

social WORKER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS



2026 WINNERS

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Congratulations to all finalists of the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2026

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UNISON is very happy once again to be involved in this year's Social Worker of the Year Awards and to be presenting the two Team of the Year Awards- for Adult Services and for Children's Services.

Social workers do vital work in supporting and protecting individuals and communities. We are really pleased that through these awards they are receiving some well-deserved recognition for the work they've done.

As the UK's largest trade union for social workers and the wider social care workforce, we know the challenges social workers face and the differences they make to people's lives. As an organisation built on solidarity and togetherness, UNISON would like to pay tribute to the social work teams that practice effective team working on a daily basis. Great teamwork, alongside high-quality professionalism is at the heart of excellent public service and social work.

We also applaud the social workers across the country who are taking a stand through UNISON against the wider challenges facing the profession like the continued pressures on public finances, rising demand for services and growing caseloads. The fight for better pay, working conditions and genuine development opportunities will result in better services for the public.

Mike Short
National Secretary, UNISON

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Up to £2,000	£1.30
£2,001 – £5,000	£3.50
£5,001 – £8,000	£5.30
£8,001 – £11,000	£6.60
£11,001 – £14,000	£7.85
£14,001 – £17,000	£9.70
£17,001 – £20,000	£11.50
£20,001 – £25,000	£14.00
£25,001 – £30,000	£17.25
£30,001 – £35,000	£20.30
over £35,000	£22.50

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UNISON is proud to sponsor the Social Worker of the Year Awards

Gold Award Winner

Jade McKeown
Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust

Jade McKeown has made a striking impact during her first year in social work. Working with adults with moderate to severe mental health needs, she has already been promoted to a Band 6 role and is preparing for pre-AMHP training.

Her nomination highlighted her work with a man with autism and schizophrenia whose communication needs had made it difficult for professionals to fully understand his wishes. Jade took time to build trust, challenged restrictive practice within his placement and completed a detailed mental capacity assessment despite opposition from other professionals. Her understanding of his non-verbal communication helped inform the decision to end the placement. He is now supported under a less restrictive framework and has seen significant improvements in his wellbeing and quality of life.

Jade is also beginning to influence practice beyond her own caseload. She has taught social work students about the Mental Health Act, helped establish a Neurodiversity Peer Supervision group and shares her specialist interest in perinatal mental health with colleagues. One carer said Jade had taken “so much stress off us” by coordinating services and advocating for her family.

Silver Award Winner

Imogen Strutt - West London NHS Trust

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Gold Award Winner

Integrated Adolescent Service
Lewisham Council

Lewisham's Integrated Adolescent Service has reshaped the way the Council responds to young people facing exploitation, violence, poor mental health and disengagement from education. Bringing together social work, youth justice and a co-located Health and Wellbeing Hub, the service works with young people aged 11 to 21 who can struggle to engage with traditional services.

The team leads one of the few Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams nationally focused specifically on risk outside the home. Its approach has contributed to reductions in repeat missing episodes and exploitation risk, while helping young people move towards greater stability.

One young adult at significant risk of extra-familial harm was supported through intensive mentoring and coordinated work across social care, youth justice and health. The team helped them leave harmful networks, rebuild family relationships and address their emotional wellbeing. They went on to re-engage with training and employment.

The service is also recognised for its anti-racist practice and transitional safeguarding work, with other local authorities now seeking its expertise when developing their own adolescent services.

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Silver Award Winners

Birmingham and Solihull FDAC Service – Birmingham Children's Trust

FDAC – Liverpool City Council

Gold Award Winner

Stacie Finnegan
Wolverhampton University

Stacie Finnegan has packed a remarkable amount into her social work training. A mature student who previously spent 16 years in hairdressing and further education, she achieved the highest Social Work Law marks in her cohort, represented her class and has written four books, including children's books promoting inclusion and journals to support students on placement.

Her final placement at Mary Stevens Hospice showed how confidently she can turn learning into practice. Stacie researched barriers to hospice care for ethnic minority communities, co-produced a safeguarding audio resource for staff and dealt calmly with an unexpected safeguarding disclosure during a group session.

The strongest evidence of her impact came from the people she supported. One unpaid carer who was at breaking point said Stacie arranged emergency respite; another described how she helped them through their husband's diagnosis and into a carers' group. A bereaved family recalled Stacie supporting them through the deaths of both parents and later taking two family members to cooking classes so they could manage better at home.

Her placement colleagues described her as professional, forward-thinking and already taking on the responsibility of a qualified social worker.

Silver Award Winner

Polly Green - University of Hull/Change Grow Live

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Gold Award Winner

Mahfuzul "Maf" Khan
London Borough of Newham

Mahfuzul "Maf" Khan is a leader who has combined major service change with a very personal approach to children, families and staff. After more than 25 years in social work, he became Newham's Director of Early Help and Safeguarding in 2024 and helped lead the service to an Outstanding Ofsted judgement.

Under his leadership, Early Help provision has expanded and assessment and long-term teams have been brought together to give children and families greater continuity. At the same time, staffing levels improved to around 80%, bringing more stability to teams during a difficult period for recruitment and retention.

One example in his nomination captured his approach particularly well. When a child in care needed a significant operation, Maf did not simply authorise the decision remotely. He went to the hospital, listened to the surgeon and sat with the child, parent and foster carer before signing the paperwork. His question was simple: "If this was your child, would you agree to an operation over the phone?"

Beyond Newham, Maf chairs the London Safeguarding Procedures Editorial Board, helping to shape safeguarding practice across the capital.

Silver Award Winner

Louise Spragg - Telford and Wrekin Council

Gold Award Winner

Jane Phillips
Shropshire Council

Jane Phillips has spent 17 years building a practice education offer that has become central to recruitment and retention in Shropshire's Adult Social Care workforce.

When she identified that Social Care Practitioners were carrying out statutory work without formal training, Jane worked with colleagues and a university to develop an accredited programme. It is now embedded across the service and provides a route into the social work apprenticeship. Since Jane established Shropshire's first apprenticeship cohort in 2020, 14 apprentices have qualified, 19 are in training and five are waiting to start. Completion and retention into ASYE stand at 100%.

Her work with students has been equally important. Around 80% of those completing their final placement in Shropshire go on to work in Adult Social Care there. More than a quarter of the authority's social workers are also active Practice Educators - an unusually strong base for a relatively small rural authority.

Jane's influence extends across the West Midlands and nationally through work on practice education standards. She is now helping develop an in-house Practice Educator programme and a Social Work Academy.

Silver Award Winner

Nadine Boyne – Independent Social Worker

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Gold Award Winner

Thomas Edwards
Buckinghamshire Council / Furze Down School

Thomas Edwards has spent more than two decades in children's social care and since 2018 has held a specialist social work role at Furze Down School, supporting more than 200 families of children with severe and profound disabilities and complex needs.

His work goes well beyond responding when families reach crisis. Thomas has developed safeguarding training for education staff, adapted protective behaviours work for pupils with learning difficulties and created a Services Support Directory covering specialist services, grants and benefits. The directory is now used beyond the school by other schools, social work teams and CAMHS. He also established two food banks to provide practical support to families under pressure.

Families describe Thomas as the professional who finally helped them feel heard and supported while navigating benefits, respite care, referrals and complex services.

His contribution reaches into the wider community too. As a trustee of Youth Concern, Thomas has helped the charity develop its governance and safeguarding, establish counselling and supported accommodation services, and raise more than £10 million. His community work has also been recognised by the Heart of Bucks Community Foundation and the Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire.

Silver Award Winner

Nana Yabbey-Hagan - Redbridge Council

Gold Award Winner

ParentAssess

ParentAssess was created to challenge a longstanding problem in children's services and family proceedings: parents with learning disabilities and additional needs being judged by diagnosis or assumption rather than being given a fair opportunity to show what they can do.

Over the past decade, its specialist parenting assessment framework has brought clearer language, visual tools and a simple traffic-light system into a process that can otherwise be confusing and intimidating. Parents are asked what they believe needs to change and are supported to take an active part in their assessment. Video feedback can also help parents see positive interactions with their children for themselves, while giving professionals clearer evidence of the relationship.

The approach has spread widely. Around 85% of local authorities have accessed ParentAssess training, and more than 100 practitioners were trained through national improvement work linked to the Designated Family Judge Trailblazers Programme.

Feedback from practitioners describes parents feeling more included and less judged, with the framework improving communication between families and professionals. For a small employee-owned organisation, ParentAssess has had a significant influence on how some of the most marginalised parents are understood and supported.

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Silver Award Winners

Shantel B Thomas - Anti Racist Movement CIC
Debonico Aleski Brandy-Williams - Brandy Williams Limited

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Gold Award Winner

Jennifer Benbow
West Sussex County Council

Jennifer Benbow leads an integrated Adult Social Work and NHS team of 18 professionals supporting people with complex needs, including safeguarding, self-neglect and long-term health conditions. Her nomination showed a manager whose influence can be seen as clearly in the confidence of her staff as in the outcomes achieved for people using services.

In one case, a man experiencing severe self-neglect and disengagement was at risk of moving into residential care. Jennifer supported her team to move away from a compliance-led response and understand the trauma behind his mistrust. The resulting plan enabled him to remain in the community, keep his independence and engage on his own terms.

Jennifer has also developed Continuing Healthcare training, improved financial assessment processes and strengthened joint working with NHS partners to prevent crises and avoidable hospital admissions.

Her colleagues repeatedly described her as calm, fair and supportive. One social worker said they would not have continued in the profession without Jennifer's support, adding that she had "completely reignited my passion for social work". Others described her as an "emotional anchor during demanding periods".

Silver Award Winner

Matthew Peaker - Hampshire County Council

Gold Award Winner

Dr Philip Archard

Dr Philip Archard has built his career around bringing research closer to the realities of frontline practice. A qualified social worker and mental health practitioner, his work spans CAMHS, practitioner research, doctoral education and research into child welfare inequalities.

While working in CAMHS, Dr Archard led the introduction and evaluation of a group intervention for foster carers and adoptive parents. The research identified high levels of caregiver stress and directly informed how the intervention was adapted for families using the service. He also led research into remote CAMHS care during the pandemic, helping local services understand when hybrid care could work - and where video appointments were not the answer for socially vulnerable young people.

Dr Archard has gone on to build research capacity in others. In less than three years at the Tavistock he supervised eight doctoral students to completion and established the Practice Research in Child Welfare Lab, bringing together doctoral researchers, practitioners and people with lived experience.

His collaborators describe someone who makes research useful rather than remote: helping practitioners ask questions from practice, investigate them rigorously and turn the findings back into better services.

Silver Award Winner

Lucy Jacobs - London Borough of Bromley

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Gold Award Winner

Octopus Energy Social Work Team
Octopus Energy

A team of eight qualified social workers inside an energy company is unusual. What the Octopus Energy Social Work Team has done with that model is even more distinctive.

The team recognised that for some customers, energy debt was tied directly to domestic and economic abuse. Survivors could find themselves repeatedly explaining traumatic experiences to different creditors long after leaving an abusive relationship. In response, the team worked with Surviving Economic Abuse and independent debt adviser PayPlan to create a "Safe Space" pathway and a "Tell Us Once" process.

The model allows a survivor to explain their circumstances once to a qualified professional. PayPlan can then notify creditors and recommend that coerced debt is written off. At the time of the nomination, 186 people had been referred through the specialist service and Octopus Energy alone had written off more than £155,000 of debt.

Alongside this work, the social workers use their expertise in mental health, disability, child protection and other areas to support customers with the wider issues behind financial hardship. The team is now sharing its approach with other utility companies and financial institutions.

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Silver Award Winner

Changing Futures Wellbeing Team - Essex County Council

Gold Award Winner

Jodie Gooday
Essex County Council

Jodie Gooday works in Essex's Changing Futures Wellbeing Team, supporting people whose lives can involve homelessness, substance use, poor mental health, domestic abuse and contact with the criminal justice system. The team starts from a simple principle: rather than labelling somebody "non-engaging", services need to find a better way to engage with them.

Jodie's nomination contained example after example of what that looks like in practice. One person came to her with low mood, anxiety, self-harm and alcohol use. Jodie used somatic therapy, mindfulness, grounding and DBT-informed approaches to help him understand his triggers and build his own wellbeing toolkit. Nine months later he was abstinent from alcohol, running his own business, volunteering and describing himself as being in a "happy place".

Another woman who had experienced 13 years of abuse was supported to leave the relationship, move into her own home, reduce substance use and begin volunteering with children with additional needs.

Jodie's practice has also helped bring national attention to the Changing Futures approach, with one of her cases highlighted as good practice in a cross-government review.

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Newly Qualified Children's Social Worker of the Year

Gold Award Winner

Cara Aldersley
Liverpool City Council

Cara Aldersley joined Liverpool City Council's Permanence Service in November 2025, but within months her practice was already attracting attention across the directorate.

During a major service restructure, a backlog of Personal Education Plans had developed. Cara stepped in to complete the social work sections, an initiative Liverpool's Virtual School Head said had a tangible impact on children while strengthening the team's capacity. She has also received two positive-practice notifications in 2026 - more than 4% of all such notifications across a workforce of more than 200 social workers - and was recognised with a Liverpool Values Award.

The feedback from foster carers is just as telling. Cara took over work with one child after three different social workers had been involved during an unsettled two-year period. His carers said she quickly brought reassurance, consistency and stability. Another kinship carer described how Cara had worked alongside the family to help a child with autism and ADHD return to school, adding: "I know I can get the support from Cara if I need it."

Alongside practice, Cara is developing work around Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities following her highly commended Master's dissertation.

Silver Award Winner

Shona McLaughlin - West Sussex County Council

Gold Award Winner

Dave Fry
Croydon Council

Dave Fry devoted more than 50 years to social work, beginning as an 18-year-old residential social worker in 1975 and retiring in January 2026. He died just weeks later, leaving a career that had taken him from children's homes and youth justice to director-level leadership, corporate parenting, fostering and services for young people leaving care.

Whatever the job title, the thread running through Dave's career was the same: listen to children and make the system work around their lives. In Croydon, he transformed a placement service into a relational "home finding" service and developed the council's Sufficiency Strategy with young people. He insisted that care-experienced young people were involved throughout the creation of new children's homes; Precious House, designed and named with young people, opened the day after he died.

Dave was also known for quietly helping colleagues and taking pleasure in other people's success. A former manager recalled being initially daunted by managing somebody with Dave's experience, only to find he had "no ego".

His own advice summed up the approach that shaped five decades of work: be kind, be inquisitive and keep children's needs and voices at the centre.

Silver Award Winner

Sidiq Ali - Bradford Children and Families Trust

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Gold Award Winner

Nala Gunstone
Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust

Nala Gunstone has helped make a new transition-worker role in Bromley a success, supporting young people as they move from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services into adult mental health services.

It is a point where young people can easily experience a break in relationships and support. Nala works across both CAMHS and adult teams, getting to know young people before the move and staying alongside them afterwards. She draws on experience in CAMHS, local-authority social work and interpersonal therapy to support young people living with anxiety, depression and complex trauma.

Feedback gathered from a focus group was particularly powerful. Young people said they did not know where they would be without Nala's support; some had been seriously unwell and suicidal when first referred. They valued the practical things too: she turns up on time, keeps them informed, explains what is happening and follows through on what she says she will do.

Clinicians described her role as crucial to successful transitions and praised the way she understands each young person's needs and goals. Every young person who provided feedback said they felt listened to and that their views were taken seriously.

Silver Award Winner

Janine Cooper - Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council

Overall Social Workers of the Year

Dave Fry
Croydon Council

Across a remarkable 51-year career, Dave Fry showed what it means to live the values of social work. His influence reached from individual children and families to colleagues, services and whole systems, always driven by the belief that better decisions begin by listening to the people whose lives they affect.

Dave had an unusual ability to work at every level. He could engage young staff at the beginning of their careers, bring care-experienced young people into decisions about the services designed for them, influence elected members and advise senior leaders carrying some of the most difficult risks in children's services.

He was also someone who turned ideas into action. His work ranged from developing new approaches to mental health support and helping young people return home from hospital, to creating children's homes alongside care-experienced young people. The impact of that work will continue long beyond his own career.

Yet those who worked with Dave describe a man with little interest in status or recognition. He shared his experience generously, stood alongside colleagues when things were difficult and delighted in seeing other people succeed.

Dave died shortly after retiring in 2026. His legacy is not simply more than five decades of achievement, but the people, practice and services he changed along the way and his unwavering conviction that social work should always start with listening to children.

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Overall Social Workers of the Year

Mahfuzul “Maf” Khan
London Borough of Newham

Mahfuzul “Maf” Khan demonstrates that ambitious leadership and deeply human social work can, and should, go hand in hand.



His impact in Newham has been significant. He has led major transformation across children’s services, strengthened workforce stability and helped create the conditions in which relationship-based practice can flourish. But his nomination makes clear that his leadership is measured by more than structures, performance or inspection results.

Maf creates a culture in which people feel trusted to learn, reflect and be honest when things are difficult. He acknowledges his own mistakes, encourages thoughtful professional curiosity and responds to setbacks with reflection rather than blame. Staff describe feeling genuinely cared for, while children and families remain at the centre of the decisions he makes.

That same approach extends beyond Newham. Through his role chairing the London Safeguarding Procedures Editorial Board, Maf helps influence safeguarding practice across the capital.

After more than 25 years in the profession, what distinguishes Maf is the combination of scale and humanity in his leadership. He can lead complex organisational change without losing sight of the individual child, family or practitioner experiencing it.

Compassionate without losing accountability, ambitious without ego and committed to improving practice beyond his own organisation, Maf represents social work leadership at its very best.

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Social Worker of the Year Awards 2026 finalists

Adult Social Worker of the Year

- **Kelly Loan** – Sunderland City Council
- **Jodie Gooday** – Essex County Council
- **Vicky Wilson** – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- **Sarah Burns** – Sunderland City Council

Children's Social Worker of the Year Award

- **Rangeley Shallis-Barnes** – West Sussex County Council
- **Thomas Edwards** – Buckinghamshire County Council / Furze Down School
- **Natasha Bello** – Central Bedfordshire Council
- **Nana Yabbey-Hagan** – Redbridge Council

Social Justice Champion Award
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- **Leesah Edwards** – Black & Diverse Safeguarding Professionals CIC
- **Shantel B Thomas** – Anti Racist Movement CIC
- **ParentAssess** – ParentAssess
- **Patriche Bentick** – Camden Council
- **Debonico Aleski Brandy-Williams** – Brandy Williams Limited

Team of the Year, Adult Services Award
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- **Quality, Practice and Service Development Team** – West Sussex County Council
- **Changing Futures Wellbeing Team** – Essex County Council
- **Forensic Inpatient Social Workers** – Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust
- **Octopus Energy Social Work Team** – Octopus Energy

Team of the Year, Children's Services Award
Sponsored by UNISON

- **Redbridge Multi-Agency Child Protection Team** – Redbridge Council
- **Birmingham and Solihull FDAC Service** – Birmingham Children's Trust
- **Integrated Adolescent Service** – Lewisham Council
- **FDAC** – Liverpool City Council

Practice Leadership and Management, Adult Services Award

- **Rita Modza** – London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- **Jennifer Benbow** – West Sussex County Council
- **Fiona Anderson** – Independent Social Worker
- **Lesley Howell** – Sunderland City Council
- **Matthew Peaker** – Hampshire County Council

Practice Leadership and Management, Children's Services Award

- **Shantel Thomas** – Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust
- **Louise Spragg** – Telford and Wrekin Council
- **Ahmed Saliu** – Hertfordshire County Council
- **Mahfuzul Khan** – London Borough of Newham
- **Nana Yabbey-Hagan** – Redbridge Council



Social Work Student of the Year

- **Danielle Helm** – Manchester Metropolitan University/Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust
- **Stacie Finnegan** – Wolverhampton University
- **Cherelle Miller** – University of Huddersfield
- **Polly Green** – University of Hull/Change Grow Live

Lifetime Achievement Award

- **Mark Harvey** – Southend-on-Sea City Council
- **Sidiq Ali** – Bradford Children and Families Trust
- **Dave Fry** – Croydon Council
- **Errol Chambers** – Lewisham Council

Mental Health Social Worker of the Year Award

- **Stephen Noble** – Sunderland City Council
- **Nala Gunstone** – Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- **Karen Golding** – West Sussex County Council
- **Janine Cooper** – Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council

Newly Qualified Adult Social Worker of the Year

- **Nneamaka Uti** – Rochdale Council
- **Imogen Strutt** – West London NHS Trust
- **Sev Huggins** – Gloucestershire County Council
- **Jade McKeown** – Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- **Abolanle Shoda** – Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- **Kerri Mullaney** – North Yorkshire Council

Newly Qualified Children's Social Worker of the Year

- **Becky Catchpole** – Cafcass
- **Cara Aldersley** – Liverpool City Council
- **Louise Irons** – Birmingham Children's Trust
- **Shenna Rush** – Cumberland Council
- **Shona McLaughlin** – West Sussex County Council

Practice Educator of the Year Award

- **Liz Hennessy** – Brighton and Hove City Council
- **Jane Phillips** – Shropshire Council
- **Katy Cleece** – Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust
- **Natesha Yanguba** – Croydon Council
- **Nadine Boyne** – Independent Social Worker

Practitioner-Led Research Award

- **Cumberland Academy**
- **Dr Philip Archard**
- **Practice Standards and Quality Team**
- **Lucy Jacobs** – London Borough of Bromley



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Thank you to our judging panel

Judging for the 2026 Social Worker of the Year Awards took place from May-July, when judges attended panels to decide this year's finalists and winners.

The independent judging panel was made up of:

- Leading industry professionals: invited to join the panel based upon their expertise within the social work profession
- Those who have received support from social workers
- Previous winners



All judges kindly gave up their time on a voluntary basis. Thank you to our judging panel, we couldn't do it without you!

Syeda Abedin
Richard Ashiagbor
Andrea Bassi
Patriche Bentick
Nadine Boyne
Carmen Colomina
Angela Connor
Debbie Dobson
Sophia Hussain
Asmaat Khan
Norah Khan
Erin King
Lillian Kwande
Rob Mitchell
Tara Morgan
Elizabeth Okankor Badu
Rachael Owens
Holly Price
Andrew Reece
Joseph Robb
Lashonte Royal
Baronique Saal
Thabang Thacker
Gemma Webb
Clare Winterbottom
Rheana Yacoob
Eirini Zochiou



Celebrating 20 years of the Social Worker of the Year Awards

A message from the Board of Trustees

For 20 years, the Social Worker of the Year Awards have championed excellence in social work and celebrated the extraordinary people who make a difference to individuals, families and communities every day.

Founded in 2006 by social worker Beverley Williams MBE, the Awards were created to give social workers the recognition they deserve. Two decades later, that purpose remains at the heart of everything we do.

Over the past 20 years, we have had the privilege of hearing thousands of stories of outstanding practice from across the profession. They have demonstrated the skill, compassion, leadership and innovation of social workers working in children's services, adult social care, mental health, education, justice and communities across the country.

As social work has evolved, so too have the Awards. But what has remained constant is our commitment to celebrating good practice, improving public understanding of social work and giving a national platform to the people and teams whose work can too often go unseen.

Our 20th anniversary gives us an opportunity not only to look back with pride, but to look ahead with ambition.

To everyone recognised in the 2026 Awards – our winners, finalists and nominees – congratulations. Your work represents the very best of social work and reminds us why these Awards matter.

We would also like to thank our judges, sponsors, supporters and everyone who has contributed to the Awards over the past two decades. Your continued support makes this celebration possible.

As we begin our next chapter, we remain as committed as ever to championing the profession and ensuring outstanding social work receives the recognition it deserves.

The Board of Trustees
Social Work Awards Ltd.



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Essex County Council

Gloucestershire County Council

Norfolk County Council

NHS Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research



Cafcass
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Congratulations to all the finalists of the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2026.

These awards provide the opportunity to recognise and celebrate the inspiring social workers who help transform people's lives.

As the largest employer of children's social workers in England, Cafcass is proud to be one of this year's sponsors. To learn more about the work we do, simply scan our QR code:

Essex County Council

Essex County Council are proud to support the

Social Worker of the Year Awards 2026

Congratulations to all winners and nominees during this milestone year, which marks the 20th anniversary of the awards.

www.essex.gov.uk



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Stronger together

Congratulations to all finalists

Social Worker of the Year Awards 2026

directors of adass
adult social services
West Midlands

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CELEBRATING THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THIS EVENT

Improvement is at the heart of WM ADASS. Through our regional Principal Social Worker Network, we bring together professional leaders and people with lived experience to share learning, respond to challenges and strengthen adult social work across the West Midlands.

Thank you to all nominees for your skill, compassion and commitment to helping people and families achieve the best possible outcomes.

Tamsin Waterhouse & Abbii Henry
Co-chairs of the WM ADASS Principal Social Work Network & PSWs at Shropshire Council & Solihull Council
Pete Jackson, WM-ADASS Improvement Director

wm-adass.org.uk

linkedin.com/adass-west-midlands

On behalf of Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust and the Joint Health and Social Work Leads Network, I want to express our immense pride and send our heartfelt congratulations to all our social care professionals who have been named finalists for the 2026 Social Work Awards.

Reaching this stage stands as a direct testament to your dedication, high standards of practice, and the deeply human, person-centred care you bring to our communities every single day.

We are all standing behind you and cheering you on as we head into the awards ceremony. Thank you for your passion, resilience, and continued commitment to social justice and relationship-based care.

We could not be prouder of you!

Ryan Cowley-Sharp
Director of Social Work - LSCFT
Co-Chair - Joint Health and Social Care Social Work Leads Network

lscft.nhs.uk

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Congratulations to everyone recognised through this year's Social Worker of the Year Awards.

Social work is a profession built on dedication, compassion, and resilience. Every day, social workers make a profound difference to the lives of children, young people, families, and adults at risk of abuse or neglect, often supporting people through some of the most challenging moments in their lives.

Being recognised through these awards is a testament to the commitment, skill and care you bring to your work. Whether you are an award winner, finalist or nominee, you should be incredibly proud of your achievements and the positive impact you have on the people and communities you serve.

On behalf of Gloucestershire County Council, we would like to congratulate all those recognised this year and thank social workers across the country for the vital contribution they make every day.

Cllr Lisa Spivey
Leader, Gloucestershire County Council

Jo Walker
Chief Executive, Gloucestershire County Council

Interested in a career in social work? Visit our Careers website: **https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/careers/**



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Well done to all of the finalists of the **Social Worker of the Year Awards** - we are proud to be a sponsor again.

The NIHR is a major funder of social care research in the UK, generating evidence to improve our understanding of how to enable social care in delivering care and supporting our population.

Scan to read more about how we support research across social care and work.

20 Years







The Social Worker of the Year Awards 2027.

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