

Ask the Experts 5

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Hello. My name is Kirsty Ayakwah, senior careers editor at Community Care. And welcome to another episode of *The Social Work Community* podcast mini-series, called *Ask the Experts*, where we put your career dilemmas from social workers to a panel of experts.

In this episode, we respond to a question from a social worker who works in adult social care, who wants to work for the United Nations or a similar organisation that works with refugees or coordinates disaster relief. [0:00:33.7]

My name is Kirsty Ayakwah, and I'm joined by our three experts, Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly, Claire Barcham and Kayleigh-Rose Evans, who collectively have around 60 years of social work experience between them. Thank you so much for joining us again.

Before we jump into the introductions, I just want to remind those of you listening or watching that if you have any burning questions that you'd like to share with our experts, please email them to careersadvice@markallengroup.com. And please give as much detail as possible for us to respond as effectively as possible.

Now, if you want to speak with peers, we've got a network called *The Social Work Community*. It's a free, gated community for social workers which is designed to cater for those at the beginning of their careers, those at the cusp of qualifying, and those experienced practitioners with many years in the sector. You can join at www.thesocialworkcommunity.com (all one word), which connects you to a host of other social workers.

And if you're in the community already, you'll find these episodes with our experts there too, and you may even see some of them because some of them are members.

Now, back to our panel. Now, Dame Lorna has over 30 years of experience in the sector as a practitioner, manager and workforce development lead. She brings a wealth of expertise as head of service at various authorities, and has established social work academies across the country. She's currently chair of a charity that is very much focused on supporting young people and amplifying their voices. So welcome, Dame Lorna.

Now, like Dame Lorna, Claire has over 30 years of experience in the sector – I think they're challenging each other! – initially qualifying as a generic social worker, to working as a specialist, including as a mental health social worker, and more recently managing an emergency duty team. Claire currently delivers training in children's schools and for approved mental health professionals. She also

works for the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in the area of policy, and is passionate about trying to join together both the practical experience of being a social worker and the policy work at a national level. So it's great to have you here, Claire.

And Kayleigh. Kayleigh is an accomplished social worker, practice educator and best interests assessor specialising in adult's services. She holds a Master's degree in professional development in social work, and is dedicated to advancing the field through education and advocacy. Alongside her social work practice, Kayleigh works as an independent trainer, sharing her knowledge and experience with others in the field. She also shares valuable advice, relatable educational content and reflections on social work through her popular YouTube channel, which is also called Kayleigh-Rose Evans. And you'll also find her on our podcast. So she's been on a couple of our podcast recently. The most recent one is where we explore the benefits and challenges of being a locum versus being a permanent social worker in a local authority.

So, we're pleased to have you here today with such varied experience and expertise. And I know that today's discussion is going to give us a lot of insight.

So, jumping straight into this question, we had two that were quite similar which were looking at social working abroad. So what I've done is I've combined the questions, and I'll put them first to Claire. So this one's for you, Claire.

The practitioner said, 'I work in adult social care. I want to work for the UN or other similar organisations doing social work with refugees or coordinating disaster relief. Are these jobs that social workers do? How do I find these roles, as the NGO websites that I've been to don't really seem to show much?' Over to you. [0:04:32.1]

Claire Barcham:

Okay. Well, I'll admit that I have not had one of those roles. I have met people who have, actually. And in terms of how you actually access more information, I would suggest that you start by looking to work with asylum-seekers in this country and the voluntary organisations who support them. Apart from anything else, if you're saying that's what you want to do more longer-term, then it's worth having the conversations here and to develop the skills and knowledge and understanding of the situations that make people migrate, that the war and the conflict and the pressures that bring people to this country to start off with.

You may find that adverts come in different ways, that they're not necessarily in the...because they're not using the Go Public website. They may well be using *The Guardian* or one of the other papers to recruit to. But I would start with the organisations in this country and work from there. You'll find some people who have done that work and can probably point you in the right direction, I'm sure.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Absolutely. I think we've come across a few on the community as well, people who've shared their experience of working. Can I move that question over to you, Kayleigh? [0:05:53.1]

Kayleigh-Rose Evans:

Yeah. I had to do a bit of research on this one. Anecdotally, I spoke to someone who said that a friend of theirs did go and get one of these roles. They were a head of service here and then they just got the equivalent role somewhere else and then just transitioned over. So they were just looking for similar titles in a different area and then just managed to secure that position.

But I think like Claire said, if it was me I probably would be looking for roles working, you know, here and get an idea, get your foot in the door and then often with those sorts of things then they'll tell you where the jobs are elsewhere or if they have partners with different places.

If you wanted to do it a different way, LinkedIn. Some people just post things on there and just see if anyone comes back to them. There's a few key organisations. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, Red Cross. And then there's some job portals like ReliefWeb, Idealist. Apparently some job roles are put on there, on these places, and you can get information from the organisations.

In terms of qualifications and skills, it may be worth getting a bit of background in trauma-informed care or refugee rights, humanitarian responses. Internship roles or short-term roles just to get a bit of experience so you know what you're looking at.

And then it's being a bit open-minded that the roles may not be specifically labelled as social worker. They might be programme coordinator or case manager or outreach worker. So it is just when you're looking just to be a bit aware of that. And then you probably would have some credibility as well, being a qualified social worker with your background, you know, in saying that's your training as well when you're applying for positions like that.

So they were the things that I managed to find. [0:07:44.5]

Claire Barcham:

And there was one thing I just remembered that I was going to reference, is actually BASW has some training that you can do on responding to disasters, and there's a whole sort of policy statement around that. So the ideas around how you intervene in those periods is out there, and it's worth looking on their website. And certainly, at the beginning of the pandemic I was talking to some of the senior leaders over there who were actually using their experience in disaster zones to help myself and other people here really think about, 'Well, how do you deal with stuff when suddenly everything feels like it's out of your control? And what are the important things?'

So I think the expertise is out there, but as Kayleigh says, it may not be labelled in quite the way that you expect it to be labelled. Don't expect them to advertise for a social worker, but they might advertise for a project development worker or something similar.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Yeah. That's really valuable. Dame Lorna, is there anything you wanted to add? [0:08:44.0]

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly:

Yes. I'd like to come at this from a careers advice perspective. And I'd like to start off by saying to the author of this question to think about

your motivation. What is driving you towards this area of work? Both Kayleigh and Claire have given excellent advice but I would really encourage you to think about motivation. There are many NGOs, both...some connected to churches and others not connected to churches, working in this area of work. There are volunteers. And I wondered whether, before you think about going into a career change and moving into this area of work, whether you have considered volunteering first of all. Have you spoken to any international social workers to hear about their experiences? I'm bringing very much myself and a sense of self into this. Claire and Kirsty – and I don't think Kayleigh knows this – my sister-in-law is a nun and she's been in Haiti for many years. And listening to some of the challenges and the experiences that she faces, and sisters in her convent face, is very moving and very interesting.

But one of the things that Sister Rose has always stressed is she's not there as a rescuer. She's there to work with empathy and support. And that's what made me think about the motivation. What is it that makes you want to work in this area of work? And first of all, think about volunteering. Get some experience, whether it be in this country through working through a voluntary organisation like the Red Cross or some of the ones that Kayleigh and Claire have spoken about. That's what I would like to add to the very valuable advice of Claire and Kayleigh.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

You actually have reminded me of two social workers I spoke to. One of them worked in a local authority in a child exploitation team. And what they did was, I think they had a secondment and they actually left their local authority and went to the Gambia to do work over there, and then came back after a while and then were able to share that knowledge and expertise in supporting the local authority back in this country. So it was like a two-way thing.

And then I'm aware of a social worker that I spoke to, and they did a similar thing but the other way around, basically. They went and volunteered outside of this country in a refugee team and then came back, and they were able to bring some of that knowledge and understanding about that situation and what it's like for a young person to be separated from their family and to be in another country. They were able to bring that knowledge and understanding back into the local authority.

So it wasn't exactly the same but you've just sort of peaked my memory on that. But I think everything that you've said has been very valuable and I'm hoping that that will provide some guidance for the person who submitted the question. So thank you, Dame Lorna, Claire and Kayleigh for your insights today.

As I said at the beginning, this is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts, so we do have *The Social Work Community*, which is a community platform where, as long as you register and sign in, you can join the discussion and we can keep talking about some of these topics.

So just to remind people in case they've forgotten, if they have a career dilemma please get in touch. You can do that by joining us on

The Social Work Community, signing up, and also sending us an email. As I said, the email address is careersadvice@markallengroup.com. And we'll be back next time for more career questions and dilemmas. Thank you so much.