

Episode 5 Omaid Badar

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

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In this episode we have the one and only Social Worker of the Year 2023, Omaid Badar. Omaid is from Afghanistan and came to England as a young teenage boy on a tumultuous journey by boat all alone. What brought him here and how did he go about achieving all that he has at such a young age of only 29? Let's find out.

Hi Omaid. Welcome to the Social Work Community podcast.
[0:01:06.0]

Omaid Badar:

Hello, hi. It's an honour to be here. I'm glad that you've asked me to come on your podcast.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

It's our pleasure. Many congratulations on winning not just the Social Worker of the Year award but being the gold award winner too. What an achievement! What made you choose a career in social work?
[0:01:26.1]

Omaid Badar:

Yeah. I mean, interesting story and obviously there is...I've always wanted to help people and I've always wanted to connect to people more, and I think social work was a platform for me to be more connected to the people, to the most vulnerable, and help them. I think my story, I can relate to a lot of these vulnerable people because, like I said prior to this and before to other people, you know, I have grown up in instability. I've never had stability, I've never had consistency in care. And that is not because it was my parents' fault. It was because I was born in a war-torn country, Afghanistan, and you know, there was never stability for us. There was always war. And obviously due to war we had to migrate to Pakistan, and again I had to live in a refugee camp for so many years in order to obviously for us to stand up on our two feet, to make a living. And I think it was so dangerous for us to remain there because obviously we were facing difficulties every single day. You know, the reason why we migrated to Pakistan was when my father got killed and we had to seek safe haven, and I think Pakistan was the nearest country for us to go to and seek that safe haven. And when we did come to Pakistan, I think the problems never stopped. The problem got even bigger when you don't have that father figure in life, you know, and when there's no one that goes out and works for you, for example breadwinner. We didn't have that, and we had to leave everything to our mother 'cause our mother was the only person that could do that for us.

Like I said, the problems were never-ending and I had to obviously...my mum had to make a difficult decision for me to leave the country and, you know, come to the UK and to make a life for myself and to be...to get everything that a teenager should get at that age, or a child should get. So I mean, my journey coming to England wasn't an easy one. It was a difficult one.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: I mean, you were only a child. Fourteen, were you? [0:03:58.2]

Omaid Badar: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was what my age was, fourteen. And coming out of a war-torn country where you've seen so much traumatic events, that has impacted on me emotionally, mentally, physically. You know, I was a child that had seen so much in so little time, which made me basically...the word I'm looking for is...I mean, I was traumatised. Let's say I was traumatised.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Of course.

Omaid Badar: I was not a normal teenager, I was not a normal child that, you know, that you would see normally that goes out, spends time with their friends, goes to school, plays activities, does this, does that. There was nothing of that in my life.

But coming to this country was another struggle or another obstacle for me because every day we didn't know if the agent would take us. You know, he would put us in the cars, like a car full of people. We were on top of each other. Like, there was so little space to breathe, you know. People...the people that passed away during the journey with us, that were left behind, like nobody cared that they had families, they had parents waiting for them or anything like that. Nobody really cared. And you know again, seeing that again it traumatises you because we're humans at the end of the day and, you know, we can't just leave somebody behind. But, you know, I didn't have anything in my control to do anything about it. But I think...

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And you were alone, weren't you? [0:05:44.5]

Omaid Badar: Yeah. I was alone, on my own and, you know, it's not something that I could do anything about it. But then having to reflect on all those experiences, right now I have got the platform and I've got the knowledge and I've got what it needs to protect children and to be able to offer the support and help them. Like I said to you just a minute before, the journey that I have come through and the things that I've seen by coming to England, there were not easy ones. They were very difficult. Every journey was difficult. Every journey had its own difficulties. Every journey had its own hardships. You know, there were times we didn't have anything to eat, there were days we didn't have anything to eat. You know, and if we did get something to eat the bread would be so hard that, you know, you had to just break it. And you know, they would give us yoghurt and bread and, you know, the bread would be so hard we had to break it into pieces, put it into the yoghurt and then mix it and eat it. That's what our normal routine was to eat. And most of the time we didn't even get that either, which was really difficult. But obviously what we did have a lot was water. We always had water to obviously live on because, I mean, even if

you don't eat, if you've got the water you can live on for so many days. Which was good. At the end of the day, at least we had something to live on or survive on.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And going through all that trauma, poverty, hunger, those things... I guess it's made you a more empathetic social worker because you've physically and mentally been through so much that other people haven't been through. [0:07:33.5]

Omaid Badar: Definitely. Definitely. I mean, going through the poverty, going through the hunger, going through not having the best life. I mean, now when I'm working as a social worker, when I do see families that are in poverty or I do see the children that are not getting the care that they should be getting, you know, I know how it feels and I can put myself in their shoes. And to be able to support them and everything. And sometimes what I do is I quite freely talk to the parents and to the children about my life story and I tell them that, 'Look, I've not come from a stable home. I have not had everything that every child should have, you know. I have had it very hard. But what I have today is I'm grateful for what I have today, I put my head down and I've worked hard and I've left my past behind and concentrated on my future and present.' That's what I did. And I said, 'For you guys to do that, you know, you need to make sure...' What I also do is with parents, I make them reflect on their past life experience and I say, 'Tell me, how was your own parenting like? How did your parents parent you? What was the difference? And what are you seeing now? Are you doing exactly the same thing that your parents did or do you want better for your children? You know, let's think about it, let's talk about it.' And you know, it's important to speak to parents about their parenting first and then obviously speak to the children. And you know, sometimes the children have been living in that chaotic lifestyle or chaotic home and it's just become a norm to them, and it's not okay. It's not okay. They need to... the kids need to be just teenagers, you know. If they're children, they need to be just children. They can't be doing what adults are doing, you know. They need to enjoy their childhood, they need to enjoy their teenage years. And then when they start to be an adult, that is work in progress. You start that from the age of sixteen, trying to be independent and be independency. But I do, you know, sympathise with them because, you know, it's not easy to be in poverty. You can't provide everything. So like, over the Christmas what I always do as part of my job role is I become a Santa. I just go and drop gifts to all the kids.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Ah, that's lovely.

Omaid Badar: On Christmas Day, you know, and what I do is I don't tell them I'm coming. So I'll just surprise them. I'll go there and knock on their doorsteps, give them the gifts. And the reaction that you see on their faces and the happiness, because not every parent is able to afford to buy the kids gifts. And when they see that, they get really happy.

And you know, this is something that, you know, as a Muslim we have Eid, and in Eid I know I've never had a new pair of clothes. I've never had new shoes. I never had that. You know, what we always used to get is, like, the old clothes people used to wear and go enjoy the Eid

part, you know. Like here, now, I can afford to do that. But then when I see Christmas is similar to obviously what we have as Eid, and I want these kids to have something. You know, I want these kids to not see their friends have gifts and not them.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: That's a lovely gesture from you. And yeah, for anybody who doesn't know, in Eid the tradition is to get new clothes, and gifts of course, and for children I think they're more interested in the gifts than the clothes.

Omaid Badar: Yeah, of course.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: How do children and young people react when you tell them, 'I have experience of some of what you're going through'? Do they react well? Do they want to listen? And you know when you say, you know, 'Get your head down and study,' or whatever advice you give them from your own experiences, how is it received? [0:11:26.5]

Omaid Badar: I think I'll give you an example. So I'm working with one of the teenagers and he doesn't like going to school and, you know, and I think it's all down to obviously an element of the parenting, you know, and mental associations. And because he was a high risk in the community as well, which obviously not really helped his peer pressure and all that, didn't help him.

So it got to a point where I actually took him outside the family home and I said, 'Let's go for a drive and let's go eat something and then we can have a chat.' And you know, I wanted to get him out of the family home and to be in a safe space – obviously with the parents' consent – to be in a safe space where I can speak to him, where I can, you know, speak to him and share my personal experiences where it might have an impact on him and it might change him for the positive.

And I spoke to him about education, how education back in our country we have to pay for and we have, you know, not many kids can go to school in our countries because they don't have the financial means of it to go and get educated, and what they end up doing is either working in a shop or either, you know, selling goods on the streets. They don't have a life. Or, you know, selling vegetables on the street or in a town. That's what their job role becomes because they don't have the money to go to get educated. But then the only responsibility lies on their heads is earning the money to home for...

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah, they're growing up very quickly, essentially, and not having a childhood.

Omaid Badar: No, not having a childhood. And I explained to him, I said, 'Look, you've got all the opportunities in this country, you know. You have, you know, free education. If you don't go to school the teachers are running after you to make you come to school, you know, to ensure that you are coming to school. And they will come and do welfare visits and everything as well. In our country even if you're paying, if you don't attend school they won't come to your house, knocking on your door, "Where's your child?" whereas here you've got all the facilities. Take advantage. Become something.' And I said, 'Look, a prime example is me. I've come from a country, again the same

country where never mind going to education, I didn't have anything. I didn't have a proper shelter over my roof. We lived in a tent. And you know, it wasn't ideal but at least I had something to live in. You know, it was some sort of security, some sort of safety for me,' I said, 'Whereas you've got everything. Take advantage of it and be something and make something of your life. You want finer things in life? The finer things in life only come when you work hard for it and when you have some form of knowledge or education, you know, to go and get the better job.' And I think that really helped that kid I know is still going to school and enjoying the school.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Let's go back to when you arrived in this country and how you kind of got into education not having any formal education in the past. So you came from Pakistan. It took you three months to get here. You ended up in Bradford in a police station? [0:14:48.0]

Omaid Badar: Yes. I did. I did. I ended up in a police station. I mean, when I did end up in the police station what I...I mean, I was a fourteen-year-old and what the police did is just put me in a cell. And I remember it was August time, it was cold, it was really cold!

Sharmeen Ziauddin: In August? [0:15:10.0]

Omaid Badar: I was coming from a hot country coming into a cold country, it's different! And they had given me a blanket to put on me and that blanket had so many holes in. And I was like, 'I'm in a blanket 'cause I'm still feeling cold.'

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Aw.

Omaid Badar: But I was really upset at the time, obviously having to travel a long way. Now I ended up in England. All I knew was when we were coming through these areas, once we got somewhere they would tell us, 'Oh, this is this country, this is that country,' but we didn't know when and how we were travelling to the next country or how we were crossing the borders, 'cause they were not legal. We were crossing the border illegally. So you know. And there were the risks to crossing those borders as well. So you know, we didn't know, and all that trauma had stayed with me, and obviously having to see more deaths on the way had impacted on me. So I was really quiet and I was really traumatised and I kept in the cells for, I think...I can't remember. It was late in the evening when I got to the police station and ended up there. And then it was early hours in the morning around, I think it was nine o'clock or something, that the social worker came. And when I saw that social worker, that was the time I broke down. I don't know, automatically broke down, and I didn't know if that was a social worker, I don't know what it was, but when I saw a female I broke down. I broke down really badly, into tears. I still remember that social worker. She came and she hugged me. She goes, 'Don't worry. You're in safe hands.' They had an interpreter there. They were asking me a lot of questions and I was like, 'I don't even know what to say to you. My mind is not even working. I don't know where I am and I don't know what I'm doing. I just need to be safe.' They were the words that I was saying, 'I just need to be safe, I just need to be safe.'

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And you weren't in touch with your mother at this point? [0:17:22.7]

Omaid Badar: No, no, no. I had had no contact with them, nothing, you know. And obviously I was worrying whether they're okay, whether they're alive, what's happened, what's not happened to them. So I didn't know anything about them. Nothing at all.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So was the social worker like a mother figure for you? [0:17:42.0]

Omaid Badar: Yeah. I think that's what...you know, when I saw her that's what obviously sparked up in my eyes and I was like, 'cause she was so warm towards me and I just...when she hugged me it felt like my mother hugging me and I broke down. So it was something that I was longing for that, you know, 'cause I'd not had it for so long.

And then obviously I ended up in the children's home. And I think I was there for a week and then they moved me to another children's home where I stayed until the age of sixteen. But when I was there, I think my English, it was like, 'Hello, hi!' that's all it was! These were the words, 'Hello, hi! What is your name? My name is Omaid,' and all that. I knew nothing more than that, to be fair. But I had a keyworker that made a real impact in my life. His name was Jerry Philip. And he said to me one thing and he said, 'Listen,' he goes, 'your language – Pasto or Farsi or whatever you know at the moment – that is a language that's not going to go away. But English is something that you need to start learning because if you want to live in this country you want to know the rules, you want to know everything about this country. You need to start speaking English. Say it. Even if you say it wrong, we'll correct you. You know? We are always here.'

He would always bring me books. He would always, you know, sit down with me and, you know, read with me. And I think I put my head down, six months, six months I put my head down and within six months I could speak quite good English. I wouldn't say, like, fluent fluent, but I could speak good English, I could speak good English. I put my head down and every day any staff would come I would just be chatting away, you know, I'd be speaking to them. It was a form of communication and learning from them, even if I was doing something wrong they were quite helpful. They would be like, 'No, it's like this. You have to say it like that.' I'd be like, 'Okay.'

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So Jerry gave you the support and encouragement.

Omaid Badar: Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And obviously you had an aptitude for it...

Omaid Badar: Yeah. I did, I did. And I think...do you know what it was? Because I came from a country where I didn't have anything to a country where I was provided with things, like, 'You can have this, you have that, you can have that.' And where I was at, I appreciated that. And I wanted to make something out of me because I didn't want it to...yes, I was psychologically not fit and not well because I had gone through so much. But it took me a while to put everything behind me to be able to progress in my life, to be something. I wanted to become something. I just didn't want to remain with no qualification or with nothing and just go and start working in a takeaway or anything like that. I didn't want that for myself. I wanted a career for myself and I wanted to be connected to people and be more close to them. And that is what I

wanted. So I had to put my head down. And I had the encouragement, the empowerment, the consistency from Jerry Phillip, from Connie, from a few members. I still remember their name in the children's home that helped me to get to where I am today.

And my social workers, you know. Like I said, I had bad and good experiences about social workers. There were social workers that didn't even come to see me, didn't even bother or anything like that. But there were social workers that actually did bother about me, did come to see me, did, you know, ring me to find out how I am, how I'm doing, you know, that really felt that they were responsible for me.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

And was it both positive experiences that made you decide, 'Okay, this is what I want a career in,' because you were ambitious in the sense that you wanted to make something of your life? So what was it that made you choose social work as a career? Because I don't know, but I'm assuming they don't have many social workers in the way that we do in the UK in Afghanistan and Pakistan? It's not the same kind of job. [0:22:07.2]

Omaid Badar:

No, it's not the same. I think my primary goal was to become a doctor first. So when I came in I said, 'I want to be a doctor and I want to be a cardiac doctor.' That's what I wanted to be. But seeing what my keyworker did for me and all the other social workers that were involved, like I said, the bad experiences made me the stronger person that I am today, and the good experiences made me choose this area and want to be a social area and want to be more closer. Yes, doctor is helping saving lives and everything, but as a social worker you can do so much more. You're always connected to those children and the family. You can go and speak to them and visit them, give them advice, give them support, assess the risks and everything. So that is what I wanted, and I think those experiences being in care and being introduced to social care and receiving that positive support from all of them and, you know, the empowerment, the encouragement, you know, the engagement from social care, the engagement from foster home within myself, made me decide that yeah, I think I want to proceed with becoming a social worker. Which is why I chose the health and social Level 3 diploma in Leeds Technology Campus. I completed it in Leeds Technology College and then I went on to the University of [Leeds] Beckett to get a place and be on it for social work. I completed my social work degree there and also got the Excellence of Social Work awarded there for my coursework and doing so well in my placement, which was really good. And even when I was in college I got selected – well, four of us got selected – to go abroad in Denmark and work in a children's home.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Wow.

Omaid Badar:

It was the [unclear – 024:10.5] project and it was really good. I enjoyed that. I mean, I worked in an elderly home. It was a nursing home in Denmark, Esbjerg in a really good...I mean, it was good to see the practice, differences in practice in Denmark compared to the UK. They were a lot different in many aspects. It was good. It was good. I enjoyed it overall.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

What advice would you give to those who work in children's services on how to work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, refugee children? What kind of tips can you give, having been through it yourself? You're in that unique position of offering some advice. [0:25:01.0]

Omaid Badar:

I think what's important is understanding the culture, their belief. Knowing about...I think we get a lot of unaccompanied asylum-seekers from Afghanistan, from Iran, from Kurdistan, from Sudan, Eritrea, from a lot of these countries, you know. What is important for our social worker is to understand the cultures, their beliefs, you know, what their religion is, their dietary needs and things like that. I think when I came in there was not much of that understanding, but obviously with time it got much better. And knowing that anybody that becomes an unaccompanied asylum-seeker is not by choice or not that they wanted to. It's what forced them or made them become that unaccompanied asylum-seeker to seek for a safe haven. Nobody wants to leave their country to come to a different country just for the fun of it, no. It's because of what they've been through in their country, it's because of the trauma that they've been through living in that country, the difficulties that they've faced which have left them no choice but to leave their country.

And I think being consistent with them, showing them empathy, you know, and being open and honest with them and, you know, communicate with them, provide them with the support that they need. I think as a social worker one of the values that's so important is, you know, the commitment to these children. And not just unaccompanied asylum-seekers but all the children around here, the vulnerable children. I think commitment is something that I really work towards. There's always space, there's always an area to improve me. I don't say I'm perfect. I would never say I'm perfect 'cause there's always areas for me to deal with. But I think commitment, consistency and stability for the children are really important, commitment that, you know, if you show them commitment that you're here for them and you're listening to them, that's when they will trust you, that's when they will believe in you, that's when they will share their secrets with you, that's when you will be able to support them fully in a restorative approach, in a restorative manner. Because these children need us.

And I think what is the most biggest part of that place is the culture that we need to understand. And I always say that, 'Please try to understand their cultures, what their beliefs are.' 'Cause most of us are not aware of them. And I don't expect all social workers to be fully aware of this because not everybody will be fully aware of them. They will learn with time. But I think there's always that area. 'Cause we live in the United Kingdom, which is very diverse, and we've got people from all around the world living here, literally, from different backgrounds, from different religions. So I think there should be some thought of that understanding.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

And is there...do you think there should be more, like, cultural competency training for social workers? I mean, I know most local authorities have some sort of training but it's probably not enough, I'm

assuming, 'cause there are so many different cultures to learn about.
[0:28:24.8]

Omaid Badar: I think it will be really helpful. I think for me, there should be more of those training for the social workers, in order for them to understand. Because we need to take this very seriously because you will be working with children from Sudan to understand what Sudan's like, to know what Sudan cultures are, what their values are, what their beliefs are. So we don't know that. But you know, I think these trainings like that will really help social workers promote excellent social work practice out there. So I think yes, 100%, definitely I would like that to happen in all the local authorities for social workers.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So fast forward to 2023. You've won two amazing awards. How did those come about?

Omaid Badar: I think when I joined social work, when I graduated and I joined Kirklees, my only motivation was to bring change and make a difference to the children, vulnerable children and the families. And I think I've worked with a lot of families that had complex needs, a lot of children that had complex needs. However, because I'd been through so much, like I said earlier on with the poverty and everything, I understand and I can put myself in their shoes and I can empathise with them. And I can work with them on a level where I can understand them. We have to communicate effectively with them. We have to empathise with them. And we have to give them the chance to speak. And you know something when we get these referrals coming through there's a world of information there and sometimes on paper you can make a person look like a monster. But they're not. You know when you go and see them in person, always go with an open mind. I never go and judge people. I think being open-minded, going there and sitting down with them and speaking to them, you're able to understand that person, you're able to form relationships, working relationships with them, and you're able to obviously get your message across to them, even though at times when you challenge them it doesn't seem to them as a personal attack, however it seems to them, 'There's an issue there, let's work with that.'

And what I do is always work in the restorative approach, which Kirklees supports and follows as their practice. So what we do is...what that means is we work with them rather than work for them, do everything for them. So that means anything I've done, I've done with them, I've involved them in decision-making and I've involved them in plans. I've involved them in the meetings, I've made sure they're aware of everything that's happening, every step by step. And I think I've given them control of their life back. And you know, I didn't make them feel that we had control of their lives, but we're here to support and advise. And because of all these positive experiences I've had many feedback from families, from professionals. I've done a lot of care proceeding cases where the judges have given me positive feedbacks. I go to university to give talks, talk about experiences of my experiences, my journey, the social work challenges, power imbalance, how to obviously be...how to obviously practise excellent social work practice, promote social work practice. In the panels here, when I've attended my own panels, like permanence panel or early gateway panels, these I've also have positive feedbacks because I've

always presented the case to the point. I've not gone...always been to the point and all my data, my assessments and everything have always been data and facts rather than opinions.

I think one of the families that we were closing down, they actually cried and didn't want me to leave. And I think for all of the professional group that was the first time that they had seen a family crying and not wanting me to leave and not wanting me to close the case. We had to reassure the family and I had to reassure the family and explain to them that, you know, 'This is the time that you take control of your life, take control of your decision-making. You have done so well to come to where you are from where you were, to where you are. You have made so many significant changes in your lifestyle. Your lifestyle choices have changed, you're more capable of making your own decisions. Your children are not saying anything that's happening at home. So you have everything that you need and I've got every confidence in you.' And you know, that was a particular family that would come back to us every other six months, back reopen. But I've closed it two years ago and it's still...yeah. So that means that they are doing really well and that they made the change. So I'm glad that it's there.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Is it hard for you to let go of the young people and families that you've worked together with and grown fond of? And even though the case may close, often children – especially if they're care-leavers – they might want to stay in touch with the people who've supported them so much. Like, you're in touch with your support worker? [0:34:33.2]

Omaid Badar:

Indeed. It is hard because it's not easy to let go of a family or a child that you've worked with so closely and made significant changes with them to bring their best out of them. I think it is hard. But what I do always get the pleasure of is that I did something good and, you know, now they need to go on their own way and my services are required somewhere else. But I know deep down in my heart that they're fine, they're safe. And they know where I am if they need me. They can come. One of the children that's now looked-after, and moved to the looked-after team, he still comes to the office and knocks and says, can he take me to Gregg's! And that is his excuse to come and see me. So you know, I'll still go. I'll say, 'Okay, let's go. Let's go.' I'll take him.

But you know, they still come and see me. They'll still ring me. Or if I bumped into them somewhere in town or anything, they'll come and say hi to me. They'll come and say hi to me. So I think it's lovely that obviously they remember there's somebody out there that's made positive changes to their lifestyle or to them sense of respect. I think it's the same to me. So obviously the people that made positive changes to me, I still talk about them, I still remember them. And I think it's normal, you know, when you do something good for someone they will remember it their lifetime.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Of course. And I guess seeing all this led your colleagues or your managers to nominate you? [0:36:17.8]

Omaid Badar:

I had an email in May last year from the principal social worker saying, 'We have nominated you for the Social Worker of the Year

awards and I want to come and sit down and speak to you about your achievements.' And at first I was like, 'What? I don't even know...' I said, 'Where has it come from?' I was really shocked. But then when he came in and spoke to me about the awards it was... 'cause I didn't know about the Social Worker of the Year awards and things like that. I never know about this, that they existed, to be fair. So I had a chat to him and then obviously he put the...he nominated me and put me forward for the awards.

And I think what's important as social workers, I think we do so much, we go through a lot of emotions in our job perspective, you know. We always are overworked and we're always doing so much for the families and children. And it's part of our job role, obviously. We love what we're doing. But you know, sometimes it's so much because of the staff reduction and, you know, the staff on sick leave or there's no more staff. Or people will go on sick leave because of their workload and the emotional side of it. You know. It's good that we've got something like this that recognises the hard work of all the social workers out there. Not only me, but the thousands of social workers around in the UK that are doing so well, that are putting their lives sometimes at risk to obviously support these children. And you know, to be able to be there for them. And I think in Covid, like I said, in Covid most of the staff were working from home or they were off because of the Covid, and I didn't get Covid and I was coming in every single day to the office, and I was making sure I was visiting families, I was making sure I was giving the families obviously the Covid kit and things like that, so they can make sure that they test themselves. Or giving them food parcels and things. I was doing that all through the Covid. I've not taken not even one day off throughout Covid. And I think this is why I say that, you know, the recognition is so important, not just for me but for all over the world, the social workers are working so hard that they need to be recognised. And I think this makes them happy that at least they're being recognised. 'Cause you know, in the media our image and everything is not always positive. But the work that we do, you know, when we do something good not everybody remembers. But when something slips out then it goes all over.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Yeah. That's the sad nature of social work, unfortunately. So at the actual even you won two awards. So that must have come as a massive surprise? [0:39:20.6]

Omaid Badar:

Oh yeah. I was emotional. But it was a good feeling to be going up on that stage and, you know, receiving that award. It's a prestigious award and I think not many people have the opportunity to get that. I think me being recognised at a national level for the hard work and everything, I think...it was amazing. It was absolutely pleasure to be there and getting given that award.

And then I went outside to speak to the press and take pictures and everything, and I was just enjoying myself while I stood outside and then the event organisers came and said, 'Oh, well you need to come back in 'cause they're doing the overall Social Worker of the Year award.' And I said, 'Well, I've got mine, I'm okay.' She was like, 'No, no, you have to come back in,' 'cause they knew that I've got the next one as well.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Yes.

Omaid Badar:

Yeah, they knew already that I've got the next one. So they got me back in, and then when the overall Social Worker of the Year award got announced, I think I was over the moon. Everybody stood up and, you know, I was...I went to the stage and I gave my speech, and I think I got really emotional, 'cause I had to take a pause for a few seconds. And then I went back and I... It was lovely to see all these people cheering for me, and obviously knowing my story, knowing where I come from, how much I've succeeded. And they were all so lovely, they were all so amazing, and they were all coming up to me and saying that they wished to work with me some day. And it was a dream come true, to be fair. It was just amazing. I would have never imagined that.

But I think that's why I say with the hard work and everything, it will never go unheard or unseen. And over time people will recognise and people will put you forward for something like this, which I did.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

No, I mean credit to you. You've worked hard, and given what you've been through to achieve that much is an absolutely inspiring achievement and accomplishment that I'm sure many others look up to and admire your strength and everything that's got you to where you are. Where do you get your inner strength from, that motivates you and keeps you going? [0:41:54.9]

Omaid Badar:

I think because I never had all this from the beginning. And then when you do have it, I think you can go two ways. When you don't have anything and then when you get it, either you take it or either you don't. So with me, if I didn't have the people around me that motivated me and encouraged me I wouldn't have gone the route of where I've gone. I might have, I might not have. But you know, with a little bit of push, you know, you can conquer the world, basically! But for me it was, it was...because I didn't know if I would ever meet my mother, I didn't know if I would ever be able to return back to my country, and because of what I had been through in my life I didn't want any other child to go through that. And the reason why I have succeeded so much, or I am successful in my career right now, is because of my past experiences. And you know, in what I had been provided with. And I wanted to take advantage of that because I didn't get all that in my country where I got it here. So I made sure I took advantage of it and became something of it. And I'll continue to do that because, you know, there's always something new to learn and I want to continue to be successful, I want to continue to do the great job for the children and promote good, excellent social work practice for everybody else to see that, and recruit more people – more men, actually – to social work because not many men do come to social work. They think it's not for men to do. But I think there's so much than men can do in social work, it's unbelievable. And you know, a lot of children respond really well to men, male social workers. And I've never had a negative experience so I wouldn't say...for me it's a lovely career. I think men should come to this.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

That's a really interesting point you make 'cause we've discussed this a lot with my colleagues and others that, you know, the workforce is I

think about 84% female in social work. There are a lot of men in other roles, like youth justice and...

Omaid Badar: Youth justice, youth engagement.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: ...yes. But the qualified social workers, there's not enough. This might be a good topic to discuss on another episode. We might have you back to talk about this! [0:44:27.9]

Omaid Badar: Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: I mean, I guess what you've told me shows the importance of good support, good social workers, good family support workers, and all the different staff that are involved in social services and how they can really turn someone's life around with their support. [0:44:46.8]

Omaid Badar: I'm happy with everything I have and I'm grateful for whatever I have. And you know, I'm grateful for all the people that were involved in my care, all the professionals that made this happen. I'm grateful for everybody.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Thank you so much for coming onto the podcast and sharing your inspiring story with us. [0:45:11.0]

Omaid Badar: Thank you. Thank you. It's been an honour. Thank you very much for having me here.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: That was Omaid Badar from Kirklees Council. What an incredible story. You can read his interview that our community reporter, Anastasia Koutsounia did at the beginning of the year. I'll put the link in the show notes. If there's something you want us to cover here on the Social Work Community podcast, or if you just want to say hi, you can get in touch via the www.thesocialworkcommunity.com. If you haven't already, do listen to our other episodes.

We've got two other podcasts that you should add to your library. The first is Workforce Insights, which used to be called Employer Zone. It showcases important issues within social work in collaboration with different organisations.

And there's Community Care Inform Learn On The Go, where experts and academics in the social care sector discuss research, theories and practice issues. So go and give them a follow.

That's it for now. See you next time.