

#8 Ask The Experts: 'Help! I am struggling with my ASYE'

Claire Barcham: We come into social work because we like people, and we like supporting and helping make a difference in their lives. So, do the thing that you enjoy. If you enjoy working with people with a learning disability or you enjoy working with older people or children, take the roles that actually give you passion as well.

Kirsty Ayakwah: [0:00:18.3] Hello everyone. 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 (who you've just heard from) and Kayleigh-Rose Evans, who collectively have almost 70 years of experience between them.

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

And if you want to connect with your fellow social worker in a safe space, gain career guidance, download our social work CV templates and meet some other great social workers, join our free gated community at www.thesocialworkcommunity.com. You'll also find our episodes with the experts there too. And don't forget, you can also follow us on our social media platforms @communitycareofficial.

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

Claire has around 30 years of experience in the sector, 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 (or AMPs) 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 being a social worker and the policy work at a national level. So it's great to have you here, Claire.

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 education and content, and reflections on social work through her popular YouTube channel. Welcome to you all.

So, let's kick things off with our first question. So, we have a question from a social worker who says that they're struggling with their ASYE. So I'll just read it out. 'I'm struggling with my ASYE. This isn't what they said at university that we'd have to struggle to get it. But I'm an international student and I like being here. The council is hard. The agency and the NHS is harder without experience. I ended up doing support work but to what extent? I spoke to my practice educator in school that the passion and zeal is dying because of the disappointment I'm getting, and the constant news of them needing more social workers. If they need one, why do I keep getting disappointed?'

So I'm going to put that question to you, Kayleigh. [0:04:10.1]

Kayleigh-Rose Evans:

Yeah. So, sorry that you're experiencing that would be the first thing. Because I do have a YouTube channel for social workers and a lot of people come to me and say they're facing similar challenges with ASYE positions that they're applying to get a job in ASYE but as a first-year person and just getting knockback after knockback. And especially if you've studied somewhere else, like that's an added barrier again that people are facing. And I think that that is going to affect your motivation. But I think all that you can do to keep that motivation is take steps towards moving forward with this.

And I think the first step is really working on your interview skills. And I originally put out videos about interviews because people were saying they're actually really hard. And I think that if you don't know what you're going to be asked or you're not someone that's been for, like, the same amount of interviews as someone more experienced, you're just going to struggle more than someone else. And when you're going head-to-head with someone who's been through that process, who has loads of examples, you are going to struggle. So that's why the ASYE-focused job posts are really helpful because at least you're sort of on a more level playing field. But they can be hard to come by, and they can be competitive as well.

I think in terms of the ASYE job listings, you can find them out there, but I'd also be strategic about the experience that you're trying to get so that you have the examples. If you are doing support work, try and sort of get that in places where you may potentially then want to apply for a position.

I noticed that BASW offer coaching for people at any area of career if you're a member of theirs. So there's a diaspora group that's there for international students and it offers support for people who have sort of studied in a different area, and that might enable you to sort of get

support emotionally through this difficult time of trying to secure a role, because it's about sort of finding people who are experiencing similar things and people may have advice on that.

And I think when I went to Community Care Live I did come across some councils that had specific support for people like yourself and also offered career options to help you in those formative years of your career that it could really help you.

So I would maybe touch base and network with those supportive places and the people, and people in a similar situation, and I think that that could really help you on your way.

Kirsty Ayakwah:

Thank you so much. I think it does look like there's the need for building confidence. That's one of the things that comes through, through the language that's used by the person. Dame Lorna, could you add your valuable insight to this, please? [0:06:58.2]

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly:

Thank you. I think Kayleigh has given so much wise advice. I'll follow on from that. And I'm going to make an assumption that you've gone for interviews and you've not been successful. How have you used...or have you used feedback from those interviews? Because it's always very valuable to ask when you've been for an interview for feedback in terms of, 'Did I meet the criteria? Did I totally not meet the criteria? Or was I...you know, where were my weaknesses, my points for development?' So until you've learnt from those, I think it's going to be difficult. And I'll be honest. There's something about radical candour, and I won't do any advertising and talk about the person who wrote the book that that's mentioned in. But it's important to be honest, particularly when people are coming to you for advice at the start of their career.

And you've mentioned that you've spoken to your tutor at the university. You said this isn't what they told you at the university would be difficult. And I wonder about your placements. What placements did you have? Did you have statutory placements or did you do two voluntary placements instead of a voluntary and a statutory placement? So there's all of those things.

I worry that you're running out of time. Because in relation to the assessed and supported year in employment there's a two-year window. I think it's still two years. My colleagues Claire and Kayleigh will correct me if I'm wrong. But you need to fit into that window, and you need to have successfully obtained a post that will take you through the ASYE process so that within that two-year period you have...otherwise you won't be able to say that you're going for an ASYE post.

So they're the things that I want to say. Obtain feedback. Kayleigh's already spoken about the British Association of Social Workers. If you're a member of BASW, they also do coaching. So ask to see a coach there. Although support work is very valuable, but it sounds as if you're doing that through an agency rather than working directly as a support worker for a local authority. But even though you're working through an agency, if you have the opportunity to work in a local authority through the agency as a support worker, then reach out to

colleagues in that local authority and network. Network, network, network. Thank you.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Thank you, Dame Lorna. Just looking back at the question – and Claire, I don't know if you can speak to this – it does look like, you know, if you are feeling a bit deflated it's really hard to do some of these things because you're...the passion's going. I don't know if you can advise at all on how this person can bounce back? [0:10:09.9]

Claire Barcham: I think it's really easy and really difficult. I think it's really difficult when you get into that position. And I suppose what I'd say is we come into social work because we like people, and we like supporting and helping make a difference in their lives. So, do the thing that you enjoy. If you enjoy working with people with a learning disability or you enjoy working with older people or children, take the roles that actually give you passion as well.

I would also echo both the points that Kayleigh's made but particularly the last point that Lorna was making about seeking roles that bring you into a local authority orbit. Or an NHS orbit or whichever the organisation is. But particularly with a local authority, if you're in a support role there and you show everybody how brilliant you are in the work that you do, it will make it much easier when you go, 'Oh, and by the way, I have actually got a social work qualification. I'm looking for a place. When are you going to be advertising for your next intake of social workers?' There's nothing like meeting people and showing them what you can do in terms of actually moving forward in your life. And that will feed your passion, I hope, as well.

We're a people profession. That's what will, I hope, bring the passion back again.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Brilliant. Thank you. [0:11:32.2]

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly: Yes. I think the point that Claire was making in terms of we're all about people, we're a people sector, we're...you know, it's important for us to... And that's what I meant by networking, networking, networking.

But also, I coach people. And sometimes the people that I'm coaching, if they're in a bad spot, I say to them, 'Put your shoulder back, your head up, smile, and actually act it until you actually, absolutely are feeling it.' So if you're feeling down, smile. Think of something that brings you joy. And take it from there.

Claire Barcham: Fake it until you make it!

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly: Try not to say it that way, Claire!

Kirsty Ayakwah: I was thinking the same thing, though!

Claire Barcham: There is definitely something in all walks of life about you may be a swan on the surface; people don't need to know how fast your legs are going underneath the water to keep you afloat. The important thing is staying afloat.

Kirsty Ayakwah: And thank you both. Kayleigh, you wanted to say something? [0:12:50.3]

Kayleigh-Rose Evans: Yeah. It was only 'cause they kind of inspired me with that encouraging sentiment. And I think sometimes, like, when you're down you don't feel you can put yourself forward and just speak to people and just say, 'Look, like, what am I missing here?' You feel like you can only ask those questions when you're doing super well. But actually, there might be a really simple or small reason. It may be something like, 'Oh, well we already had someone internal lined up for this,' and you don't know that and you're just taking it on yourself that you've got it wrong. And there might have just, unluckily, been a few of those occasions. So going to someone and just saying, like, 'What did I miss out on?'...or if there is a post that you want to apply to, just speak to that manager and say, 'What are you looking for?' 'Cause then you can really align yourself with that, and it gives you that moment to put some thought into it. I've done that before. And I've even then felt more encouraged to go for it because I know exactly what they're looking for and I think, 'Right, how am I going to sell myself on this?' And I think just going for it. It's like a numbers game at first. You just have to keep going until something clicks and you just get it. And I think it's really hard, and especially when you're first starting out. But you just need to keep your head up, like the others have said, and that's all you can do. And you will find your way anyway in the end.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Lift your head up, shoulders back, focus on the goal.

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly: And keep smiling.

Kirsty Ayakwah: Absolutely. Brilliant. Well, hopefully that has been useful for the person who wrote in, but anyone else who's facing a similar challenge with ASYE. So hopefully this will help you to get through and then we'll be seeing you as a fully fledged social worker.

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly: Yes.

Kirsty Ayakwah: 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.