The Social Work Community – Career Transitions, Jenifer Lamadrid

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 'Career Transitions', where we speak to social workers who started their career in another profession and have transitioned into social work. We find out what prompted their move, what skills they've been able to take from one profession to another, and more.

In this episode, we speak to Jenifer Lamadrid, who transitioned from being an independent domestic violence advisor (or IDVA) in Australia, to London to practice social work. She is now a specialist domestic abuse social worker. Let's find out more.

Hi Jenifer. [0:00:50.1]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Hi there. Thank you for having me, Kirsty.

Kirsty Ayakwah: No problem. It's so good to have you here, and also learn more about what it means to be an IDVA. Could you tell us about that? [0:01:01.0]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah, of course. So, an IDVA, I guess by definition it's quite easy – an independent domestic violence advocate or advisor, that are kind of focused on working with victim survivors of domestic abuse and providing support to victims in different ways, whether that be advocacy, including support with police or courts, or whether that's safety planning to protect themselves, but also offering crisis intervention such as accessing safe accommodation and other resources. And there's also long-term support. Many IDVA services will offer counselling, whether that's one-to-one or sometimes even specialist groups with more people who have experienced domestic abuse. And they also take a coordinated approach in the multi-agency risk assessment conferences know an the MARAC.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Thank you. I introduced you earlier and I said that you actually worked in this role in Australia, which sounds amazing. Could you tell us a bit more about how that happened and who you were working with there? [0:02:02.0]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah, of course. So, when I was working in Australia, one of the things that are required for IDVAs is that you need to have a year of professional experience supporting victims of domestic abuse. And the good thing is that can be either in a paid or voluntary role. So for myself, I had had previous experience volunteering at a women's shelter, and from there I did their training, which I don't know how relevant that is but it's very similar to what's kind of required here in the UK, which is completing a role and undertaking, like, a certificate within domestic abuse prevention and early intervention as, like, a certification. I think here in the UK they call it the OCNLR.

Kirsty Ayakwah: That stands for Open College Network London.

Jenifer Lamadrid: So very similar to the same process as Australia. And I worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait women specifically.

Kirsty Ayakwah: And how long were you doing that for? [0:03:04.5]

Jenifer Lamadrid: I was there for two years. It was a really promising time in my life and I was really passionate about the work that I was doing.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Okay. What was the reason behind you working with this particular group? [0:03:21.8]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Mm. I guess for me it was…well of course it was what was available as, like, contracts come up and things like that. But I felt really passionate about working within the focus of, like, harmful practices. We have very similar ideas here in the UK where we work with groups that are a bit more vulnerable. Here we usually consider things such as honour-based abuse, and obviously the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have had their own history with displacement and oppression within Australia, so they are in a very particularly vulnerable situation because of lots of the laws that were passed and a lot of the actions taken by the government.

So it is a really interesting group to work with because it's also a very strong communal spirit, and also care that is taken amongst each other. And there's a very difficult way of how to reconcile within that community, such as many communities that we work with, when there is an abuser that is from within the same community, and how do you work with them, the victims of that abuser, in a way that they feel is safe, particularly when they don't want to involve police or other legal professionals because there has been a system of state violence towards them.

So that was one of the reasons I was really interested particularly working there, and I think that that's kind of continued in my work within being a domestic abuse specialist. One of my areas I'm very passionate about is honour-based abuse and harmful practices. So I think that stems from working there, because it is a very different way of having to work with people when you have to understand that they live with impunity. And people who have experienced state violence, it's something that you cannot deny in any capacity, generations upon generations and how you kind of hold those two things to support someone in different and creative ways that maybe do not involve statutory services.

Kirsty Ayakwah: No, that's really interesting because I see really strong parallels with African American communities or, you know, outside of that, anywhere where there are minority black or non-white communities, and that intersection with dealing with police. So you have that quandry of, 'I need to feel safe as a human being or as a woman, but I also need to…I want to protect my community as well.' So by calling the police there is a risk that that would be something very detrimental to that individual who is the aggressor but also to the community as a whole. So how do you balance those two things? Or how did you balance them? [0:06:02.7]

Jenifer Lamadrid: I think it's a bit easier when you are working as an IDVA because a lot of that is focused around what the victim survivor wants. When you are working within the social work context we sometimes do have to have the awareness that we have statutory obligations that we need to meet, and there are times that we can't hold that risk.

So I think sometimes when you are working as a charity or organisation there is almost this more flexible way of working, and it's one of the reasons I'm so passionate about giving the people the option that when they are working alongside social services we do offer them community resources that can work more in line with how they want to work. Because sometimes we do have to act on statutory duties and that can be a really fine balance.

So it's very much centred around what the victim wants. Obviously there are times where we might recommend certain things, such as taking upon legal orders or reporting to the police, particularly when there is high risk, when there might be concerns of homicide. But we do try to advocate. Maybe we do that disclosure with the person. Maybe we're there for them while they're having conversations or interviews with police officers. So it's about trying to see that when we do have to have that involvement, how can we reassure them that we are going to be supportive of that process for them? And I guess that's where it is really insightful to work in a way where it is about what that person wants and what that person feels is needed at the time.

And also kind of understanding that police aren't the only way to keep a person safe. I think that's something we do have to take into consideration and we have to keep an eye on, even as social workers. There are different ways. We have to understand maybe, and be more curious about where that barrier is coming from. 'Cause oftentimes it is rooted in a very real rationale that is completely fair. And I think sometimes we don't lend ourselves that curiosity as much when we are working in statutory services.

Kirsty Ayakwah: No, that's really profound. So just to be clear, you were working in a charity setting as an IDVA, and I guess you would have been working with social workers in Australia, would you? [0:08:14.6]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. Yeah, so sometimes. Obviously some families were not involved with social services. Perhaps it was, you know, threshold wasn't met at the time or they had a really good safety plan, community support, there was a lot going on that showed that they were accessing support and taking the right steps. But oftentimes yes, there was social work involvement as well. Just like we would do now, and it was one of those things of having that inter-agency work, being able to discuss, 'What steps are you doing? These are the steps that I'm doing. Who…is this something that maybe I have a better working relationship and can probe and discuss with them a bit more?'

So very similar to how it kind of operates here. It will depend on each family. Obviously there are certain times where a disclosure also might happen that does alert us that there is a lot of risk. And just like it would happen here, sometimes you do have to make referrals into

multi-agency safeguarding hubs and things like that. Ideally that's always done with people's consent but sometimes we do have to understand, especially if there is risk of homicide or something like that to the person or the children…we try to always work with consent but sometimes we…it was understanding when we had to do that. But yeah, very similar to how it operates here, I guess, which is the positive part. It also kind of sometimes lends you an idea of how people are experiencing the system from a different point of view.

Kirsty Ayakwah: What do you mean? [0:09:42.1]

Jenifer Lamadrid: So I guess when you're an IDVA you are very much – unless you are also a children's IDVA – you are very much focused on the victim survivor and their trauma. And sometimes with social services, particularly children's social services, that can kind of get lost sight of, in terms of when we're thinking about the child and what the child needs. And sometimes those can be quite conflicting. Not oftentimes but sometimes they can be quite conflicting interests. And how we balance that is really interesting because each agency, I guess, comes with their own ethos of care and how, you know, they're going to roll out their work and interventions. And it is always really interesting to see how that kind of differs. Which is what can make one multi-agency working so valuable but also a bit tricky, I guess.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Mm. Mm, 'cause it's about making sure that you are able to have that voice. I hear this a lot when the social workers are working in multi-disciplinary teams or in…even in a sort of hospital setting, making sure that you have that space to advocate for that person. [0:10:48.6]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Uh-huh.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah. Your job sounds really rewarding, and I can't imagine why you would have had to have left. But please tell us, why did you transition into social work? [0:10:59.0]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. I guess one of the big things was that I did have a degree in psychology, and it was something that I wanted to work in a more therapeutic way. The job I had at the time, it was much more crisis intervention and I would stay with families around six months. Which is a really good amount of time but I did want to be able to, I guess, take on a longer range in my working, and also to use my degree. So that was the primary reasons that I wanted to go. I wanted to 1) work a little bit more therapeutically, and also use the degree that I had gone to school for.

Kirsty Ayakwah: And that wasn't something that you could pursue in Australia? [0:11:40.4]

Jenifer Lamadrid: It was. It was definitely an option in Australia. But at the time…I'm not Australian. I guess that's a really important factor. I went to international school, which is why I have a very hybrid accent. And…

Kirsty Ayakwah: Do you want to tell the audience or the listeners where you're from? [0:11:57.6]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah, sure. I'm from Cuba. I was born and raised in Cuba, which is the biggest island in the Caribbean. So I'm sure most of the people know, but just in case!

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah!

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah! It's an international school accent! So, at the time I had gone there just for what I had assumed just to be, like, a few years. I went for four. And it was just very far from home. So that was really the main driving factor. It was a bit too hard to get back home. It is genuinely on the other side of the world! So that was a big driving factor. And one of the good things that I really liked about the UK in terms of their degree programmes was that if I did want to return to Australia they had almost like learning agreements with the countries that were part of the Commonwealth. So it was quite easy to practise from one country to the other.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Mm, this is interesting. We're going to have to find out what the name is. [0:12:49.5]

Jenifer Lamadrid: So I don't know if there's an actual title about it. But I've just looked it up that the University of Edinburgh degrees are widely recognised and respected in Commonwealth countries and the university actively supports international students from these nations. So it says here that a [unclear – 0:13:05.0] qualification is recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council and the corresponding regulator of Social Work England, Northern Ireland and Wales. But it says it's also recognised as a professional qualification of social work across the world, including the United States and Canada, following accreditation with the in-country regulatory authorities. I don't know if that's changed for Australia but it was before also Australia.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Fantastic. So that meant that if you wanted to, once you'd done that Master's, you could have gone back to Australia or anywhere? [0:13:34.0]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yes. I would have had to get, like, the in-country regulations. But it's a lot easier 'cause it is recognised as, like, an equivalent degree.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Okay. So I guess that would be a stronger pull than just doing it in Australia? [0:13:47.2]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yes. That was one of the stronger pulls. And it also was, I was like, 'Well, I have time to decide where I want to live more long-term,' and at the time I could have at least been a little bit closer 'cause the flight back home is only nine hours compared to twenty-five!

Kirsty Ayakwah: Oh! Yes, that makes a lot of sense. Okay. So you end up in Edinburgh? Tell us that journey. [0:14:08.6]

Jenifer Lamadrid: So yeah, I ended up at the University of Edinburgh doing the Master's in Social Work programme. It was really brilliant. I had an amazing practice tutor called [unclear – 0:14:19.4], who really instilled a great love of social services to me. I remember one of the first things she said to us. I think it genuinely was the first day of our course. She said that the work of social work should be to lose our jobs.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Mm.

Jenifer Lamadrid: And I thought that that was really, really thoughtful because it is the idea that we should be able to dream and experience and consider and imagine a reality where this type of work doesn't have to occur.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah.

Jenifer Lamadrid: That there isn't systems of poverty and systemic features that devalue and make life more difficult for certain people. So I always found that really brilliant because I do think sometimes we…especially in a profession like this it can be quite grim, the work that we're doing. And I think we do have to be able to imagine a different reality.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah, that is really, really true. And you've been able to hold onto that ethos throughout your career so far? [0:15:23.3]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah, I think so. I mean, there are moments where, you know, I can be very frustrated with what's happening with the world. I mean, recently the reports and the recent femicide report for the UK came out, and that was really staggering. And it does leave me feeling a bit of despair. I wouldn't say that I've never felt that emotion, especially in domestic abuse work. But I do think about how many people have reached out to me years later and they're in a much better position in their lives or they found a strength that they didn't know that they had inside of themselves. And I do think about those, and I try to keep that as the idea of why I do my practice and my work. So I like to think so.

I also think this isn't the type of job that you can despair in.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah.

Jenifer Lamadrid: Maybe for a moment but you have to deal with it in whatever way that comes for you and move on because if we're not able to, once again, imagine that different future and imagine better for people, I think we do them a disservice in this line of work.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah. I see that. I mean, would they call that professional resilience? Is that the word? [0:16:30.9]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. And I guess that forms in a lot of ways, 'cause I think professional resilience very much sometimes gets boggled down to an individual thing but I don't think that that's true. I think there is sometimes to be considered about the creation of systemic resilience within workers. Because it is very different when you have a council that maybe has a lot to offer, schools that maybe have a lot to offer children with SEND needs or they have a lot to offer in terms of ELSA support…

Kirsty Ayakwah: That stands for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants.

Jenifer Lamadrid: …and things like that. So I think sometimes we get really jarred down with the idea that professional resilience is just about the individual, but there is so much to say about what proper budgeting, proper funding, a workplace that allows for maybe mental health support, can really do to impact the professional resilience of its workers. And I think I've gotten really lucky in that part with my current job.

Kirsty Ayakwah: And where is your current job? [0:17:30.4]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. I work for Wandsworth Children's Social Services.

Kirsty Ayakwah: How long have you been a social work for now? [0:17:37.2]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Oh, I've been a social worker for seven years now.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Okay. And is it right that you started out as a specialist domestic abuse social worker? [0:17:45.8]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Not necessarily as a specialist but I started off working within a domestic abuse role right off the bat, which I was really, really keen on. A lot of people said that's not the likeliest thing to happen but I was very much applying for those jobs. And that was really exciting to do. It was working more in the long-term teams, and then looking at domestic abuse support for families that were already on child-in-need and child protection plans.

And then during Covid I transitioned to a team that was actually formed as part of the Covid response to deal with the intake that was being received about domestic abuse. And that was kind of within the frontline of kind of like the MASH. So that was also really interesting. So yeah, my whole career has been focused around domestic abuse, which is, I think, in some ways a really big strength because it was what I was passionate about and what I wanted to specialise in, but I'm also aware about how it sometimes can limit me in my knowledge. So I guess that's where training also comes in as important in kind of recognising when I don't understand something or a piece of work might look a lot different to me than it does to another social worker.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Mm, yes, yes. There was something that really caught my attention that you mentioned earlier, and that's about…we talked about professional resilience and having that support structure around you. But my question is, not everyone works in a local authority or an institution where there's always that level of support and resource around. And also, if you're working with vulnerable people – I'll say people but I guess predominantly you're dealing with women when it comes to domestic violence – I guess you'd have to be creative to be able to access those resources that you know can support them? [0:19:38.1]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. No, definitely. And I guess that's why we have to look at what is in place but also like national funding. But also thinking of creatively, a lot of councils sometimes have like emergency funding for families who might be experiencing things such as domestic abuse. And I don't think some people realise to use that as much. But it's also looking at grants and applying for those. But also, I guess, like within London we're really blessed as well that we have the pan-London service agreement, which is so beneficial. One, it's a way of working quite universally for social services, but that also means that a lot of…not all but so many of the charities do cover the entirety of London. So even if you are someone that is experiencing harm in Hackney, and let's say that you are a Latino woman, you can still be referred to Latin-American Women's Aid, which their base is…I believe it's in Southwark. But I know it's definitely in South London, somewhere in South London. But you can…so I think it's always

looking creatively at what is offered not just within your borough, what's offered across the UK or across the area that you work with.

Similar to the pan-London working agreement, I know they do something very similar in Cambridgeshire and things like that. So it's always looking at what is outside of just my local council. So there might be a lot more than you think there is.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah. But I guess that comes with experience. I mean, you've done that in different settings and different countries, different communities. So I guess all of that skills and knowledge you've been able to apply it to your current role? [0:21:16.0]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. No, it's definitely…it's one of those career…I think working in the charity sector where funding is unfortunately always an issue really, it makes you look at creative solutions for things and, 'How can we get this for these families?' So I do think it is about not being afraid to ask. I very much…this is all my mother's doing. My mum's favourite thing when we were growing up translates basically to, 'You have the no. Why don't you go buy the yes?' Like, when you ask questions, like, basically you know what's going to happen if you say no, if someone tells you no. But what if they say yes?

Kirsty Ayakwah: Wow.

Jenifer Lamadrid: That's always a helpful mindset!

Kirsty Ayakwah: No, definitely. Not seeing that as a barrier and still pushing through it. That's really profound.

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. Yeah, 'cause it's one of those things. You know what'll happen if they say no. You say no and then you're like, 'Okay, that's not an option.' But what if miraculously somehow they say yes?

Kirsty Ayakwah: And you've seen that, I'm sure. [0:22:18.6]

Jenifer Lamadrid: I have. I have seen that. And I think once it happens one time you're like, 'Well, why not? I'm going to be a little bit cheeky about it. I'm going to ask again.' And it's one of those things that, honestly, I think sometimes we think so individually and I don't think we realise how much people are willing to, like, support people within their communities or to…even if they can't give you the answer try to link you in with someone. 'Cause I've had that happen so many times when they're like, 'Actually we can't do that but have you tried this resource?' and then I learn about a new resource. And I think sometimes maybe coming from a culture where there is a huge community spirit and will, I think maybe we get really focused on the idea that we have to be the ones to figure everything out. But people are actually just so much more willing to support one another than I think we realise.

Kirsty Ayakwah: And I love that you said that. 'Cause it's taking me back to something you mentioned earlier about the community and looking through the community lens when you were supporting the women from Australia and Torres Strait. So again, could you talk to us a bit more about centreing those people? It's being very person-centred, you know,

these types of words that we know as it relates to social work. [0:23:26.6]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. I mean, we always discuss about, like, social work is emotional work, social work is heart work and things like that. But I think sometimes we're really focused on the individual, and it's actually looking at, like, a more systemic way of practising where it's like, 'Okay, the individual but what does that also mean for what they have around them structurally? But what do they have, like, in terms of their community? What do they have in terms of, like, their relationships with schools, in terms of their relationships with, like, maybe religious institutions and things like that?' And I think when we can look at someone not just within their four walls of their home but look at them within, like, the wider world, we can understand a little bit better about what makes things difficult, but also what can be really enriching and a strength that they might have that we hadn't considered a strength. So I always think that that's a really interesting way of working.

I think one of the first ways I started thinking about how we understand and assess strengths actually came through, like, language. I remember someone saying, 'Oh…' It was an assessment and they were like, 'Oh, the parent is illiterate in English.' And I was like, 'No, no, no, they're not illiterate. They don't know English, sure.' But I was like, 'They speak four language. Just English is not one of them.' I was like, 'But they speak all of these other languages, and read and write in all of these other languages.' You know, 'cause 'illiterate' is very different to actually, 'I just don't have that language but if you put me in maybe like some [unclear – 0:24:56.6] classes I'll probably develop that skill.'

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah. And it's so disempowering if you say that…

Jenifer Lamadrid: Uh-huh, exactly.

Kirsty Ayakwah: …about the person, yeah.

Jenifer Lamadrid: And it's not. Yeah, they don't have English as a language or are able to read it 100%. That's valid. But they do have the skills to learn it. Because like, with something like that, it would be that maybe that skill isn't there. So I think sometimes it's how we frame things. And like, framing it from that context of that person and their wider world, and not just what is happening right there and then. Domestic abuse is a very sensitive topic because we have our own ideas around families. We have our own ideas about relationships. And it's one of those very thin lines, sometimes that I might accept in my relationship and I'm very happy to do so in my relationship, another person might not accept or want to do in their relationship. And it's those fine lines of how do we look at one that borders onto control? Because people will have different expectations and ideas of relationships. And that doesn't necessarily mean that because there's conflicting ideas that your relationship is abusive and mine isn't. It's about when we're able to challenge and maybe question one another in a way that we're not intimidated to do that. It's actually we're like, 'Hm, this isn't really working out. Do we have that space?'

So I think it is one of those things that we get very emotional, even as professionals, about domestic abuse because we might have our own understanding of domestic abuse, our own understanding of relationships and family life, maybe even our own bias about the importance of having a two-parent household, and also our own experiences. It's one of those things that I think a lot more people have lived with domestic abuse than we actually are aware of. We know that in the UK it's one in five children are experiencing it. So what does that mean for, like, the adults in our lives who become professionals who might have experienced this as well? It can be things that are very difficult to understand. And then that's also the ideas that we have as society about, you know, what are women's roles, what are men's roles. We are impacted by how society thinks how we consume media. That's not something that we can deny. So…

Kirsty Ayakwah: Really, really fascinating. And so complex as well. Are you only dealing with adult domestic violence between adults or do you ever deal with situations where it's a child? [0:27:20.0]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. So not…they are a child. Let me re-word that. But more adolescents. So my direct work is usually with the actual victim survivor. Within the UK, the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021 created a legal definition for domestic abuse, and with that was a stipulation around age. So, domestic abuse, both parties have to be aged 16 or over for it to be legally recognised as domestic abuse. So when that is met, yes, I 100% can work with that young person. But usually when it is with children, that might be the social worker's role or we might look at another project that might work directly with children just due to capacity and things like that, 'cause I am there as almost…I work alongside the social worker whose focus is on the children and my focus then becomes on the victim survivor.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Okay.

Jenifer Lamadrid: To ideally be able to support some of those things that child needs but then obviously the child might need support in their own right, whether that might be counselling, whether that might be therapeutic settings around reconciliation with their parent, 'cause sometimes children might have really difficult emotions about both the perpetrator and the victim. They might feel that the victim has put them in this position by not leaving. Or they might also feel that the victim has punished the other parent by saying something. It can be really complex and difficult. So sometimes things like reunification sessions are really needed. And we do source that for people but that wouldn't be my work as it is around the victim survivor.

So once they're 16, 17, yes, I definitely would work with them if they were experiencing it within their peer-to-peer relationships, or even within their families. We know that honour-based abuse is a very big thing, so that would also happen.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Very, very interesting. I feel like you've spoken about this but I wonder if I can ask you to maybe drill down some of the skills that you think you've taken from being an IDVA and have been able to supplant into being a social worker? [0:29:24.7]

Jenifer Lamadrid: I guess we have, like, the theory base, which is like a skill in itself, like very much person-centred, relationship-based. I like working from the idea that the person I'm working with is the expert. I always tell them, I'm like, 'You know this person and their behaviours more than I can…more than I do. I can maybe speculate and things, but you know how situations might develop much more than I do.' And that's a very big part of my considerations when I'm safety planning, is giving that person back the expertise and the knowledge. 'Cause for example, something that we find happens a lot is that we'll have comments that say, 'Oh, the victim survivor let the perpetrator inside the house.' Then when you sit down with that person and you go, 'Can you walk me through what happened?' they're like, 'Well, the last time I didn't let them into the house they broke down the door and that door didn't get fixed for, like, three days. And then I was in a home with children with a door in any area where maybe it's not the safest of areas.' So sometimes we are really quick to assume. But that person might have a lot of expertise, more than we do. So I think that person-centred approach is definitely a skill.

I think also the considerations of, like, looking systemically at families, looking at their wider networks and being really curious about what drives their decision-making. And I think also the idea of working within…as an IDVA to now a social worker, I think it really did hound into me the idea of how we can overstep as social workers sometimes and be quite punitive, and taking that into focus and considering that and how we work with people. I think when…

Kirsty Ayakwah: Can you tell me what you mean by that? [0:31:06.5]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. Well, kind of back to what I just said. It's like imagine reading a report about yourself and someone saying that you didn't act safely 'cause you let this person in. And they didn't even bother to ask you what you were thinking, why you did that. It's just that's how it's read, that you were unsafe.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah.

Jenifer Lamadrid: You made unsafe decisions, you put your child at risk, rather than the person who was banging at your door trying to break it down. Right? And that happens so commonly. And that is really punitive. It is a way of writing and thinking that puts complete focus on the person that is experiencing harm. And I think that might be because within social services we know that it is sometimes difficult to reach people who cause harm, who are typically the fathers. Of course domestic abuse happens to anyone but typically we do experience more of a gender-based idea around it. And we know they might be more difficult to engage. So I think because of that, we almost become quite punishing to the mother, who is the only person we can access in terms of, like, how we consider their actions. So things like that is, like, what I mean by, like, punitive. It can be quite jarring. 'Cause imagine reading a report like that and you're like, 'If anybody asks me, I could have actually told you why I did that. I didn't want to let him in. Like, that wasn't my plan, that wasn't what I set out to do. I was just minding my business at home trying to make dinner and this person shows up who's refused to acknowledge the relationship

ending.' You know, so it's very interesting how we sometimes just want to make very broad sweeps.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah. And it reminds me of when people say, 'Why didn't you just walk away? Why didn't you just leave?' And we do know from reports that actually, leaving at that critical point can actually mean your death if you're not careful or you're, you know, severely injured. [0:32:52.2]

Jenifer Lamadrid: Yeah. It's something that we can't ignore. Like, all of our research has very clearly pointed out that the most likely time that a woman will be killed is when she leaves the relationship. I think, you know…so walking away isn't that easy. And walking away when you might not have your own finances, walking away when you might not have a grasp of the language, your own legal status within the country even. All of those things can pile up and make that not the easiest solution, like we want to say, 'Oh, just leave.' So that's where I kind of come from the idea that it can be quite punitive. And like, working from a charity sector we can see how that is experienced by people. And I think bringing that to my work in social services and actively seeing, like, and reading some of these reports before I became a social worker, I could really grasp that and I could see how it made people feel about themselves and about their abilities. But also, like, it was kind of…diminished any work that they had done. So I think that was a really strong thing that I brought in, the idea that actually we have to be more curious. We have to think about why people do things, especially in situations where there is domestic abuse. It's usually not as straightforward as they just let them in.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah, exactly. So what advice would you give to anyone who's listening who is working in domestic violence – so not a social worker – but they're thinking, 'Actually, I do all of that. I could be a social worker.' What advice would you give them? [0:34:26.1]

Jenifer Lamadrid: I would say to honestly, like, really consider it. I think it's also one of those things that you're in a really good position to…maybe there's a social worker that you've worked with in the past that you have a positive relationship, that maybe you could talk to a little bit more about what their experiences are working with the council. You're maybe in a position to actually get that experience from another person. And it is one of those things that so many organisations offer social work accreditation across the UK in really flexible ways. So I think definitely give it a go.

Kirsty Ayakwah: I love that.

Jenifer Lamadrid: I think they're in a position where it is a very easy transition in terms of, like, the way that IDVAs practice. You know, they do so much of it already. They know how to present at panel meetings, you know, at MARAC. They're often at child-in-need, child protection plans. They have an idea of how the law sits because…especially partaking into domestic abuse. They have an idea about how domestic abuse affects children. You know, especially…sometimes even more so than others because children have always been experiencing domestic abuse but it wasn't until recently that the legislation actually changed to show that they are victims within their own right when

they are living within these homes. So they're probably in a position that they can do a lot of this work. All they're missing is maybe the training around the legislation and maybe about some other systems of practice.

Kirsty Ayakwah: And it would be a pay uplift. Maybe generally – you can't speak for everyone. [0:35:55.8]

Jenifer Lamadrid: I can't speak for everyone but like, for me, definitely it was a pay lift. So that's always…you know, we live in a society – and that is something that a lot of people might be very interested in – because our financial livelihood is important.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Yeah. No, thank you so much for talking to us. It's been really insightful and I've learnt a lot.

Jenifer Lamadrid: Thank you so much for having me again. I really appreciate it.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Until next time, bye bye.

Jenifer Lamadrid: Bye.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Thank you for listening to this podcast. If you're a keen listener, why not check out some of the other podcasts in our Community Care library? We have the Community Care Inform podcast series, called *Learn on the Go*, where expert practitioners and academics discuss what the latest research, theories and practice models mean for social workers. All these podcasts are available on most platforms, including Spotify, Audible and Apple Podcasts. And if you haven't heard, we have a new community site, The Social Work Community, which offers a safe and positive space to share careers guidance, network with peers and exchange experiences of social work. If you haven't already, you can sign up now at www.thesocialworkcommunity.com. And don't forget to follow us on Instagram @communitycareofficial. Thank you.