

NORTH EAST EQUALITY

Awards



## Individuals Who Have Made a Difference 2012 Winner – Leanne Wilkinson (DISC)

Having worked for DISC for the last eight years Leanne's role covers Co Durham offering support to Gypsy, Roma and Travelling communities.

Access into the Gypsy, Roma and Travelling communities has not been easy. It took a long time to gain the trust of the people.

*"I would say it took a good six to nine months before they would even speak to me,"* says Leanne.

*"But now that I have gained their trust, I am made to feel very welcome. I even get called 'our Leanne.'*

One of her impressive successes is working with the men on the sites. Leanne has built up such trust and confidence with them, that when she is unable to make site visits they now feel comfortable attending the office when they need advice and support. Which

would have been unheard of a year ago.

Leanne has also identified the many areas of discrimination they face and has worked hard to address the issues that accompanies such negative attitudes. By building up individual's confidence she has facilitated the removal of barriers to access a range of services such as health, education, welfare benefits and leisure facilities. She offers a unique home visit service and is well known on the various sites throughout the county, one of only a handful of people who they trust enough.

Through her relationships she is able to facilitate much needed support from Social services and healthcare for older people, pregnant women and those with mental health and alcohol and drug problems. She liaises with the police and other agencies promoting awareness of the Gypsy, Roma and Travelling community to promote better relationships.



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Leanne works to promote better relationships between Gypsy, Roma and Travelling communities and public/government bodies and has been instrumental in a national re-labelling of medication due to a tragic event which occurred. A woman from the community left hospital after treatment and died soon afterwards of an overdose from her prescribed medication. She couldn't read and therefore was unable to follow the written instructions on the medication bottle. No one at the hospital had checked her literacy skills.

In her spare time, evenings and at weekends, Leanne selflessly provides a food and drink service for street homeless people in Middlesbrough. Inspired by her late father and mother, who started soup runs 21 years ago, she has been involved since her teenage years and is a well-known, welcome face within the homeless community. Through rain, snow or shine she tirelessly gathers food and drinks, blankets and clothing together to ensure those who want it enjoy a meal and a hot drink and don't go hungry or cold. Her compassion and commitment is inspiring and she has encouraged many of her colleagues to help out at various times giving much needed support, and a listening ear to those who need it.

*"I really enjoy it and find it very rewarding. You do encounter a few aggressive people but the majority are happy to see*

*you and really appreciate what you are doing."* Leanne said.

Leanne has inspired others to volunteer with her street homeless service. She has further raised awareness of their needs through presentations and discussions with local community groups and churches.

Leanne is an inspiration to her fellow team members and deserves to be recognised for the difference she makes to people's lives every day.

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The work Leanne has carried out with the Gypsy, Roma and Travelling communities has instigated a national response to the labelling of medication. However, away from her impressive record in her day job it is evident that she inspires her colleagues, raises awareness of Gypsy, Roma and Travelling communities within the organisation and her work has prompted increased funding.

For more information about the North East Equality Awards, please visit our website, [www.equality-ne.co.uk/awards](http://www.equality-ne.co.uk/awards) or contact Equality North East on 0191 426 4399 or email [info@equality-ne.co.uk](mailto:info@equality-ne.co.uk).

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