

Ask The Experts 7 - How do I transition from adults' to children's?

Kirsty Ayakwah: Hello everyone and thanks for joining us for this 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 from the sector. My name is Kirsty Ayakwah, senior careers editor at Community Care. And I'm joined today 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.

Before we jump into the introductions, if you have any career dilemmas that you'd like answered, please share them with our experts at careersadvice@markallengroup.com and give us as much detail as possible.

And if you'd like to connect with fellow social workers in a safe space and gain career guidance, download social work CV templates and even meet some great social workers, join our gated community at www.thesocialworkcommunity.com, and you'll find our other episodes there too.

Now, back to our panel. Dame Lorna brings a wealth of expertise spanning over 30 years that includes working as head of service at several 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.

Claire has over 30 years of experience in the sector too, initially qualifying as a generic social worker, to working as a specialist, including a mental health social worker, and more recently managing an emergency duty team. Claire currently delivers training in children's schools for approved mental health professionals and 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 a social worker and policy work at a national level.

And 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, also called Kayleigh-Rose Evans.

Welcome to you all. So, I'm going to start off with the first question, and this one is a transitions question. I've heard from time to time, but

usually it comes from social workers who work in children's that want to transition to adults', but this question the social worker works in adults' and wants to work in children's. So this is what they said. "I'm writing to express my interest in transitioning from adults' social work to children's social work, and would appreciate any guidance or opportunities available. Having worked extensively in adults' social work, including community mental health teams, mental health safeguarding, I've developed strong skills in assessment, multi-agency collaboration and safeguarding, which I believe are transferable to children's services. I'm particularly keen to gain experience in child protection, fostering and adoption, also looked-after children, and would welcome any advice on relevant training, shadowing opportunities or potential roles out there. How can I best align my skills with children's social work?"

So I'm going to start off with you, Dame Lorna, if you would like to answer that question. Thank you. [0:04:00.0]

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly: Okay. Thank you, Kirsty. Well, first of all I would like to acknowledge the wide level of knowledge and transferable skills that you bring. And, you know, that's wonderful to see. And I'm always enthusiastic to know that there are social workers who wish to practise across adults' and children and families. I too trained as a generic social worker so that's why I'm so keen on this. So thank you for this.

I'm going to answer the easiest one first of all, and that's where you can find out about these jobs. Because of course where you can find out about these jobs is through The Social Work Community. So if you sign up you will get regular pop-ups of adverts for vacancies and so on. So that's the easy bit.

Going on then to thinking about upskilling yourself, you're already very knowledgeable in terms of the legislative framework around adults and mental health and so on, but what you'll need to do is similarly to update your skills in relation to the legislative framework for children and children and families.

What I would encourage you to do, because when you ask about the areas you speak about fostering and adoption, and I'm quite keen that social workers in adults' will learn that adoption and fostering is now a split. It's not a joined-up service as it was in years gone past. It's very much split.

So what I'm quite keen for you to think about is to focus on which of the areas you'd like to go into. Is it looked-after children? Is it adoption? Is it fostering? Is it child protection? Once you've done that, then think about reading, looking at the different courses that are available to you, and actually looking at courses in your organisation that you already work for. Because there are always vacancies in training. So don't be put off. If you're working in a local authority, don't be put off because you see a course advertised and it says for children's services. There's always vacancies on those courses. Be kind of proactive and get in touch with your learning and development department or your academy and say, 'I'm really interested in developing my skills in this area and so I want to do this.'

You ask about shadowing. Now, in terms of shadowing I'm assuming that you're either working for a local authority or for the NHS. But if you're working in the NHS you will have very close links with the local authority. In fact, you've told us in your question that you are very good at networking and so on. So reach out to colleagues within your local authority, and particularly service managers and team managers, to say, 'I'm really interested in moving into adoption, fostering or safeguarding in the duty team,' or whichever bits you're interested in going into. Reach out to that service manager, that team manager, and ask to come and shadow. First of all ask for a conversation about what...the work they do. Ask them about, you know, what training is available.

So Kirsty, I'd go on for ever and ever 'cause I'm so enthusiastic about the idea of bringing across social workers from adults' to children, because in my experience they bring such a wealth of knowledge and over the years I have actually found the transferable skills when I've been doing recruitment in doing just that. Thank you.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Thank you, Dame Lorna. So does it tend to be more common one way or the other, so children's-to adults', adults'-to-children?
[0:08:06.2]

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly:

I think that adults' social workers worry about having the knowledge and skills to transfer and I don't think they should. They're good at assessments, they're good at safeguarding adults, they've got a wealth of mental health experience, they've got that sort of coaching approach that, you know, still exists in adult social work. So I think people worry also in children's services about transferring to adults. So I think given the...there's probably, I don't know...Claire might know more than I do, and Kayleigh may know, but I think that there might be an even mix of people wanting to transfer. And when I've done the clinics at Community Care Live, I've kind of found an even mix of people wanting advice about how they can transfer or how they can come across. Actually, I'm going to say this. It might not be heard very well. But I find that adults' social workers who want to come across to children want to come across for very different reasons. Often children's social workers who want to go across to adults want to go across because they're finding it very challenging and difficult in children's services. So I'm sorry, colleagues. Forgive me, but this is what I've found in doing the clinics.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Thank you for your honesty, Dame Lorna. That's really valuable. Claire, would you like to develop on that? [0:09:42.4]

Claire Barcham:

I would love to. Partly because I think the question touches me because I think that's mostly what I've done. I started off as a generic social worker, I went into mental health, did other things, but I went back into a generic social work role where I had to relearn and develop child protection skills as an EDT (Emergency Duty Team) social worker and team manager.

And I would agree with Lorna. I think there's a lot of skills that experienced adults' social workers – and particularly those who have got experience in mental health – can bring in terms of confidence, risk assessments, the ability to just sit back a little and think about the

challenge that they're looking at, and think about people's rights and apply a rights-based approach to a child protection situation.

So I would say for this person definitely go for it. And I think there are probably more adult social workers who wouldn't mind doing this if it was an easier and clearer route to go.

So, in terms of what this person might like to think about, the types of jobs, the first one that occurred to me is actually an emergency duty team that's generic. Because that would use your skills. And it's interesting, within my team of experienced social workers we actually developed a weekend service that allowed people who were adult specialists or learning disability specialists to come in and work alongside their EDT colleagues. And that helped build people's confidence so that when vacancies became available in the main team people could actually step into those roles. And also I made sure that they could develop their child protection skills, perhaps shadow within the child protection service for a while, look at the front door, the MASH system, and really develop their confidence to do the work there. So that would be one place.

Another place is actually, I wonder if this person would enjoy working in a progression to adulthood team or a transitions team. Because for me that's where some of the most exciting social work is likely to come in the next few years. It's the 16-25-year old age group where you have overlapping areas of the law. There's the Children's Act, there's the Mental Capacity Act and there's the Mental Health Act, as well as the Care Act. And people, young people do actually need some specialist support to make sure they make that move to adulthood in the best way possible. And that would give you...so if you were coming into a team like that with the skills you describe, there'll be others in that team who will be coming in with their child protection experience, and I'm sure that together you will share and develop and learn a lot. So those would be two.

My third suggestion is a little bit of a different one. But if you're a bit adventurous and if you could travel, the army social work services are still generic. They do have some specialists as well. But they're mostly generic. So it's the British Forces Social Work Service is what it's called these days. And because the British Army is based all around the world and the families move with the serving member of the family, there are communities there. And they do some really interesting family work and also do a lot of work understanding loss and trauma, and what happens when families have to move every few years from one spot to another spot on the globe. So if you can move and that makes sense to you, that might be worth looking at. They also have their own adoption and fostering service, which is interesting as well. So that might be worth considering.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Fantastic, Claire. You've really sold it to me and I'm not the one who asked the question! I really like that idea of if you are able to travel. And that is one thing that we've started to write about at Community Care. We've got one where we look at social work in unusual settings, so that fits perfectly into that.

Kayleigh, I know you work in adults' social care already, so it's interesting to find out what you think about this question. [0:14:32.6]

Kayleigh-Rose Evans:

Yeah. I think the beauty of, like, the panel and this as a whole is that you are getting perspectives from different areas and we'll all have, like, different anecdotal examples from what we've seen. Personally, I have met more people moving from children's to adults' because it's felt that maybe the work-life balance would improve. However, you know, if it was supportive I'd have maybe considered it because I used to think I'd go straight into children's services. I had two placements in adults'. The philosophy of it as a starting point, I was really encouraged to go into adults' because it was all about promoting autonomy. I'd be very interested as to how that would feed into children's services. But I think if this was me transitioning into children's I thought I'd imagine I was ready to do that now, putting myself in the person's shoes as well, the first thing I'd want to improve is my technical knowledge, because even though I haven't been, you know, a social worker as long as the others and I still feel like...I'd want to re-look at my knowledge from the university standpoint. Because I think when you're sort of away from the children's law and you're not practising in that way every day, like I just feel a little bit removed from it. And also, the way the setup is, adults' and children's, like we work in different places where in my local authority we don't come across each other. I just feel it's very separate. I think it'd be nice if it was more merged and we could just walk across and ask someone something, but it's just not like that.

So I think to sort of improve that knowledge base I'd consider going on a postgraduate course or something and just looking at that legislation, revisiting it. Because I've done a Master's and I got a lot out of doing those sorts of courses which I've built up over time. But you could easily do something like that.

In terms of advancing your knowledge, I'd be very interested in, like, revisiting my knowledge around attachment or trauma-informed practice. I'm sure you could get that from Community Care Inform. And I also found Alison Brammer's law books really helpful. I'd maybe revisit them because they've got lots of different bullet points around the legislation. It always helped me at university.

In terms of your transferable skills, I'd find it a lot easier to consider how they would apply in a new role if you speak to someone who's actually recently interviewed, and then you can build on that and make sure that what you're doing is sort of aligning with that.

I've done secondments in different places which have given me the confidence, and then it will give you sort of an awareness around what the priorities are if you are speaking to colleagues who actually work in that area. And I think it's just around getting yourself into that mindset of what you'd be transitioning into. And I definitely think it'd make you a really well-rounded practitioner to do so.

In terms of the EDT conversation that was brought up, where I work I think you're expected to have adults' and children's experience in order to get those roles. So there may be roles where if you did have that dual experience you'd be very employable after. So it'd be really

interesting because you would set yourself apart because not many people, you know, are seen to have the confidence to do both. So I think it'd be really good in terms of career progression and looking at things a little bit more holistically as well. [0:17:50.4]

Claire Barcham:

Thank you so much, Kayleigh, for sort of bringing up that point about EDT. Yes, EDT social workers in generic teams, the preference is that people have both sets of experience but it isn't easy to come by. So actually, going into something like a transitions team or being willing to be part of things in a different way, you might be surprised that your EDT colleagues, if you can evidence how you can use your skills in a transferable way, they might be willing to help you develop the child protection experience you'd need.

And I just wanted to say, in terms of what you bring, I had a really interesting conversation with a director of children's services who had actually employed adults' social workers in his leaving care team because he wanted to improve the transition into adulthood. And he particularly commented on the fact that they brought a different perspective and a different way of looking at the issues, particularly a much more rights-based approach to the work that they did, which he found very healthy for his teams. Because children's services have more of a focus on the Children's Act and child protection, that can make people feel that they need to work in a very similar way, in a very paternalistic way. Adults' services has a different ethos, and if you're supporting young people who are moving into adulthood you need to understand that. And that's what adults' social workers can bring to the party, I think.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Thank you. I feel like we've got a wealth of different pieces of guidance that this person who submitted the question can move forward with. So, being proactive, deciding where they would like to focus their area of interest in, doing the research, and considering those teams. I've not thought of it in that way and I think it's really good that you mentioned those, Claire – transitions, EDT but also working in a setting which potentially means that you're moving about a bit more. So thank you so much for that information.

So, we've actually come to the end of another engaging episode. But if you have a dilemma that you'd like help with, please email us at careersadvice@markallengroup.com with as much detail as you can so that we can respond effectively. And also head over to www.thesocialworkcommunity.com to join the conversation. So once again I'd like to thank Dame Lorna, Claire and Kayleigh for their advice, and we'll see you again next time. Thank you.