Social work around the world: Zimbabwe

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Hello. You're listening to The Social Work Community podcast. I'm Sharmeen Ziauddin, careers editor at Community Care.

This episode is part of the *Social Work Around the World* mini-series, and today's episode is all about Zimbabwe. We've got two social workers who are from there and now live in England. So first of all, we have Theresa Kambani, who is a children's social worker and currently a deputy team manager and practice educator. And we have Weston Mudimu, who's also a children's social worker in the long-term team in a local authority. Good afternoon to you both. Thank you for coming on the podcast. How are you both doing? [0:00:43.6]

Weston Mudimu: I'm doing great. And you?

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah, I'm fine, thanks. How are you, Theresa? [0:00:48.3]

Theresa Kambani: Hi Sharmeen. Thank you so much for having us. I'm doing great. I was excited in counting down to the podcast. So thank you so much for having us today.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: You're very welcome. So you guys, you know, you have a wealth of experience. I'll start with you, Theresa. Tell me about your experience. When did you come from Zimbabwe? And what were you doing there before you made the journey to England? [0:01:11.6]

Theresa Kambani: Thank you so much. So, I graduated in 2013 from the University of Zimbabwe. Then after that I was recruited to work for the Department of Social Welfare. It's more like the local authority if you compare it to the UK. So I was working for Social Welfare in public services until 2017 when I moved to work at the hospital as a medical social worker. Then I relocated to the UK in 2019 as a frontline practitioner in the safeguarding long-term team. Then obviously from 2019 I progressed in terms of being a senior social worker to consultant social worker, then obviously I'm also a practice educator. I did my practice education through the Frontline programme. So I'm also a Frontline fellow. Then currently I'm a deputy manager in the multi-agency safeguarding team, which is the MASH team, and I'm also a practice educator. Thank you.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Fantastic. And what about you, Weston? [0:02:08.2]

Weston Mudimu: Thank you, Sharmeen. I completed a Bachelor of Social Work degree at the University of Zimbabwe in 2011 and then I worked in the Department of Social Welfare like my colleague. I worked there for about two years, then I also worked in the Ministry of Justice in a programme for a diverson programme for young persons who have committed offences. And after that I applied for jobs in the UK and

then I relocated in 2017. So from 2017 I've been working in child protection and I've worked in the long-term team, I've worked in the children with disabilities team, assessment, and currently I'm a children's social worker in the long-term team. In a local authority in the UK.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Okay, great. So, tell me, both of you – you've been here a while now – what was it like when you first got here? Was it a culture shock? Were you prepared for the differences? Or, you know, what was your experience like? [0:03:23.9]

Weston Mudimu: I would say it was difficult initially but I also had friends who had relocated to the UK so they did share their experiences. So some of the challenges I was already anticipating from conversations. But then it's different when you're experiencing, when you're going through the experience. So it was difficult in initially. But I think what helped me to settle was I had good support from a manager and also my colleagues who had already moved to the UK ahead of me. And I think also…I mean, having prior experiences really played a big part in terms of my adjustment because I think when you have been practising it brings some level of confidence to handle situations, though they are quite different in the UK, but at least it gives you some sort of level of confidence.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Of course.

Weston Mudimu: I would say initially it was very difficult because of issues around isolation. I mean, it's difficult leaving familiar places, familiar environments. Moving to the UK there's the loss of family support networks, friends. So it was quite difficult. But I think the few friends who had migrated ahead of me helped me to settle into my role. So I do feel it really played a part in my adjustment.

And also we would sometimes link up after work just to chat and just getting that emotional support. So really it helped me.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So the support network that you had around you really helped you adjust and settle? [0:05:13.4]

Weston Mudimu: Definitely. Yeah, definitely it did.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And what was the hardest thing? Like, you mentioned a few things there, but what would you say was the hardest thing, the most challenging thing that you came across when you moved? [0:05:26.2]

Weston Mudimu: I think in terms of the job it's getting acquainted with the policies and procedures of local authorities. Yes, I had read legislation but that was in a space where interviews are concerned. But in terms of implementation… So initially it was so difficult trying to acquaint myself with the policies, court procedures or…yeah, all the child protection procedures, which are quite different from back home.

And I guess also there were some experiences of racist behaviour and discrimination that was difficult. It was difficult initially. And I'd say some biases as well. So yeah, I had to navigate all of that. But with support I found my feet.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: I'm going to come back to that in a minute, what you mentioned about some of the challenges, but I just wanted to ask Theresa what her experience was like and whether she had support, and what was the biggest challenge you faced, Theresa, when you came over here? [0:06:31.6]

Theresa Kambani: Okay, thank you. So I think moving, when I got the phone call that I had passed the interview, I remember I was in a commute on the bus, and I screamed, like I had the next lady that was next to me. Then when I got home I started reflecting. So it was, 'What an exciting and challenging opportunity,' at the same time on one hand it was an opportunity for me to grow professionally as a young lady and offer my skills in a new context. But at the same time it meant that I had to leave my family behind, the familiar environment, like what Weston was saying. Language, my identity. And I think how social workers are embraced in Zimbabwe is quite different from here because I think there's a lot of respect in terms of social workers in Zimbabwe, and you're working with the communities. Also it's a lot easier to navigate as a social worker back home.

Then you're coming here. The weather is special – oh, my word, I struggled with the weather! And the food…'cause obviously there are certain types of food that we eat as Zimbabweans. So the first days it was hard navigating, like, where do we buy the food, and obviously the clothes. We had brought some winter clothes but obviously we realised that they were not really winter enough when we came. So I think it was a matter of just navigating also the UK system, adjusting to terminology, to different climate, and understanding the professional landscape. And obviously IT systems, 'cause obviously we type here in the UK. Obviously if work is not recorded it's not done. So I think the immigration process as a whole, and obviously registration with Social Work England, the annual registration. The new policies, the standards, and I think the demanding transition.

But I think overall it also strengthened me. I was in shock but I think as Weston said we had a very good support form our social work academy. We had…so the social work academy and I think the local authority had also taken account of the previous…I think that they met with previous cohorts was…I remember the previous cohorts, the moment they arrived they were given a caseload. So for us, we had to be integrated through the social work academy. So we spent about six months within the social work academy, which was very helpful. And I think for me I was also matched with a manager who had gone through the same route but obviously I think for them they were the first initial cohort.

So I think just also creating allyship, 'cause for me, what also helped me is creating allyship with other white colleagues, 'cause obviously they know the system. They helped me a lot to navigate. So I managed also to create that relationship and have an open mind to say, 'I'm in a new space. I need to learn but I also need to adapt to the UK culture and form relationships.' So I had an open mind. So having those allies, my white allies, also helped a lot, 'cause they shared resources, they showed me how to navigate. So in a way, if they shared with me I'd go to my other international social workers to say, 'Oh guys, I've got these resources, I've got these.' So in a way it

also helped because when they were helping me I would go to my other colleagues, like when Weston said we were having our Sadza and our braais, our barbecues, I also shared those resources with my colleagues. So I think being a people person also helped me a lot, in terms of navigating to the system.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah. I think it sounds like you both had very good support from management and colleagues in your workplaces, which isn't always the case. So I guess that would have helped a lot, and I guess the rest of it is just learning, as you said, Weston, the policies and the legislation and all the different terminology. And obviously the big culture difference with food, weather etc., etc. That you kind of work out in your own time. Over time it gets a bit easier, I would imagine.

You mentioned, Weston, racism, biases. Could you elaborate a bit more on that? What kind of things did you encounter? Or Theresa, if you have anything to say about that. [0:10:35.7]

Weston Mudimu: Alright. So, I mean, I've had personal experiences of, like, racism, and I've also spoken to colleagues who came before and after me. They've also shared similar experiences. I think before I go to these scenarios I think also my observation is that if a local authority has an established history of, like, recruiting overseas workers, they tend to be better in terms of understanding the needs of overseas workers, and are better placed to support them. I've actually noticed, because I've moved around different places, there are some local authorities where it's so…the racism so it might be overt, some comments are said that are quite…which I would deem to be racial. But there are some places where people are always considerate of others. And I've noticed those places – or local authorities, should I say – with different experiences of recruiting overseas workers, so they are better placed to support.

But generally I have experienced racism in different forms. For examples, one scenario, I think there's a bias and assumption about overseas social workers' abilities. Like, even though I'm like, as I say, I've been doing this for six years in the UK, there are times when people still question, like ask you, 'How long have you been doing this?' a question which they would rarely ask, for example, a native British social worker. But sometimes you have people asking those questions. 'How long have you been a social worker?' Which you feel sometimes is unnecessary to ask those sort of questions. So I guess there's some sort of bias and assumption around people's abilities based on their race.

My experience in another local authority, you had to work twice as hard to prove yourself and to earn respect. But I mean, once you earn it, I think that reputation follows you, but you'd have to work twice as hard to get that sort of positive reputation.

And I also think…I mean, I've had families who have sometimes struggled with having a social worker with a different accent. Sometimes you have those families or clients or service users saying, like, 'I want a social worker who speaks English,' though I'd like to think I'm quite articulate enough to put across a point. But you'd have service users asking for a social worker who speaks English.

And sometimes there's a general avoidance. Because with even workmates at times because they don't know how to…they don't want to come across as being racist. So sometimes in interactions they are not as open and interactive when they are maybe engaging overseas workers because they just don't know how to respond to them or what to say, and they don't want to be deemed as racist. So there's a general avoidance. And sometimes it can be isolating. You can be in a team and feel left out, excluded whether or not it's emanating from those ideas or people are just afraid to say something that could be deemed racist because they don't know how to engage at a social level. So those are some of the experiences that I've experienced over the years from team members and also at times from families.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So that would affect, you know, your relationship-building with those families and children if they're sort of holding back because they…

Weston Mudimu: Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: …yeah. So like you said, you have to work twice as hard. And I guess that would be…you would have to work more hard to establish those relationships and build those relationships.

Weston Mudimu: Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Theresa, can you relate to what Weston's saying? [0:14:51.1]

Theresa Kambani: I think in addition to what Weston's said, I think they are more like micro-aggressions. And I think I agree with him, like, if a local authority has had a history…'cause my local authority has been recruiting since 2015. So kind of like they have an idea. And I think with each new cohort they have to learn as well. But I think for me, I realise that it's both of us learning, 'cause our colleagues are also learning to adapt in terms of how to engage with us. Because sometimes I realise when we have those open conversations, like when we became close, at some point in one-to-one conversations, so okay, the first days, 'Can you explain to us why you were doing this to us?' And they were like, 'We didn't really know how to…what to say and what would be offensive.' And obviously there were emails going around, around racism, around micro-aggressions. So I think it was also, too…they were also not sure how to react to us or how to respond to us. But I think it's also a matter of having those open conversations. If your local authority is so supportive to have those open conversations.

So for us, we formed a support group that had overseas social workers, just our own support group. But it also had, like, some practice educators from the social work academy. So it was a safe space for us to say how we were feeling, how people were being done in the supervisions, how some people were like, after probation, after ASYE, someone has not been past probation, without any explanation. And I remember at some point our emails were written with 'international social worker' at the end. And families were asking, like, 'Why are you allocating us international social workers?' I think it was an oversight as well, which obviously I think HR and IT took accountability of it and obviously changed, 'cause I think they had to do that when we were still in Zimbabwe so that we could have emails.

But no one removed that bit, so every time that you go it's written 'international social worker'. So already we were at a disadvantage with the families as well.

And I think the accent that Weston spoke about is very hard. The first days you're hearing people talking, you think you know English but you realise, 'Okay, this is a different type of English.' So we had to navigate in terms of understanding the accent. Even like normal greetings. So there were some things that we were deem, like, it's okay, but in the British culture it wasn't okay. I remember one time we had training the whole day from morning until four. Weston knows when we've got training in Zimbabwe we are provided with lots of food and obviously travel money. So everyone was seated. We didn't carry any lunchboxes at all. And it was very far. So people were like, 'Theresa, you're the one who's confident. Go and ask what time the food is coming.' And I went then and said, 'Oh, everyone wants to know what time the food is coming.' They were like, 'Food? What food are you talking about?' I said, 'When we do our trainings in Zimbabwe they give us food, and we haven't brought any lunchboxes.' So they emailed HR to say, 'Can we have at least something so that we can provide them food?'

So I think for me it has been a learning curve from what side of the ends…obviously there are micro-aggressions but how do local authorities address those issues? There are issues around career progression as well. Like, how can someone be a social worker for five years, who already had prior experience before coming? So I think there were also those issues around people just being given opportunities to grow, develop, and also opportunities to move to other teams, because at some point some people were told, 'You can't move from safeguarding. You don't have training.' So it also needed an opportunity to move across, like, different teams, to safeguarding, child-in-care, asylum-seeking teams, so that you gain experience in other, different teams. So I think from my end that is what I experienced, which led me to become a practice educator, because obviously there weren't any practice educator of colour, like a lot of them. So once I was in that role, I could also represent what people were saying, 'cause I think for me advocacy is something that I'm passionate about, and if something doesn't sit right with me I don't keep quiet. I say it out, but obviously in a professional manner.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So, you mentioned earlier about cultural differences in terms of social work, how it's sort of viewed in Zimbabwe is different to here. So tell me a little bit about the main differences in practice. What were you doing there that is different to what you do now? [0:19:21.2]

Theresa Kambani: I think in terms of our safeguarding, it's a bit different. We're doing safeguarding but in a different aspect. I think Weston will add on more. 'Cause we were using the family. So we were working on a…family mode, like a community approach. So in Zimbabwe I think it was more community- and family-based, where as here it is obviously it's [unclear]-based and it's procedure and policy-driven as well. And so before you, like, there's a very limited number of our children in care in Zimbabwe. So when I came here it was a shock, like, realising I think it's almost like 90% of children were in care, and it has been a generational thing as well. So I think, having practised in Zimbabwe,

where the resources are very limited, it helps you to create, to be creative in terms of how you think, and you also utilise resources to your best ability as well, 'cause I think in the UK people have got more access to resources, multi-agents working as well, more structure, and obviously the funding. Like, there's a clear budget for social services, where as in Zi (Zimbabwe) you have to navigate and get support from non-government organisations. So I think having that experience coming from a limited resource country, a [unclear – 0:20:33.8] country, and coming here, you realise, 'Okay, these people have got so much at their hands that we can utilise.' So I think that approach, in terms of how I support families, how I support children, also helped me in terms of, 'How do I become creative? How do I navigate with the limited resources that we have?' Having your own laptop, having your own phone, it's a privilege. Like, when I look at how it was in Zimbabwe, we'd have maybe one laptop the whole office, or two at least, and we would have to share. So I think…and even in terms of the *UBUNTU* approach. Obviously if I am doing cases with families I go there with a human heart 'I am because we are'…I'm thinking, 'We are dealing with human beings,' even how I approach the families you approach with that cultural humility as well. And I think just being resilient. Obviously I'm coming from a third-world country who's got its own challenges, resources. So, just being resilient. 'Cause I've realised that I think there's an issue around resilience in people who are trained in the UK like the social workers. They give up easily. But some of us have developed a thick skin because we know where we are coming from. So this is an opportunity for us to grow so we don't really give up easily. And I think, like, the things that we have gone through, the micro-aggressions and obviously the experiences, it's because the resilience that we have way back that has managed us to survive and to where we are, paying a lot of money from home or fees, trying to manage the bills, the mortgages the council tax so I think is that resilience that we had from Zim helped us in terms of how we practice and how we engage with families. And that cultural humility was obviously…the UK is becoming very diverse as well. You're working with diverse families. There's a lot of immigration happening, young asylum-seekers. So it also helps in terms of how we practice as well.

Weston Mudimu: Yes. So I think Theresa has elaborated very well. I guess what I could add is that one of the things that was very…or is different is that there's a strong emphasis in individual rights in the UK. Children have got lots of autonomy to make decisions, and their rights are regarded as, like, absolute. And yet there is also an understanding that they lack the capacity to make…they *may* lack capacity to make certain decisions, particularly if they are of a younger age, like below 16. Sometimes best interest decisions are made, whereas in Africa – or in Zimbabwe, to be more specific – there's an emphasis around collective care, community responsibility, respect for elders. So children's rights are acknowledged but they also have responsibilities. They start community responsibility, which is a bit different. From my practice I've noticed that children have got lots of autonomy to decide on many aspects, whereas in Africa certain decisions would be made by adults within the family, like the parents, carers or who has got care of the children would make best interest decisions. So to me that was a very significant difference, really, that struck me.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah, that is really significantly different. Yeah, I understand what you're saying. So in Zimbabwe, is the social work mostly non-statutory? Is there a statutory service or is it all NGOs and other organisations who carry out the social work? [0:24:19.4]

Weston Mudimu: Yeah, it is…there is statutory and also voluntary social work, which is carried out by NGOs. Yeah. But there is also statutory social work, and it's the prerogative of the Department of Social Welfare. And when I left Zimbabwe they'd also created another department of Pre-Trial Diversion, in the Ministry of Justice. They were responsible for diverting young persons from the court system to extra-judicial activities like out-of-court disposals, like just to rehabilitate and prevent young persons from getting, like, criminal records. So yeah, there are, like, statutory agents like the Department of Social Welfare, which has got branches in different districts. Which is the equivalent of different local authorities like here.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: You used to work with sort of young people, didn't you, Weston, in Zimbabwe? What are the kind of things you see in terms of issues that, say, affect teenagers and young people here compared to what you saw in Zimbabwe? [0:25:32.4]

Weston Mudimu: I mean, I would say there are similarities. I think the formative years of a child are quite important because a lot of the time, for example, in Zimbabwe as a social worker, before the courts I was also a…I would make recommendations to the courts. So you'd write reports and I'd assess the child's upbringing, background, and a lot of the time, in most instances, some of the children presenting with challenging behaviours or criminal behaviours would have a difficult background. And I've also noticed the same even in the UK, like, children who start to present with challenging behaviours, you can trace it back to a difficult childhood, difficult experience, traumatic experience. So that is quite similar. The context may be different but in both scenarios I've realised that usually, behind all of the behaviours, there's a child who has had traumatic experiences in the formative years. The manifestations may be different but usually there will be some kind of trauma from early experiences.

Theresa Kambani: I think in addition to what Weston just said, obviously the Department of Social Services is more like the statutory organisation. So it is responsible. So the non-government organisations just complement the work that the government is doing. So in terms of legal, statutory, the duties and obligation, it lies in the social workers within the department.

Then in terms of the similarities and differences, I think in Zimbabwe we're battling more with child marriages and poverty. So the childhood trauma has stemmed from childhood poverty, child marriages. Those are the issues that we're tackling a lot. And sexual abuses that were being done within the families that were not being reported, 'cause obviously I think it was also a matter of the law, how people perceived the law and understood the law as well. So a bit of incest as well. Whereas here it's more like maybe gang-related. The children have got resources, they've got access to resources, whereas back home we were working with children who didn't have access to resources and we're also doing work with children with

different disabilities or learning difficulties and there wasn't any specific diagnosis. So I think there was a misconception of people understanding those learning difficulties to say, 'Oh, this child, I think they're misbehaving. They need to be beaten.' I think the physical abuse was more…it's more like it's okay to hit the children. Whereas here, if you're looking at physical abuse, it's one of the most serious if I'm looking at the threshold from a MASH perspective.

So I think there are, like, some similarities but there are also differences in terms of we are dealing with a third-world country, then here where we're dealing with a first-world country. And I think I also, when I did my medical social work I was working with a specific group of children who were born with HIV. So I think we were doing a lot of programmes in terms of responding to HIV, and obviously there was a trauma in terms of how the parents had passed it on and how the HIV was transmitted to the children. They had a lot of questions. They were left with their old grandparents. They didn't know what happened to their parents. So we were dealing with a lot of children who had also that trauma. So I think childhood trauma is one key thing that is similar, in terms of how we're responding to what children in the UK and in Zimbabwe.

But I think what struck me is, I think, the sexual abuse, how we would respond. Because I think in Zimbabwe we responded quite a lot to sexual abuse and child marriages, whereas here if someone's 16, like, there was a case that I did. Someone was 16. They were living with a 40-year-old man and people were just casual about it, in as much as they're 16. But I don't think they really understand in terms of decision-making.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So there's, you know, there's different traumas, but I guess what you're saying is that how you work with a child is similar but the traumas are different or the instigators, you know, what they went through is different.

Weston Mudimu: And Sharmeen let me dissect a bit a point…

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Please, yeah.

Weston Mudimu: …that my colleague has also made. You'd also notice that in Zimbabwe we have urban areas and rural areas. You'd find out that in urban areas there's more acceptance of modern ideas, whereas in the rural areas there are still those primitive, traditional practices, like child marriages, physical abuse. In the urban areas there's a lot of advocacy work being carried out against marrying children at a young age. Besides that, you notice if someone worked in the Department of Social Welfare in an urban setting, the problems would be different from someone working for the same department in the rural areas. You'd notice some cases, especially in the rural areas, you have lots of cases of child marriages. So I just wanted to…

Theresa Kambani: In the region as well.

Weston Mudimu: Yeah. Yeah, I just wanted to dissect that. In some areas there's an acceptance of modern ideas. So you'd find practice that is similar to Western practice but there are also some areas where it's still got lots

of primitive practices that are so prevalent. And religious as well. There'll be also those religious beliefs.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah, no, thanks for clarifying that because yes, what Theresa meant was more that some of those things are more in village areas and rural areas, like you said, and different issues. And that's probably the case in a lot of countries across the world where there's quite a stark difference between cities and, you know, rural life and the issues that affect children and families.

Can I ask, what made you choose England above other countries? Or, you know, what made you want to move and leave sunny Zimbabwe? [0:31:41.0]

Weston Mudimu: I think for me, I think firstly I wanted exposure to more advanced systems in a first-world country. The UK visa system at the time when I came, it was more open to people from different races. I know in other places that applying for a visa is quite difficult. For the UK, I would say that's probably a plus. Like, they've embraced people from different backgrounds. The immigration system, at least at the time when I came, was so easy to navigate. You could…I think the system worked for people who have got the necessary, the needed, the required skills, I would say. And also there's an established Zimbabwean community. There are lots of people that I know in the UK. So it's played a part in my decision to come to the UK. I thought I would settle in much better because there are people I already know, rather than going to another country where you might not know anyone. So to me it's played a huge part.

And lastly, Zimbabwe is a former colony of the UK, so you'd notice that our education systems, they were established by our colonisers, I'd say. I would say the adaptation is much easier compared to going to any other country because the systems have already been put in place by the English who had colonised Zimbabwe.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yep. And obviously because the UK is an English-speaking…speaks English and that's what, you know, people speak in…

Weston Mudimu: Definitely, yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: …yeah, is the language, the second language that you would know. I was going to say, yeah, I think that now that our immigration system is a lot more different or, you know, and there's more changes coming, so it's probably not as easy now. [0:33:41.9]

Theresa Kambani: I think in terms of…or in addition, I think there have been also a high market of how UK social work has been marketed because I remember there were seeking cohorts who were more like 50 years plus. So I think UK had been recruiting, that direct relationship with Zimbabwe, direct relationship whereby they would go to the school of social work. On your last year you'd know, 'I'm moving to this local authority,' so I think there was that relationship that was established. 'Cause one of my aunts, who's now a director, came way, way back. So I know that UK was, I think, user-friendly in terms of recruiting Zimbabwean social workers, 'cause obviously people had come already, had also set that pace in terms of their work ethic as well.

Then I think for me as a person, I wanted…I was inspired by the potential to work in the UK. So I wanted to bring my Afro-centric, community-rooted experience while also learning about policy [unclear – 0:34:37.3] and I think better career structure and just growing my wings as a young person, 'cause obviously the resources were very constrained and we were thinking, 'Where is my future going?' And you know, when you're young you've got goals, you've got aspirations as well. And I think, like what Weston said, we've got a better Zimbabwean community. You can eat our Zimbabwean food every day. Like, it has gotten a lot better. And I think the climate has changed a lot. In terms of the years that we come, you can see like right now we're enjoying a proper summer, a proper Zimbabwean summer. So I think it's just about how UK has that relationship with Zimbabwe that obviously we know there was a high demand in active recruitment, which was a lot easier for social workers as compared to other countries.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah. I mean, there's a massive demand for social workers here, and there's so many vacancies. So of course those vacancies need to be filled. What approaches from Zimbabwe have you used here, and has it enhanced your practice? [0:35:36.6]

Weston Mudimu: Like I said earlier, when I was practising in Zimbabwe a lot of my work involved writing reports to courts, doing assessments, making recommendations. I think that has carried over. I've…accrued very good assessment skills 'cause a lot of the time would write probation officers' reports analysing children's early experiences and the impact that it's had on them, assessing capacity of family members to care for children and making recommendations on the best care options for children. So to me, those skills have continued to apply. But I've had, obviously, to modify it to the new environment.

So I've also been in court, but in Zimbabwe rarely do you…are you called up in court. A lot of the time you just write reports and a lot of the time the courts would agree with your recommendations, whereas in the UK if the family don't agree they've got access to solicitors, you can be challenged on your evidence. And if it's a contested situation you'd have to go and respond to those contested aspects of that case, which is quite different from Zimbabwe. I've noted contested outcomes, such contested outcomes.

But the skills of assessing children's backgrounds, the parenting, the impact it has on outcomes and subsequent recommendations, I think it's carried over and it's been an essential skill. My court experience as well. Yeah, to me it's really helped. You know, when you're writing court reports your submissions should be factual. So I believe that skill was developed early in my practice and it became quite essential when I came over to the UK, such that even when I write reports, when I analyse risk, I always try as much to be as factual as possible in terms of any observations that I may make around risks to a child.

So I think those skills have been quite essential, though of course I've had to adapt them to a new setup within a different cultural context and a different legal framework. But I guess the idea of assessing children's upbringing and how it affects their outcomes has been developed early on in my practice back home.

Theresa Kambani: In addition to what Weston's saying, I think that from what I've observed, as Zimbabweans we carry *UBUNTU* - how we relate to families as well. 'Cause I've seen that families in the UK are so anti social workers. But when you go with that *UBUNTU*, with that relational approach, they will be so different. I've received a lot of compliments from families in terms of how I go into their houses. I'm not going there with a powerful approach 'cause you've got so much power in the UK as a social worker, but I'm going there to say, 'I need us to work as a team. This is about you. The best environment for the child is the family so we need to make this environment safe.' So I think that *UBUNTU*, community-rooted approach that I grew up from Zimbabwe, I've used it, I carry it wherever I go. But in addition I'm also using that holistic familial understanding, seeing the person in their context and in their community, the extended family. And obviously explaining to them. 'Cause I think in the UK people can disown each other, I was shocked, like people can just disown each other and that's it. But for me, I grew up in a family setup, whether your brother's dad, they're called dad, there's no dad, cousin or uncle or aunt, everyone is a father figure. So…and also resilience in that adaptability, like how we think creatively outside the box and how to remain calm under pressure because obviously practising in the UK you need a thick skin and cases can kick off and all that. And people are like, 'Why are you not panicking? Why is your face not red? So you're black.' 'No, I've seen a lot. I have been through a lot when I grew up so this is like ice on the tea.' So how I do reports with my children or my service users, even with my colleagues as well, which is why I've been able to form relationships with my white colleagues and how that has been developed in terms of my career growth and opportunities. When they identify an opportunity they'll say, 'Oh Theresa, I think you're good for this. You need to apply. You need to go for this position.' So I think that also having that cultural sensitivity, being able to navigate different cultural identities with humility, it has helped me a lot to connect with the different families. I think, like Weston said, there have been a lot of people migrating to the UK. I think the UK is quite developed in accepting people. So I think those approaches that I grew up with from my Zimbabwean background, my Zimbabwean culture, and even how to be respectful as well, I think I have carried that in terms of how I do my social work practice. You can actually tell, like, when you do that approach how families respond to you. They'll respond with so much respect, with so much humility. And even their resistance will go. I think the first days they will resist it but later on they realise, 'Oh, this person wants to support us. They are treating us as human beings,' and how they're responding, even the children, how they open up. Because I remember I had a case where this child had not opened up to five social workers. When I cracked that case myself, my service manager was like, 'Theresa, what magic did you use with this child?' I was like, 'No, I treat every child as a person.'

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah, and I think that's so important because over here relationship-building and the restorative and relational approach, it's been used…or trying to be implemented across the country in different authorities 'cause, you know, realise that is the way forward if you want families and children to engage.

So it sounds like both of you brought over some wonderful skills from Zimbabwe and used it in your practice. [0:41:47.8]

Weston Mudimu: Yeah. And just to add on, I do…I mean, I talk to many social workers from Zimbabwe. I do feel that we are a really hardworking lot, based on feedback we get from managers. Like in one local authority where I worked, they used to highly recommend recruiting from Zimbabwe because they are known for being hard workers. And it's unfortunate when you hear recent political debates, people are talking negatively about illegal migration, though there's no recognition of the huge contribution that overseas social workers are making in this country. They're making a very huge contribution, to the extend that in the local authority where I used to work, they would always recruit a cohort from Zimbabwe because of the reputation that had been built of being hard workers. And some of it is inculcated as we are growing up, as children in our cultures.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: It's wonderful that your culture and the fact that you're from Zimbabwe is recognised within your colleagues and local authorities. But does the negativity that you mentioned, the politics and the news, does the rhetoric that we've been hearing over the last few years about immigration, does it affect you? [0:43:11.1]

Weston Mudimu: Yeah, it…a lot of the time I would say people avoid talking about it when you're around. But sometimes people, like, they will just say it. I've heard some people having conversations about viewing immigration in a negative. I can understand the illegal side of immigration is not right. But then those who have come legally, I think they've sort of been painted with the same brush, but we are making huge sacrifices in terms of giving a service where there's a huge need for social workers in the UK. So yeah, sometimes we hear those conversations, yeah. I remember one colleague mentioning that she was actually in a room and they were talking about immigrants and the native social workers had forgotten that they've got an overseas social worker, and then they started saying, 'Oh, these immigrants, they are taking our jobs.' And then when they realised that they had said something which might offend this other social worker they then said, 'Oh, we don't mean you.' But they'd already said it. So it does come with a lot of negativity and it's quite unfortunate because I do feel we make a huge contribution in a situation where there's a huge deficit of social workers. And the job is not easy anyway. It's acknowledged everywhere. So I think there should be some sort of acknowledgement of the tremendous work being done by overseas social workers. But I'm saying it's not everyone who doesn't appreciate. But in some settings.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: No, I understand absolutely what you're saying, and that 'I don't mean you' thing is quite common. Theresa, did you want to add anything? Have things affected you, the political climate in the news? [0:45:05.5]

Theresa Kambani: I think when you're trying to meditate deeply on it, it does impact you 'cause you think of the…even the financial contribution that we've made, like the leave to remain they've increased, the citizenship they've increased, and obviously we've got families that come, our dependents as well. But I think for me and Weston at the moment, who have our papers so it's a bit of…it's our colleagues that still don't

have the leave to remain and even how it impacts in terms of how you wait, ‘cause I think there’ve been some managers who have been saying to the people, ‘Oh, remember you’re on a visa,’ or just using that intimidation. So I think if you want to think deeply about it, obviously it will impact you as a person, but I think sometimes you just have to look at the positives, like to say we’ve been given an opportunity to come, we now have our right to live in the UK. You know when you’ve got the British passport I think it opens doors for you as well, which is why they were saying it should be very expensive, you should feel like you worked so hard for this British passport. But I think, like Weston was saying, it’s close to home, it’s a topic that is close to us, so obviously it will impact us. But sometimes you just keep quiet or keep your views to yourself in a way. I think which has also impacted a lot of social workers when these micro-aggressions happen. People choose to have peace because we’ve been brought in that manner to say, ‘Don’t argue.’ You’re not argumentative. We hold peace more. So I think in a way it’s good but in a way it also contributes to a lot of mental health issues as well. People have struggled with their mental health issues when all this has been happening in workplaces. So I think it’s a very delicate conversation. But I think I’m grateful for the opportunity that I’ve had. Obviously I miss home, I miss the warmth of the people, the culture and the weather, but I carry my Zimbabwean pride and my identity everywhere I go, and I try my level best to advocate for others, to be inclusive, and that has shaped my practice in the UK. And I’m also grateful to have had experiences of what Zimbabweans now in the UK…so in a way UK is now my second home. All my kids were born here, so I think we have to embrace both worlds as well.

And I think I have played a big part in terms of working with BASW to come up with the framework for supporting social workers. So we did come up with the framework, with technology, with how we can support international social workers. And next to it there’s going to be a diaspora conference at Wolverhampton so we are now doing it on an annual basis. We’re inviting local authorities that are recruiting. So I think some people from Oxford are going to share their journeys here. So we’re now doing it as a yearly thing. So I think things are being done, but obviously it’s something that…it’s a process. But I think things are being done. It will take time obviously to address issues but I think I’ve been part of the advocates, that group of how to make a difference in the lives of the international social workers. Obviously we are contributing a lot. I think this year there is the International Social Worker Award that was included. We advocated to say we are doing a lot in terms of UK social work, so obviously it’s a learning curve for everyone as well, but what I would say is that everyone should also come with an open mind. We want to learn, we want to embrace, we want to adapt. But yeah, we’re grateful for the opportunity that we have had to come here, to learn, to grow, and yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: You mentioned the things you miss. Weston, what do you miss about Zimbabwe? What’s the thing you miss the most? [0:48:42.6]

Weston Mudimu: I mean, it’s mainly my extended family. I’ve got parents back home, siblings. Most of them, they’re back home. So yeah, I do miss…I do

miss it. And I also miss African food as well. But you now have, like, some shops will do sell, like, traditional African foods. So that has helped a little bit. Yeah. It's mostly family.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And tell me, what is Zimbabwean food? I don't think I've ever had Zimbabwe-specific food. [0:49:14.9]

Theresa Kambani: Sadza!

Weston Mudimu: Sadza, yeah. Sadza.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Sadza?

Theresa Kambani: You use corn…you use maize that is crushed. It's more like mashed potato…

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Okay.

Theresa Kambani: …how we cook it.

Weston Mudimu: Yeah.

Theresa Kambani: So you can eat it with beef stew, vegetables, with barbecue. Usually we do our barbecues and eFnjoy our sadza.

Weston Mudimu: And I've also been able to bring my family here on a visitor visa so it's been quite great. For example, my parents have visited me twice. So it's been quite good. So I would say I don't miss home as much. But when I do, I do take some extended periods of leave to go and see family.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Fantastic. It's been so nice speaking to both of you, and you're so full of joy and smiley-ness. It's a shame people can't see, because this is an audio podcast. Thank you to the both of you and for the wonderful work that you've done here and will continue to do so.

Weston Mudimu: Thank you.

Theresa Kambani: Thank you, thank you for having us.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: That was the lovely Theresa and Weston talking about their experiences as Zimbabwean social workers moving to England. If you like this episode, do follow us on your podcast platform, whether that's Spotify or Apple or wherever you listen to podcasts so that you'll be updated whenever we release a new episode. And if you haven't already, do sign up for free to The Social Work Community where you can discuss practice-related issues with other practitioners. If you want to get in touch with us here at Community Care, you can email communitycare@markallengroup.com or find us on Instagram @communitycareofficial. That's all for now.