For reflecting a relentless enthusiasm, encyclopaedic knowledge about social history and passion to create a more inclusive and informed community which challenges racism, sexism, and power, through focusing on the life of Britain's first black professional footballer, cricketer and world's fastest man: Arthur Wharton.

- **Karen Goodman** (Refugee and asylum social work community advocate, London): For having spent a lifetime advocating for others, not least by her fabulous, caring, and inspiring work around campaigning for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.
- **Clair Graham** (Contextual Safeguarding Lead, Birmingham Children's Trust): For continuing to walk the talk, by getting involved with local communities by walking the streets with residents' day and night to better understand local community's needs, and who can regularly be found in community halls on a Friday night passionately campaigning to reduce violent crime and child exploitation. She is without doubt a great ambassador for Birmingham Children's Trust.
- **Hannah O'Neil** (Founder of the Survivor Lighthouse, Smethwick): For her inspiring and relentless work in using her own experiences of domestic abuse to set up a local organisation to help both female and male victims / survivors of domestic abuse. And being a wonderful, charismatic, and generous co-trainer helping me out when providing voluntary safeguarding training to others.
- **Stephanie Hunter** (Principal social worker, author, therapist, Darlington): For promoting the best interests of children and inspiring other professionals in Darlington and further afield, by positively, creatively, and passionately seeking to use her numerous professional skills to improve her own and others social work practice.
- **Cllr Kerry Jenkins** (Birmingham councillor & youth champion): For being the only Birmingham Councillor, (out of 100) who over recent years has consistently championed local youths by recognising that even though this is not her council portfolio, as a councillor, she still has a powerful and important voice to use in both her constituency and across the city as a whole to promote the best interest of all young people.
- **Dave Keech** (Police trainer, Manchester): For not just delivering safeguarding training to various police forces and the NCA across the country, but for the genuine passion and care which he consistently brings to

make sure that as far as he can, he is absolutely on top of his professional game in terms of knowledge, experience and commitment to best practice.

- **My School Family Support Team:** I would need to write a book to list their qualities. Suffice to say, Zena Wedgwood, Christine Rowley Jenny Ranson, Maria Chiriches, Nicholas Kelleher, Jemma Farrell, Rebecca Skinner and Anna Lockley-Scott are all the best family support team in the world, always go the extra mile and make my job very easy and enjoyable.
- **Niall McAuley** (Retired social worker / community activist, Birmingham): For his ongoing commitment to promoting the needs of others by getting involved in community activities, whether that is litter picking or campaigning against the use of 'unregulated placements' for looked after children.
- **Melanie Mills** (Social worker, academic, Birmingham). For her commitment to local safeguarding, community activity and who continues to help me expand my repertoire of flowery vocabulary at public meetings!
- **Salman Mirza** (Benefits adviser / super wrestler / community activist, Smethwick): For being an inspiration and example to me and others for over 30 years by his willingness to share his endless energy and passion to engage and organise community resistance to all kinds of social injustices. Salman is living proof that community action, not words, puts food in empty fridges.
- **Mark Monaghan** (Social worker, Coventry): For his indefatigable pursuit of making social work systems more human and relationship based, constructively speaking his mind, and never failing to get back on the proverbial 'horse' when it throws him off now and again.
- **Rebekah Pierre** (BASW England professional officer): For using her own personal experience of being in an 'unregulated placement' as a young person, to now work as a professional officer within BASW to passionately campaign against unregulated placements and provide other young people with hope and inspiration.

- **Shefali Shah** (Lawyer, trainer, author): For her continuing to freely share all sorts of legal resources (publications, blogs, etc) to help parents and professionals better understand the complexities of childcare law.
- **Hugh Shriane** (School friend, social worker, London – Bournemouth): For a lifetime commitment to mental health and disability social work, and for setting up a voluntary chess club for the elderly (including himself!) on Bournemouth seafront, his ongoing pro bono advocacy for those with mental health needs and promotion of the best interests of all children, including Birmingham.
- **Peter Unwin** (Social work academic and anti-austerity campaigner, Worcester): For tirelessly campaigning on behalf of others in his community, promoting co-production and giving a voice to marginalised people. And, providing much needed wise advice and inspiration to others through song, poetry, and genuine good humour.
- **Mandy Wade and Richard Wade** (Foster carers, adopters, now pub proprietors, Black Heath): For their life-long commitment to children and families and their current involvement in promoting a men's mental health helpline within their pub. They also do a mean pint and pie!
- **Kylie Windle and Ian Whiteside** (Gamcare practitioners / promoters of trek therapy, Liverpool): For their enthusiastic energy in always appearing to take every opportunity to develop their services outwards to meet the needs of their local community and for also promoting the simple joy and healing power of walking and talking with others. Sadly, so far, they have misguidedly resisted my idea of developing an ice cream / trek therapy programme, but undaunted by this rejection I will continue to work on them!
- **Salma Yaqoob** (Health professional / community activist): For being an inspiration to so many people of all ages and cultures in the Midlands for her lifelong commitment and courage in speaking out on a range of social issues to make the world a better place for everyone.

- **Caroline, Jason, Nick, Ian, Mandy, 2 X Richard, Brie, David, Eamon (IRMs)** (Adopters / Special Guardians, etc): who kindly continue to send me pictures every year of the children they have taken into their hearts by providing them with permanent life-long and loving homes.
- **Single Parents Everywhere (IRMs)**: Knowing just how hard parenting can be in a two-parent family...these **IRMs** are for all those brilliant single parents, (who rarely recognise how brilliant they actually are), for your continued love and lifelong selfless commitment to your wonderful children.....you have my never ending admiration.
- **You** (fill your own name and details in here .....)

And that my friends, brings to an end my Alternative New Year's Honours list. Despite the light-hearted tone of the above, I do genuinely think that anyone who works with others in trying to help make their communities kinder, safer and a more inclusive place to live, are just the sort of people who make me and others want to keep getting up every day and doing what we do.

Thank you. Eddie O'Hara 15-12-22