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One change, many possibilities, Holly Phillips

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One of the biggest lessons I have learned at university is to celebrate what you do and the difference your practice makes to someone's life. The smallest of changes can make a huge difference. Studying learning disability nursing opened my eyes to a constantly evolving field, driven by some of the most passionate people I have ever met. With infectious commitment, they work to make a difference and shout for others who may be unable to speak up for themselves. Their passion spreads to fellow nurses and students. As our annual student learning disability nurse conference Positive Choices demonstrated Together We Are Better.

The incredible stories I heard made me want to make a difference myself, so in my second year I became a student quality ambassador. This initiative by Health Education North West promotes high quality care, and ambassadors provide a network of student support to help initiate and encourage participation in quality improvement plans. During a lecture I heard a woman describe the problems she and her son had experienced using the toilet facilities in outpatients. Her son had profound multiple learning disabilities, so gaining access to a toilet was a struggle. Then I learned about the Changing Places (2013) campaign, which aims to make toilet facilities fully accessible. Along with a fellow student, I campaigned for our local trust hospitals to have fully accessible toilets – and our proposal was adopted. I also supported students' training, introducing peer mentor and peer-assisted study sessions to the course. As a learning disability champion I spread the word in schools and colleges about the fabulous work done by learning disability nurses.

As I came up to the middle of my final year, I decided to try to inspire others to become 'movers and shakers'. Entering the RCNi Nurse Awards gave me an opportunity to do this, celebrating the successes I have had with the many colleagues who have supported me. Writing my entry was a challenge: what to include? I began by telling the stories of the service users who had shared their experiences with me. These experiences made a big impact on my practice, changing me as a nurse. Being an award finalist has been such an honour and opened many doors for me. As I was invited to write articles and blogs and make videos of our Changing Places project, my network grew and strengthened. And the glamorous awards ceremony, celebrating the achievements of healthcare professionals nationwide, was worth the effort, too.

I would encourage students to enter the awards, no matter how big or small you believe your project to be. My three tips are:

- Be honest and show your development journey.
- Bring the service user with you by including the voices of those you have worked with.
- Be proud of your achievements, big or small.

Whether you've been shortlisted or not, you're doing fine work. Keep it up.

References

Changing Places (2013) Changing Places, Changing Lives. changing-places.org