

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Hi and welcome to another episode of the Social Work Community Podcast. This episode is part of the Social Work Around the World series. I'm Sharmeen Ziauddin, the Senior Commercial Editor here at Community Care.

If you don't already, do follow the Social Work Community Podcast on Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts so that you'll be notified whenever a new episode drops. So today's focus is on the Falkland Islands, which is a British Overseas Territory situated 300 miles east of Argentina. Joining me are Nikki Murphy, Head of Social Services, and Lynn Roberts, a Team Manager in Social Services as well.

So, hi ladies, so lovely to have you join us from 8,000 miles away. How are you both?

Lynns Roberts: Very good, thank you. Thank you for inviting us on the show.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: You're very welcome.

Nikki Murphy: Yeah, we're good, thank you.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So let's just begin with you introducing yourselves. Just if you can tell me a little bit about what brought you to the Falklands.

Nikki Murphy: So I'm Nikki Murphy and I'm a social worker. I've been a social worker for 31 years. I came to the Falkland Islands first in the year 2000. And then I've kind of come back and forth since between Wales and the Falkland Islands with a stint in a couple of other overseas territories as well.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Okay, great. Lynn, what about you?

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, so hi, I'm Lynn Roberts and I moved to the Falklands as a teenager. So I've been here 31 years in total. I started off as a residential support worker and I started in the team in 2002 and I qualified in the UK in 2017. A bit like Nikki really, I've been bouncing backwards and forwards between here and the UK.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Fantastic. So can you tell me a little bit about the islands in terms of what it's like to live there and the demographic? Because I know a lot of people, including myself before I spoke to you guys didn't know a huge amount about life in the Falklands.

Nikki Murphy: Yeah, so it's a British overseas territory. And as you said, it's just 300 miles off the coast of South America and 700 miles off the Antarctic Peninsula. It's 700 islands, so it's quite a large area, about the size of Northern Ireland.

And there's three and a half thousand people. It's quite a diverse population. The last census said there were over 60 nationalities represented and it's sort of split into three.

So there's the town, Stanley itself is about 2,500-3,000. And then there's the kind of rural areas, which we call camp, which are kind of sheep farms mostly. And then there's the military garrison called Mount Pleasant, about 35 miles away.

And there's about 1,200-1,500 people out there as well.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: What do people do for work generally there?

Nikki Murphy: The economy is mostly based on selling squid licences, so fishing, commercial fishing, farming and tourism. And then the Falkland Island government is a large employer as well for public services.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: OK, so let's talk about social services. I'm assuming it's quite a small department. Tell me a little bit about how many people work there and how it's changed over time.

Lynn Roberts: Oh, gosh. So at the moment, at social services, we have kind of 11 people. So it's myself, Nikki, two children social workers, and we have an office administrator, and we've got three social worker assistants.

One of those kind of encompasses an early help practitioner role as well and also probation officer as well. And then we also have a residential setting and we have nine people employed there. Yeah, so 20 of us in total.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: OK, so quite small.

Nikki Murphy: And then in addition to those roles, we also have a principal social worker for adults and income support worker because we also deliver income support services as well as sort of social care to adults, children, as Lynn said, residential, probation and income support. So it's quite varied.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So the children's and adults is combined. Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, we all work together.

Nikki Murphy: So there are distinct roles, but I think part of the joy of working here is that you do get to become experienced in all aspects of social work. Yeah, so it can be really varied and you learn more about adult social work than we're both children's social workers naturally, but we've learned a lot as time's gone on. Haven't we learned about adult social workers as well?

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, definitely. Like, you know, over the years, it was started off as a small team. I think maybe two people, Nikki, working from the hospital.

Nikki Murphy: Yeah.

Lynn Roberts: They were social work assistants and then kind of developed over time from there?

Nikki Murphy: Yeah, so originally it was a couple of sort of nice nurses who saw that there were issues and tried to support people. And then from that came a social work assistant. And then eventually in 1999, a social work, qualified social worker was brought over from the UK and work started towards sort of professionalising the service to social workers, we recognise it.

And it's been quite a slow burn, I guess. In 2013 and 2015, the Lucy Faithful Foundation came over. They were commissioned by the Falkland Island government to come and have a look at services and see how services could be improved, particularly around safeguarding for children.

And that resulted in a recommendation for a framework and a kind of roadmap for safeguarding. So legislation was introduced in 2014. Safeguarding procedures for children were introduced in 2014.

The probation officer post was created to kind of deal with the treatment of offenders and rehabilitation of offenders. A psychologist post was created to support with trauma as it was recognised that there'd be an intergenerational abuse that hadn't been dealt with for years and that that needed support. So we were supported by three CPNs and a clinical psychologist.

And then adult social workers kind of been slightly behind the curve. We've been playing catch up in the last few years. So our principal social worker for adults, Sam, has been working really hard to kind of get us up to speed.

So the assessment and safeguarding of adults legislation came out in 2020, which is similar to the Care Act in most principles. And currently, she's working with the Attorney General's Chambers to prepare and draft a Mental Capacity Ordinance, which matches the Mental Capacity Act in England and Wales, which will be a massive change for us next year, hopefully.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: OK, so even though it's British Overseas Territory, you have your own set of laws and legislation.

Nikki Murphy: Yeah, exactly. So our ordinances are based generally on the Acts in England and Wales. So our Children's Ordinance mirrors the Children Act 1989 and parts of the 2004 Act.

But they've got their own local kind of flavours as well that are completely different to something you'd see in the Children Act to meet the local need.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: OK, so speaking of local need, what are the kind of issues you see, say, in children's? And when we spoke offline, you mentioned there's only one school, primary school, one secondary school. So tell me a little bit about the children and the families that you support.

Lynn Roberts: In a similar sense that, you know, obviously the volume isn't the same as what it is in the UK, but we see the same kind of issues in terms of domestic abuse, substance misuse in terms of alcohol, and also kind of neglect. So it's the same sort of issues, but on a smaller scale, I would say. But equally, that allows us to kind of really work in a preventative way in the Falklands.

We can really kind of get support around a family really quickly. You know, multi-agency, you know, here we can call a multi-agency meeting very quickly and we can kind of get in and kind of hands on in our support that we do offer children and their families. So I think that is one of the benefits of working in the Falkland Islands.

So yeah, the same issue, but just issues, but just not on the same scale as you would see in the UK. Luckily, we don't have the same issues in terms of drug misuse, but alcohol, substance misuse. Alcohol is the main kind of issue here in the small island.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So there's not much drug usage around or illegal drug usage around as you're alluding to.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And is that just because of the way you're situated in the sense that there's not that many people coming in and out of the islands or what's the reason for that?

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, I think it's all of that really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So you mentioned when we spoke before that 16 to 18 year olds, there was no education for them in the Falklands. So they often move to the UK, or they can do. So tell me a bit about that and the implication of that.

Nikki Murphy: Post-16 education is really well supported by the Falkland Island government. So because it's too small to run A-level programs or BTECs, specialist programs like that.

Young people at 16 travel to the UK to boarding colleges and attend the next two years of their schooling overseas, which is a huge move for them. But it also means that there's a gap, that we're missing the young people of that age in the community. So that that can be slightly problematic.

And so we've done quite a lot of work around child sexual exploitation and understanding what that looks like here in the Falkland Islands. It looks very different to how it looks in the UK. And it got described as spinning.

So spinning is used to describe older people using their vehicles to, you know, bring attract young people into their vehicles with the offer of alcohol, cigarettes and sort of getting out of town. But that was being used as a framework to sexually abuse and sexually exploit young people. So there's been initiatives to work with the police and all services, education, health and ourselves to really kind of nip that in and disrupt anybody who seemed to be exploiting children.

And that's resulted in quite lengthy prison sentences for some individuals. And then work has been done to support young people as well to understand that dynamic. And, you know, in a preventative way, as Lynn mentioned earlier, we can because we're the sort of same few professionals involved in everything, we can be quite creative in making sure that programmes are very much have a local flavour to them and meet the local need rather than importing something from somewhere else that might not work.

We've got a college, Falklands College here. So quite often, if young people don't go away to the UK to study, there is an option of kind of studying A-levels online or other courses. And there's an apprenticeship route as well.

So, you know, that has really kind of grown and developed over the last few years. So we do see a lot of people continuing with education, which is really good.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And I guess if a lot of the work in the Falklands is, you know, you mentioned squid fishing and tourism, you don't necessarily need to have formal education to continue those family businesses as well.

You can just get like an apprenticeship or just muck in straight away if you're if you want to.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, a lot of our young people are kind of multi kind of talented. Lots of people in the community wear seven different hats.

So, you know, you could be one day working somewhere, then next day you might be working driving tourists. So, you know, things like that. It's really, really quite kind of diverse.

And I think, yeah, as a community, we were kind of used to all chipping in and doing lots of different things.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Like all smaller communities and remote areas, everybody knows each other. Right so that that must bring its own challenges as well as the benefits in terms of social care, seeing social services that might create some barriers?

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, I think it's a funny one. I'm sure Nikki will have something to add as well. But I think you do know a lot of people, but you may not necessarily know them, know them. I think it's a myth around that you might know everybody kind of really, really well.

You certainly kind of see people around and you might bump into them a lot more shopping and things like that. But actually, it's, you know, I don't I don't find it really problematic, really. I don't know. Nikki, do you find it different?

Nikki Murphy: I suppose you're much more accessible. People will maybe approach you, which is sometimes a good thing. You've got to be really careful about your professional boundaries for sure. But, yeah, we're more accessible. So people, if they've got a concern, will come and tell us about it. And that can be equally helpful and challenging.

So it's just about managing it really carefully around professional boundaries, because we've both brought our families up here. And so, yeah, that's a different kind of challenge, isn't it? You wouldn't normally be in the same community when you're working as you know, where you're bringing up your own kids. And again, that kind of enriches the experience.

And it's not for the faint hearted. That can be quite challenging, can't it?

Lynn Roberts: Yeah. Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: I mean, it's really it's really fascinating. You know, what do you love about being in the Falklands?

Lynn Roberts: For me, I think it's just kind of, you know, still kind of feels like the sort of type of social work that you come in. You know, the reason why you do social work in the first place is to kind of support families and be hands on.

And I think we still do that really well in the Falklands. So that's definitely for me one of the reasons why I just I just love working here. But also for me, obviously, I've got family and I was raised here, so it's just home.

Nikki Murphy: For me, having moved in as an adult, I find working here just so rewarding because it's you can be really responsive. And, you know, the sort of changes that you see are needed. You can affect those changes quite easily. Yeah. And that is really rewarding. We don't have I'm not saying oversight isn't a good thing.

Of course it is. But we don't have the kind of bureaucracy and feed in the machine that has become prevalent in the UK. I totally agree with Lynn on that, that, you know, you're more able to do what you came in to the profession to do.

And as I mean, we're both managers, but, you know, one day you could be moving a child or buying a food parcel or just whatever needs doing. Do you know what I mean? It's you need to be flexible and just enjoy the role. And it just makes it really varied and each day quite exciting, really.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, I agree. I agree. You never know what you're going to get every day. And it's just great to be able to pick up the phone and respond, respond, you know, as we do as a team. Everyone in the team is so used to wearing several, several hats and getting involved. It's a supportive team.

And I just think, yeah, we could offer the same to the community.

Nikki Murphy: Some of our families that we work with, we've known for 25, 30 years. And it's a privilege, isn't it, to be able to see their lives change and develop and grow.

And, yeah, you know, they stay in touch. A lot of our children who've been locked up stay in touch. That's really, really rewarding.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, I agree.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: That's beautifully put. In terms of you mentioned looked after children, do you have foster carers in?

Nikki Murphy: So we do. We do. We don't have many. All of our numbers are so small that we can't really talk about numbers because they're so tiny.

They're really identifiable. But it's we do. And, you know, we really value the ones that we have and try and look after them the best we can.

That's a really challenging role because you're living right in amongst, you know, if a child needs to be placed, you're living right next to the family. So that brings you can't place somebody elsewhere because they need to be here to attend school in town. So, yeah, it's quite challenging.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: I mean, you mentioned bureaucracy. I think here it's most social workers, the bane of their lives, the paperwork and the bureaucracy. So you say you're not registered with Ofsted. You're not privy to those regulations and assessment that they do and CQC. You don't fall under their remit.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, we're outside their jurisdictions.

Nikki Murphy: So we're accountable to the safeguarding board. We've got two adult and children safeguarding boards that oversee and monitor what we're doing on behalf of safeguarding.

And we sit under the Department of Health and Social Services. So there's sort of scrutiny and QA within those organising within the sort of large organisation. But we don't have a registration body.

We recruit mostly from, well, from England. We need people who've been social work experienced in England, Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland, you know, where they've had the same sort of framework experience that we've got, same legislation. So we would expect anybody who comes to work for us to have registration with one of the registration bodies.

But, yeah, we're outside their jurisdiction once they're here. So it's a bit of an anomaly, really.

I suppose something else that's quite different in the way we work is that we're co-located with, we've got our own, the probation officer is in our service, but also we've got our own police officer.

So having police, social services and probation together is brilliant, particularly in cases of sexual abuse and domestic abuse that just works so well. And that's been a really useful model of working. It's all kind of obviously based on relationships and building those, that understanding of each other's roles.

And we partly fund the police officer who's, we call it the PPO, the public protection officer. But unlike anywhere else, there isn't like a PPU, there's no unit. It's, excuse me, it's that one officer.

And we often have that conversation that we pay them to disagree with us. And that's really like it's a really helpful dynamic. And it just works really well.

Lynn Roberts: It provides consistency, doesn't it? So having, building up that relationship with a PPO is really important. And it acts as a liaison between us and the police. But where there's safeguarding and a criminal kind of element working together, you know, is the best model to safeguard the child, the adult.

It's a really good model. And I think we utilise it every day. It's just part of our practice now, the role. So, yeah, it's been, it's been a great addition.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So the police, obviously there's a police service, which is separate, and you have PPO who works for you and with you on site. That's what you mean? Yes.

Yeah, yeah. So there's the Royal Falkland Island Police Service that I think there's about 28 officers. And but then we've got our own specific one who is absolutely part of the Royal Falkland Island Police.

But they're co-located. So they've got a desk at the station and they've got a desk here. And Lynn and it's currently Chris, used to be Helen, that they both do

Every referral that comes in is screened by police and Lynn and the PPO straight away. So you've got that multi-agency look on it straight, straight off.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yeah, that's really advantageous because here, as you're probably aware, there is a lot of new initiatives with local authorities who are trying to, they have a child sexual exploitation team where they try and have hubs where there's multi-agency work going on. So they'll have a police officer, they'll have other, someone from health and someone from education all working together. But you have that by the sounds of it when it comes to the police and prison service. So the advantage of being small is actually that you can do that quite easily.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, absolutely. And we can sort of, you know, call upon our kind of professionals, our wider professionals from health, education, emotional well-being team really quickly. So, yeah, it's a really good model.

Nikki Murphy: Yes, it kind of goes back to the old locality model in a way, doesn't it? But we're sort of forced to have it because we're so small, there is nobody else. But, yeah, we see the advantages of it because so although we're part of health and social services, colleagues in health, we've got the under-19 service. So the health visitor and the school nurse, they'll come to every strategy meeting.

Yes. Whichever one is the right one for the meeting. And then we've got the two head teachers who will either come themselves or they will, you know, delegate to one of the pastoral team to attend.

So it's a really small group that's constantly working on safeguarding. And same in adults, the social care. So social care is very different.

We don't provide it in social services. It comes under health and is a free service. Currently, that's that's the way it's being set up.

You know, the kind of home health model, the district nurse and residential, nobody pays for those services. So, again, it's really close team. So the OT, the residential, the community support team, they work really closely with our principal adult social worker for adults and also with the PPO.

So, yeah, it works really well having this just small, small teams, small and close knit.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: But also in terms of those specialist services that parents or children may need. How are you placed to fulfil those? If it's alcohol abuse or, you know, other kinds of help, say, send children with disabilities. Do you have the resources for those kind of more specialist services?

Nikki Murphy: So some of them are on island and some of them aren't. Some have to, children have to or anybody has to travel overseas for those. So on island, we do have a speech and language therapist service.

We have SENCO in schools, but more specialists than people have to travel either to usually to the UK, but could be Chile or Uruguay if there's an emergency sort of health emergency for specialist services.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: And in terms of recruitment, how do you manage that? Do you get a lot of interest or not much interest when you're recruiting for positions?

Nikki Murphy: It's really challenging at the moment across the board, isn't it? So we go occasionally we'll go to career fairs and people will come and talk to us and they'll be like, where are the Falklands? Where is it? So we've taken to having a big map with us because,

you know, on one occasion somebody said to us, so can I can I commute from South London? No, you absolutely cannot.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: They thought it might be like the Isle of Dogs or something.

Nikki Murphy: Yeah, I guess so. And it's like, no, you really can't because there's two flights a week from the RAF. It's an 18-hour journey that refuels on Ascension Island on the way down. And it's really affected by weather. So my longest delay, Lynn is always saying she won't ever travel with me. So I get on the flight and it goes wrong. My longest delay was I got stuck out of the islands for two weeks and nothing was coming and going because of, I can't remember, technical issues or weather or whatever it was. And that's not two weeks is uncommon, but four or five days is really isn't. We don't even think of that as a delay.

It's just, you know, you've got to take it in your stride. You definitely can't commute.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: But you know what, you're in the Falklands, there's other local authorities in England who need maps, you know, when they come to community care live, people don't know where they are. So you're not alone, even though you're thousands of miles away. Geography is not the strongest point for a lot of people.

Nikki Murphy: That's true. I think our USP is the wildlife though and the work life balance because we've got so much kind of wilderness and just beautiful scenery. And I mean Lynn's over it because she grew up here, but I'm still excited by penguins after 25 years and whales and sea lions. And, you know, you can just see wildlife all the time. And that's that's really special.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: So for nature lovers, if you're a social worker who loves nature, then that's the place to be.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, definitely, definitely, definitely.

Nikki Murphy: And photography, it's just amazing photography. The lighting, there's no pollution and the lighting and clarity of light here is just stunning. You get the amazing sunsets and sunrises.

Lynn Roberts: Yeah, a lot of people that, you know, looking for a new challenge, a new opportunity. You know, so, yeah, never been anywhere like the Falklands before. So, you know, we get a lot of interest like that, don't we Nikki? It's like people trying to kind of get out of the UK and, you know, as you say, the bureaucracy. So they're looking further afield as well.

Nikki Murphy: Yeah, adventure seekers tend to be the people we get, isn't it? Yeah. And who settle here and fit in really well.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: You mentioned there's over 60 nationalities who live in the Falklands. What are the majority of those nationalities?

Nikki Murphy: So the majority are from Britain. And then the next group would be St Helena and other overseas territory in the South Atlantic, come here to work and settle their families here. Following that would be Chileans and Filipinos and Zimbabweans, but really everywhere. Zimbabweans first came as part of the UN programme to rid the islands of the mines that were left after the '82 conflict. And the last one went, I think, in 2000, perhaps 2001. No, 2000. And a lot of the deminers brought their families and they've settled. Yeah, it's very diverse, very multinational for a small, remote island.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: We've just done an episode about Zimbabwe, actually. And so the last one was social work around the world, Zimbabwe. So I spoke to two lovely Zimbabweans from there who've been in England for about just under 10 years, both of them. So that was so I learnt a lot about Zimbabwe. I feel like I want to visit the Falklands and I've never really felt that way. You obviously sold it a little bit to me as well.

Lynn Roberts: It's very beautiful.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: It's been really fascinating speaking to you both. Thank you so much for giving up your time to join us on the podcast.

Nikki Murphy: Thank you very much. It's really nice talking to you. And we'll go and listen to the Zimbabwe episode now. That'll be interesting.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Please do. Thank you.

Lynn Roberts: Thank you.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: That was Nikki and Lynn from the Falkland Islands. Do get in touch if you want to be part of the Social Work Around the World miniseries.

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That's all for now. See you next time.