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A LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION: A FACULTY AND PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT WITH YVONNE DOBLE

By Loren Collins

For some, community engagement just seems like a good idea for their class or a pedagogy worth trying, but for Yvonne Doble, it is a way of life and part of who they are. Doble is the Director of Field Education and a lecturer in the Social Work department at Humboldt State University (HSU).

I first met Yvonne Doble on Eureka High School's campus, when we were both students many years ago. Even then, she was known for her commitment to community, equity and inclusion; she consistently looked for ways to make a difference in the communities around her. Fast forward to today and you can see that her passion has not waned in more than 20 years. Rather, Doble's passion for community, equity and inclusion has progressed, and it shows in every aspect of their life and work.

Growing up during the "timber wars" of the 90's in Humboldt County, Doble thought the best way for her to make a difference in the community was to major in

Environmental Science. After graduating high school, she attended Oberlin College, a small Liberal Arts college in rural Ohio. "During my time in Ohio I actually really struggled, because I figured out I didn't want to be a scientist, but then I wasn't sure what I was going to school for," Doble said. "I tried four different majors, and ended up needing to take a semester leave to come home and figure out what was important to me."

During that time off, Doble created their own major in Community-based Education. "Oberlin had a process where you write a proposal, you list all the classes you want to include in your major and you list all of the ways that you're going to use those classes and what your goal is when you finish it," they said. "I basically grabbed every class that involved critical studies, and every class that said practicum. I was really writing about my goal to come home to Humboldt to do something useful -- to create a better community, somehow connected to education and social justice. It's one of those funny things... because, now, what I do so direct-



ly connects to that degree, but I had no idea that this work even existed when I wrote that plan.”

Part of Doble’s college experience included a job and a scholarship for helping create a Service Learning class for a local high school, where students designed service projects in an effort to get them through their own struggles with education. These experiences led to a position through AmeriCorps at Eureka High School as she considered a possible future as a teacher. Doble’s position was focused on school-to-career job shadowing, but also included being a mentor and serving as the advisor for the Youth Educating Against Homophobia Club.

“Being a visible member of the queer community was also important to me - a place to push my one high school to do better. I even advocated to adapt a Healthy Relationships group specifically for queer youth, that wasn’t limited by gender identity,” Doble said. “A lot of the youth I most connected with were struggling with feelings of belonging, acceptance and mental health challenges - like myself and my friends four years earlier, who also grappled with the death of one of our friends.”

Looking to dive deeper into supporting youth one-to-one, and pay down more student loans, Doble signed up for a second AmeriCorps term of service. This time, their work focused on teens in foster care through the local Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) office. CASA was having a hard time finding consistent volunteers for older youth, and Doble suggested a partnership with HSU. Specifically, she recommended they create a Social Work internship program, as well as a volunteer coordinator position. CASA staff secured grant funding for the volunteer coordinator role and Doble was asked to fill the position. Doble spent seven and a half years working with CASA, and supervised up to eleven social work interns from HSU each year, and was eventually encouraged to apply to the Master of Social Work (MSW) program.

Originally, Doble’s goal in obtaining a MSW was to become a clinician to help meet the persistent need for clinicians prepared to work with older youth, LGBTQ+ youth and other systems involving youth from a harm reduction framework. During her studies she had the opportunity to work as a teaching assistant for a Child Welfare course and then pursued an independent study class in Teaching Social Work and Social Justice. They also interned with Humboldt County Transition

Aged Youth Collaboration and Open Door Behavioral Health. After graduating, Doble worked with the Senior Action Coalition, continuing her passion for supporting folks most affected by systems, to have a voice into policies shaping their lives. In the long term, however, the seed had already been planted that she would like to help teach and develop social workers at HSU - and that is exactly what she ended up doing.

Since arriving at HSU in 2012, Doble has had the opportunity to build classes in community accountability, restorative justice and community-based practice, as well integrative seminar coursework. “One of the things I love about being part of the team within the Social Work department is the opportunity to seek to shift to systems level practice within the field, sometimes across generations of practice,” Doble said. “Now I get to see former students mentoring current students.”

Doble still finds their one-to-one work with students incredibly meaningful. “I often feel that the students whom I advise or who reach out to me, are a lot like the youth I worked most passionately with back at Eureka High, except at many different phases of their lives,” Doble said. “I’ve gotten to support students working on criminal record expungement, students navigating lived experience with mental health systems, former foster youth and folks that are figuring out how social work fits into community activism. I love coming alongside folks and seeing them come into their own strengths and skills to continue the ripple of community change.”

It was perhaps inevitable that Doble’s past work in community-based learning, community organizing, and their passion to support students, would lead to the position of Director of Field Education at HSU. Now Doble is responsible for helping support the social work interns serving with community partners and opening doors for students in places she once worked. In any given year, Doble places approximately 150 students for year-long practicum field experiences.

Doble has worked to create a scaffolded program for students in both the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and MSW programs where they can explore their strengths and interests and begin to search out their plans for a future career. In preparation for their placements, Doble and the Social Work Department have developed built-in processes where every student creates a resume, cover letter, and practices interviewing. They then submit their resumes and cover letters to potential organizations for their field experiences and

participate in interviews. Students serve as social work interns for dozens of local nonprofits, schools, and government agencies. Once placed, each student is enrolled in a reflective seminar course, with faculty support, while they complete more than 400 hours of field experience over the course of one year.

Doble has taken the lead on many efforts that go beyond the Social Work Department and benefit students across HSU who are serving in the community as well. Doble is always thinking big while simultaneously thinking in a way that supports the individual in need. Doble serves on a committee focused on building a future center in McKinleyville to provide integrated community services in one location. "Because of COVID it has been in sort of a holding pattern, but I'm the Social Work Department's representative on the leadership committee for that program. Its goal is to be a pilot model integrating services across nonprofit, health, tribal, and county social services to effectively meet the needs of the community. Students will be able to talk with folks who are doing case management in that setting to build an understanding of interdisciplinary teamwork and getting to connect directly. So it's not just internships but actually doing workshops, training, classes, and other pieces on site when stores are open and it is safe to do so."

Doble has continued to demonstrate the same commitment and passion toward equity and inclusion that I saw so long ago, leading committees and working groups to find out how HSU can best support our diverse student body as they serve in the local community. Doble has participated in work to train community partners on issues related to equity, helped design rapid response to issues related to equity in the field, and integrated orientations and training on equity in all aspects of preparing

interns for their placement. Doble continues to advocate for the needs of students and the community while taking a holistic approach to learning that deepens ties and support between HSU and the community.

Recently the Social Work Department was presented the opportunity to partner with Eureka City Schools and Del Norte Unified School District for U.S. Department of Education grants focusing on school-based mental health. Doble immediately knew the importance of providing financial support to students completing the MSW. "I know it's a huge barrier and equity issue for many of our students that the full-time campus MSW program doesn't allow for time to work while in school, and that the majority of the two day per week practicum placements are unfunded," Doble said. "So the first thing I said when this grant possibility came up was, 'Let's fund stipends for the students making this commitment.'"

These five year grants now provide a \$13,000 stipend for MSW candidates in the Master of Social Work program who do their advanced year internship at local schools and earn their Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) School Social Work credential in the following summer. "We didn't know at the time that Covid-19 would be what it was and how critical any extra support that we could get into our local schools was going to be this first year in the program, but I am deeply grateful that our students could be part of that effort," Doble said.

Indeed, Doble's lifelong commitment to both community engagement and helping students in a holistic way positively impacts students' lives and the community in which they live. I saw this in high school and I witness it daily through our work together.

