

Episode 116: Sidonie

Hi and welcome to Social Work Spotlight, where I showcase different areas of the profession each episode. I'm your host, Yasmine Loupis, and today's guest is Sid who is in her early years of social work and has discovered a deep passion for engaging with and supporting individuals navigating PTSD and mental health challenges. Her journey into social work was driven by a profound love for aiding others and a genuine interest in listening to their stories, empowering them to feel like the protagonist in their own lives.

Yasmine Thanks so much, Sid, for joining me today on the podcast. I'm looking forward to having a chat with you about your experience.

Sidonie Yeah, thank you so much for having me, Yasmine. It's an absolute pleasure.

Yasmine I always ask firstly, when you got started in social work and what brought you to the profession?

Sidonie Yeah, so, I mean, I did my Master's in social work. I guess I could go right back to my undergrad, which was a decision I made when I was 18. So I didn't really know what I wanted to do and it's always a bit daunting kind of choosing what area of study, I mean, at such a young age, more for myself anyway. And I chose to do my undergrad in the social sciences because I always loved looking into, I guess, the study of people, the studies of individuals and communities, and you know, how we behave and how we interact with each other. And I really liked society and culture in high school. So that was quite an easy direction to go into that, looking at like an anthropology side of the world, and I liked seeing things in that way. So the social science was definitely the right path for me as an undergrad before I kind of even thought about social work. And then I did, my major was in sociology. I really enjoyed it. And what I found, I kind of enjoyed the most about that, was when we looked at the different pandemics of society and the biggest problems our society is going into in the future. The biggest one I found was loneliness, that I really found myself getting very attached to that idea. I spent a lot more time on that area of my study research, you know, I found I was the most passionate about it when we had to do, you know, projects on it. And I think that was definitely the biggest eye-opener from the youngest point, was when realised that the thing I wanted to look into the most was the relationships between people and how we can work to kind of make those relationships stronger, and how we can help other people. Obviously I didn't know it at the time, but that's what I wanted to do. I was still quite young, I didn't really know where I wanted to go at that point. Graduated, didn't really have any idea of what I wanted to do. Took a year-long break and travelled. And again, I think the main denominator of experiences that I had overseas was just like talking to people and having conversations and hearing their stories of different people and bringing those two together. I was like, I love talking to people, I love hearing people's stories. I think stories is why the world revolves so well. And what I love the most about the human experiences is those stories and is those conversations and connections. And so I just found Master's of Social Work at UOW and rolled into it quite easily and found myself as a social worker two years later at my Master's.

Yasmine Yeah. And what were your placements while you were studying?

Sidonie Yeah so my first, it was actually a very confusing time when I did my placements, because I did my Master's during COVID. So our first year placement went from a thousand hours, I think we have to do in the Master's total, yeah so 500 each year. And so our first one was cut in half which was quite nice based off COVID. So mine was with a company called

Green Connect, and it's a not-for-profit in Wollongong that hires refugees and youth that might not have opportunity for jobs if they don't have that resume and they don't have that experience in the past. So allowed people to get a job with Green Connect working on a eco farm which was in the middle of an urban farm in the middle of Wollongong, which was really special. I got to work a little bit on the farm, which was really cool, because during COVID there wasn't that many programs happening because everything was locked down. So I spent a little bit of the time on the farm. They also ran a couple of op shops and I got to just be a part of watching how a not-for-profit organisation works, and really seeing the ins and outs on all aspects of it as well, which was really cool. And then my second placement was at the Illawarra Women's Health Centre which I absolutely adored. That was, for me, the moment when I realised I wanted to work one-on-one with people in a counselling space. I think that was, yeah, realising where I wanted to go was that one-on-one connection. And working with narrative therapy was very important to me, and I think that came up very quickly for me in that placement as well.

Yasmine Was there much of an opportunity in the first placement to build on your counselling skills, or it wasn't really until the second one?

Sidonie It wasn't really until the second one that I actually did dive into counselling a little bit, but also I didn't know I wanted to do it in the first year of my Master's. I think I was more interested in my first year doing green social work or international social work, so more of a macro level social work was definitely where my head was at in the first year. And then I think working on the micro level in the second year allowed me to realise how much I love that one-on-one connection with different people and just having a conversation with one person and how much that can really benefit both people. The social worker and the client as well. So that was a big breakthrough moment for me.

Yasmine Yeah. Was there much of an opportunity to look at things like funding applications and all that dynamic around where do we actually get funding for our programs, in that first placement?

Sidonie Yeah, so they actually, Green Connect when I arrived had a really great funding from the government and the council for youth to get jobs. So they had just, they got approved for that funding to hire a certain amount of youth that may be going through mental health crises to then work for six months with the organisation, which was all then funded. Which I think was such a fantastic incentive, especially during COVID. It allowed for people to have those job opportunities, especially when so much was shut down. And myself included, I lost my job at the hotel I was working at the time. So it was, allowed opportunity for you to be outside and working in different fields during COVID with this funding, which was really great as well.

Yasmine Yeah. And I saw that you've done some student volunteering as well. You were a student rep and peer support. How did that tie into your student experience and how do you think it helped develop your advocacy?

Sidonie Yeah. So I did probably two main work experiences whilst I was at uni that held a point in my heart, especially the first one was, I did an internship in Fiji with an organisation called Project Everest. And I worked in a group that worked on farming in Fiji, and how we could help them with eco farming, how we could help them develop new incentives and different ways to enhance their economics through their farming. And I spent a month with them, and it was really great. But I think what I came out of it realising was again, I just love the conversations with the different people we met rather than kind of trying to sell the products that the organisation was trying to do in the first place. So I think that again, not realising at the time was

me figuring out, okay, well, I just wanna talk to these people and see what's happening with them rather than trying to sell what the organisation was trying to sell. And in saying that, it was great what they were selling and they were trying to promote an amazing program for these Fijians, however, I was just happy sitting there chatting away with them, forming that connection rather than doing the other side of things, which was trying to promote what we were trying to sell as well. And then the second one was the peer support program with the Illawarra Multicultural Services, which is an organisation in Wollongong that brings together multicultural communities and allows the youth to have a space where they feel safe and supported. And they had just started a program where you do peer support one-on-one. And I worked very closely with one individual, and we just formed a really strong connection where we would hang out in community together, whether it was go get coffee, whether it was go for a walk. We did a photo shoot together because she was very passionate about fashion and design and style. So I said I would do a photo shoot with her, which was really sweet, but definitely out of my comfort zone. But yeah, again, it was just a way to relate and connect with one other person that, in another world, you wouldn't think that a 17 year old and a 25 year old would be spending time together. But it helped both of us to figure out what we both wanted to do. You know, she figured out what she wanted to do, I then went into social work. So it was just, again, a really beautiful experience of connecting with another person.

Yasmine That's also a lot to take on though, as a student who's still busy trying to find their way in this world, doing placements as well. How did you balance everything?

Sidonie Yeah, not very well at the beginning. I definitely took on too much those two years, and I definitely had a few moments where I had to take a step back and let go of a few things that I was doing, and definitely take a little bit more off my plate. But again, I think COVID, although it was a very stressful time to be doing uni, it also meant there was a lot more flexibility with, you know, what we were doing and less time in class. So I think why I did a lot of those other extra, you know, extra activities, because I was lacking that connection with my classmates. So I wanted to fill that time up with other experiences as well.

Yasmine Yeah, wow. And just paved the way so beautifully then to what you were doing in your social work studies in terms of that engagement and connecting with people. After you finished your placements, what did you imagine you were gonna be doing and what was your first role out?

Sidonie Yeah, so after coming out of the second placement I was very set on counselling. And as I had just graduated, the options for someone who has just graduated to get a counselling role is quite hard. You know, not having that experience. So I kind of had to find a role where not only did I incorporate counselling into the role, but there was a large percent that was also case management. So I went into a company called Pro Care, which is rehab consulting. So basically, that role allowed me to work with people trying to find roles after an injury, mental or physical injury, and trying to get themselves back into the workforce after having that experience. I worked predominantly with police officers who had come out of the police force with a mental illness, and because of that they weren't allowed on the force anymore. So they had to reinvent themselves and they had to re-engage themselves in life after their whole lives, really, being the police was you know a big part of their identity and who they were. And any police officer would tell you that it becomes your entire life and in a way that isn't necessarily a bad thing. Like I mean, look at Brooklyn Nine-Nine as an example. They are obsessed with their job. They're so passionate about their job. It becomes their whole lives. Like, they're so engaged and passionate about what they're doing. So to lose that because of PTSD or because of a trauma experience or because of mental health in any capacity, it's very

jarring for these people, and it's very jarring for them to see who they are outside of the police. So I worked with them to figure out who they were outside of the police force and kind of want to re-emerge themselves as someone new, find a new career or just, you know, find joy in life again after having some pretty intense experiences.

Yasmine Yeah, I'm familiar. I support a gentleman who was injured in his secondary employment, but his primary employment was with the cops, and his wife also works for the police. And there are so many barriers for him at the moment in terms of returning to work, even though psychologically he's great. But it's a matter of, I guess, trying to find something that's going to be fulfilling and engaging enough for him to feel like he still works for the police, when his role was so active and physical. And I imagine, yeah, for people to reconceptualise what work would look like for them when that's all they wanted to do, must be really hard. So were you involved in sort of the pre-employment counselling side or the practical, let's prepare you, let's do the modules, let's prepare for interviews, that sort of side? Or a bit of both?

Sidonie I did a little bit of both, but I focused mainly on a program we had facilitated called the Engage program. And so what that was, was 10 sessions approved. It started with 10, more could be approved in the future if it was needed, and basically it was working one-on-one with the police officers who were retired to find their spark. You know, re-enlight that spark to figure out what they wanted to do in the future or even tomorrow, whether that's go for a walk. So a lot of the, you know, as you mentioned, you've worked with a few police officers, there's so many hours now that have come into their day that they did not have before. And anyone that has worked a full-time job for 10 years or a year or 40 years, getting that time back is extremely difficult, because we don't know what to do with that extra time and we don't know how to fill it in a healthy way. So I worked really closely with them to figure out what their passions were outside of work and what they got excited about when they were at home, and what they wanted to do with their spare time. So I have a really great example that I was thinking about yesterday. One of my clients, she had to retire due to PTSD and trauma, and we had 10 sessions together, and it was all over the phone. Our first session, she answered it in bed. She was really struggling to get out of bed, to self-motivate, to regulate her emotions, to figure out what she wanted to do with all her spare time. The first session, she was very much lacking any sort of energy, she was quite depressed. And throughout these 10 sessions, started to figure out what she did really love. And one thing she really loved was nature and spending time in her garden. And she thought she wanted to bring that back to her regular daily movements. You know, being out in the sun, spending time in her garden. And I had recently just read a book called Braiding Sweetgrass, which is by Robin Wall Kimmerer. I highly recommend to everyone listening. It changed my life, it changed how I see the world. And it's just a woman really talking about her appreciation to nature, her connection to the land and connection to flora and fauna in every way. So myself and this client, we read the book together. Every week we would read a few chapters and then we would reflect on these chapters together. And I could start to see her, starting to see a little bit more of excitement into really re-appreciating nature and really appreciating her time spent outside. And over the sessions, I would start seeing her answering the phone outside on the balcony or answering the phone as she was going through a walk. So she was really much, you know, connecting with her time outside and starting to see a bit more light by just bringing up, you know, what makes you happy. What do you want to be doing outside of work? And she was able to find that. And our last session together, she came onto the phone crying because she had just seen a dragonfly in her garden. And she said that because of this book and because of these sessions together, she had thanked the dragonfly for what it does to the plants and she thanked the garden for feeding her and her family. And she was just so thankful that she was able to kind of look at life outside of the police and look at life through the lens of nature. And what she really enjoyed was looking at it through that lens. So I

think that was really special. And then down the road, she went into horticultural studies and went to TAFE to study that. And she works in that field now. So it's just small movements and small pathways that you don't realise are going to get you to that point. But over time, she found it very naturally and not, she wasn't pressured to find it. She found it in her own time and I think that was really special.

Yasmine That's such a beautiful story. And it is a really great demonstration of that sort of mutual experience through the text and helping to ground her. Is literature therapy a thing? I know cinema therapy is, but I'm just wondering where that idea came from.

Sidonie I don't know, surely it should be. I think I've always just read books with friends and I love coming back together with a friend and talking about that book and I think it's a shared experience that's really special. So I did find that at the beginning she was quite reserved and she didn't really want to give me much. So I tried to find that shared experience that we could go through together. You know, she was in Victoria, I was in New South Wales, our conversations were FaceTimes. So it was an ability to be able to kind of create that shared experience with each other being in different states and have something to converse about when sometimes she didn't really have anything she wanted to say. And so I think it was a really good opener for her to be able to express how she felt through that story as well.

Yasmine Yeah. Did you ever feel pressure to get people back to work when you felt perhaps it wasn't a good fit? Yeah, that was definitely something I struggled with in that role, was that pressure and the expectations for them to find work again. And I'm not a very pushy person, and it's very uncomfortable for me. So over time that's kind of why I wanted to change my role, but with this Engage program that I did focus on a lot, I eventually just asked to be working in that field a lot more. Because it wasn't a push, it wasn't forcing people to do things they didn't feel comfortable doing. And it was a way for me to be that middleman before they then went on to the next rehab stage to get back to work as well.

Yasmine And also to practice your counselling skills, which was really important to you.

Sidonie Exactly.

Yasmine Yeah.

Sidonie Yeah.

Yasmine How long did you stay in that role?

Sidonie I was there for maybe 15 months, I think. Yeah, I left maybe last March. I went overseas for a few months to America. So I had some time off. But yeah, I left, yeah, I think March, March or April. Yeah. So I was there for a year and a bit. And it was a really great experience for a first time job once in the field of social worker. I think they had a really great way of bringing in new social workers and a really good post grad role. So I'm very thankful for it and I had a great time with them.

Yasmine Yeah. So where did you move to from there once you got back from the US?

Sidonie Yeah so I got back into the US October last year, had a couple months off rock climbing which was very fun, and I came back and I got the role that I'm at now that I adore a lot, which is with a company called Medibase Health. It started out as being Veterans Benefits

Australia but they've recently changed their name to Medibase Health. And it's the role I'm in now, and I work with veterans who want to not only connect with the right services under their gold card, which is the card they get for ongoing insurance for the rest of their lives post-service, and I work with them to make sure they connect with the right services and support as well as supporting them along the way as well.

Yasmine Do you get to support their families? I think from memory, white cards, is it, for a widow of a veteran?

Sidonie Yeah, so I work with White Card and Gold. I work with a few widows, but the service I work with, we only work with the veteran and their widows to help them access those services. So yeah, a couple of widows, which I find is a really great thing that they get to have access to as well. And you know, they have no idea about the services that they're allowed to have once they do become a widow. So it's great to be there to help them in any way possible as well.

Yasmine Yeah. And do you then look after all defence forces? Is it people who have served or reserves, or is it kind of a mixture?

Sidonie A big mixture, yeah. So I work with a lot of clients who served overseas a lot and yeah, reserves as well, but the people I work with and I think need the most help are those who served overseas. They definitely want to access all those services, physical and mental services that are available to them.

Yasmine And coming back to, I guess, that loneliness research that you completed when you were an undergrad, I imagine a huge part of the difficulty will be relating to other people once you've served or even, you know, once you have had to leave the force, and how do you connect with people? How do you find someone who understands what you're going through?

Sidonie Exactly. And I've definitely gone through imposter syndrome a lot with this role, because my first role was with police officers and now my new role is with veterans. So I do go through a bit of turmoil about who am I to kind of speak with these people and help them through things that I have never experienced and will never experience. But then I do remember that it's not about shared experiences always. It's always just about shared conversations and allowing that person to have the space to talk with someone. And sometimes people that I work with like that I am completely separate from that world that they've been part of. And they like having that fresh perspective that comes in. So it's definitely been hard to kind of work with them, not having those experiences that they've gone through, but I'm learning and I'm definitely trying to help them in any way possible. And loneliness is a big thing. It's a huge, huge problem with the veteran population. And so at the end of the day, sometimes all these clients, one is just a friendly voice on the other end of the phone, checking in and making sure they are being remembered and that they feel like they're heard and listened to. And they feel really respected and they feel really nice having someone call them and just checking in.

Yasmine Yeah. What are some of the other types of issues that come up for the vets that you look after? I'm thinking things like hypervigilance and constant fear of threat in the absence of a threat, those sorts of concerns, and how do you support them through that?

Sidonie Yeah, so having, you know, that trauma and that PTSD is a huge denominator in these veterans, and I think the one thing I really do enjoy about this service is being able to communicate with them over the phone, which allows them to have those conversations in a

safe space and in their safe space. And I think that's actually, has been really beneficial to a lot of the clients because they can just answer the phone in their home and allow them to kind of express and open up in that safe space rather than being moved to a clinical space where they sit with me and they're in an uncomfortable position and they don't feel comfortable in that. Which I think when you want to have a narrative therapy space, it allows them to open up a lot more sitting in their bed if they want to be, or sitting outside having a cup of coffee while talking to me on the phone. It just, I think that has helped them a lot to open up to someone that they don't know, necessarily.

Yasmine Is it very different to what you imagined therapy would be like as you were studying? Because tele support is obviously very different to an in clinic kind of therapy scenario. How do you navigate that?

Sidonie Yeah, that's a really great question. Being on the phone, like telehealth with a client, I think is quite difficult in that you can't read body language as much. So it's very much relying on those pauses and the sounding of their voices and, you know, allowing for that space to be silent for a moment. Which in person is very natural to happen but on the phone when you can't read and see what they're looking like or their body language, it's very hard to read what they are thinking in that moment. And to be able to allow that safe space to happen in silence is very difficult to read over telehealth. I'm not sure if you've done any telehealth or if you have any similar experiences with in-person or not in-person, but I find, and from my own personal experiences, that face-to-face therapy can be quite uncomfortable because you don't know what to do with your hands and because they're reading your whole body. It can be a little overwhelming for some people, you know, wanting to pick at their fingers, wanting to fidget around a little bit. So a lot of my clients will just answer the phone and talk to me while they're on a walk or able to move around the home as they talk to me as well. So they're able to kind of just talk to me while doing movements around as well, rather than just sitting there and looking at me face-to-face. And again, I haven't really had face-to-face counselling with people in years, so I don't necessarily remember how it is because I've been doing telehealth for over two years now. So for me, it works really well for me, and I've had a lot of clients say that my voice is quite soothing for them. So it's nice to be able to just be a voice and not be a face, which I think helps a lot as well.

Yasmine Yeah. I think in my context it was something that we had to get used to, was that video conferencing or just a telephone if someone didn't have the capacity and the technology to figure out the video. And some of my older gentlemen that I look after just wouldn't have been able to coordinate it anyway. But yeah, my program supports people all over the country. So sometimes there is that need, but it's not a therapy sort of service. It's more sort of coordination and case management. So it's got a very different focus. Some of that stuff is very easy to do over the phone or by video, but as you said, some of that therapy focused stuff and especially narrative therapy, you wanna be getting the visual cues and the facial gestures and the, how does someone react while they're talking about some of these things, which is challenging.

Sidonie Yeah, for sure. And I think, you know, I also do a little bit of the case management stuff as well. So, you know, helping them access different services and you know, connecting them with the right things that they might need moving forward. However, I have found that because a lot of my clientelle are older, they actually love a phone chat. Like, I think because that generation always had the phone in the home, you know, they love just having a chat. Whilst if I have a younger client, a phone call is the worst thing for them. Like that is their biggest nightmare. And I'm the same outside of work. I hate a phone call. I'm just like, just text me. So I think with this generation, the veterans, which a lot of them are over 60, they thrive on

that phone call. They love it. You know, sometimes the conversation goes longer than anticipated because they love just sitting there having a chat. So I think that generation and that age group, it has worked out really well. So I think bringing in that phone call telehealth option has been great for veterans.

Yasmine Yeah. What's the thing you enjoy most about your work? What do you find most satisfying?

Sidonie Definitely my regular conversations with some of my clients. So one of my clients I speak to five days a week.

Yasmine Wow.

Sidonie One of my clients I speak to two days a week and we have such strong rapport now. They have a certain way they answer the phone that they know I'm calling them. They really open up to me. One of my clients, we're going to have a little over the phone celebration once we hit our one year mark of talking every single week. So I think I love being that person in someone's life, and I love when someone says thank you so much, you know, knowing you're phoning me today makes my day so much better. You know, some of my clients will say you've just made me feel so much more energised for the rest of the day. So I think little moments like that, little trickling, little sprinkles that go into the conversation, like that really helps me feel motivated and inspired by my job.

Yasmine Do you have a team of people that you work with? I'm wondering if you feel disconnected sometimes from that.

Sidonie Yeah, so with my role, I'm actually technically my own boss. So we work under a parent company, which is Medibase Health, however, we organise and manage our own hours and clients. So yes, I kind of am isolated in that sense because I don't really have workmates in that sense, but I do talk to a lot of the people that work under the same mother company that I do. So we do rehash our experiences together and we do have an occasional work meeting where we bring all the other social workers together to talk about our experiences. So again, because I started this working after COVID, it's always been online work for me. I actually don't know what it would be like to be in a workplace where you actually see your workers anymore. And there's options out there, but I very much got trapped very happily into the remote life of social work and haven't come out on the other end yet. But I'm sure I will eventually.

Yasmine Is it mostly social workers, the other people you work with?

Sidonie Yeah, so we have like a large variety of different social workers that work within the company. We have social workers like myself which is general counselling and case management social workers, then we have social workers that work with the CBD oil team. So, you know, we will tell our veterans to go to work, talk to those social workers if they want to get CBD oil for their trauma or chronic pains. And then we have social workers under podiatry branch. So there's a lot of different branches within the Medibase Health organisation where social workers will trickle down into all of those fields before you then go off to the specific services. So a social worker before you go to a podiatrist or CBD oil social worker before you go and speak to the doctor about the referral. So things like that. We have a lot of different branches of social workers.

Yasmine And it sounds really structured, so there's a clear indication of that step over.

Sidonie Yeah. It's such a fantastic organisation. I definitely hope they listen to this because I'm just praising them, but I came into this organisation and everything was just so perfectly set out. All the different online programs that they use, all the different information and questions answered. It's just fantastic. It's very well structured and organised.

Yasmine Yeah, nice. What support do you need then, being somewhat disconnected from other social workers?

Sidonie I think motivation. I think sometimes you when you don't speak to other social workers you kind of lose a little bit of momentum and you lose a bit of that excitement, you know, when you talk with other social workers and you get that back and forth momentum and I guess accountability buddies as well. I think that's really important, and to bounce different ideas off each other and in a sense rant as well. So I think I do miss that but I also do have a few social workers that I do have that with, within the organisation. So it is there but it could be more I think, in terms of I could reach out a little bit more as well.

Yasmine Sure. And given that a lot of the people that you're supporting have dealt and continue to deal with pretty difficult situations and experiences, how do you navigate that for yourself? How do you, I guess, safeguard yourself or ensure that you can have longevity in this career?

Sidonie That's a very good question, because burnout is so real. And I mean, I'm only two years deep into working full-time as a social worker. And it is definitely something that we need to think about a lot. And we need to really touch base with ourselves all the time. I've been pretty good with that and I navigate my own mental health and my burnout very well. I guess through my example that I spoke with about one of the clients who we connected over her love of nature, I make sure I spend a lot of time outside. I make sure I'm switching off outside of my work hours. As a social worker, I'm sure you know that clients will be constantly communicating with us and reaching out to us and texting us at very absurd times as well, especially with my role where I do just text them a little bit as well. So making sure that I set those boundaries and having those hours, that I make sure I'm not looking at work emails and I'm not looking at messages from clients as well.

Yasmine Yeah. Do you have separate computers that you work through?

Sidonie Unfortunately not at the moment, but I need to do that. I think that's going to be a very healthy decision to make.

Yasmine Yeah. I have students as frequently as I can, but my student at the moment, everything goes through her smartwatch and I can see she's getting personal messages, she's getting work emails, she's gettin, she also works as a disability support worker part-time. And she's getting so many things coming through and I just think, you need to switch it off, you need to have some way of disconnecting or having that separation between your work life and your personal life.

Sidonie Exactly, and it's so hard, because you know, if you are just on your phone and a message pops up from a client, it would take two seconds to reply. And in my mind I'm like, okay, yeah, this is fine. It's just a quick thing to do. But I know that not switching off and having that constant notification popping up as an option, I know it's gonna be really unhealthy over the years as well, to not be able to switch off between private life and work life.

Yasmine Easier said than done.

Sidonie Always.

Yasmine But I think that's one of those, as you work through and develop more experience, I think you'll get your own way of doing that. Do you support any vets with hearing difficulties? Is that the connection to Auslan, or is that completely separate?

Sidonie I've definitely referred a lot of clients to tinnitus support. That's quite common. Like the ringing in the ears and a lot of ear issues. We have like a tinnitus relief program that works with our organisation. So I have referred a lot of clients to that, but it's common, but it's something that I kind of refer off to someone else as soon as someone asks for tinnitus support as well.

Yasmine Okay. And how did you come about deciding you wanted to study Auslan?

Sidonie So I did it at the community college last year, and I just thought that it would be a great element to add to social work. You know, I would love to be able to, even just the bare minimum know Auslan to, you know, work with clients who are deaf. And I think I love to be able to be a part of that community and be able to talk with that community and communicate with that community. You know, I did the first course of learning how to do Auslan. It was very hard, and I'm very slow at learning things when it comes to hands and languages in general. I've tried Spanish multiple times and I have failed miserably. But I thought Auslan would be a beautiful thing to learn. And so I've learned very basic Auslan. I still practice, but I haven't actually put it into practice yet. So I'm still just in the classroom when it comes to Auslan language.

Yasmine Yeah, cool. I think it's such a valuable thing to have another language, and a way to relate to people that perhaps don't have that accessibility. And yeah, I think it's really hard. So well done for, in amongst your full time work and all the other things you do, trying to fit that in.

Sidonie Yeah, it's really special. My teacher from last year, she was hearing impaired and she would bring her service dog into the class with her. And that was just really special to see a service dog in the class with her. And a lot of my veterans, I advocate for them to get service dogs as well. So seeing that service dog in the flesh and seeing what she does for her owner really helps me to advocate as well for a lot of my clients in veterans to get those service dogs as well. So I love seeing that in flesh.

Yasmine And it's something that I think is such a hidden impairment or difficulty, that I think a lot of people assume that people are born deaf or they develop it from, I don't know, a workplace injury that has to do with loud noises, but it's not. I look after quite a lot of people with a traumatic brain injury that end up with auditory problems, vestibular problems. So yeah, everything is so sensitive and I think, yeah, the more awareness we can create around, you know, these problems come from very diverse effects or injuries, I think the better. Because then it demystifies it a little bit.

Sidonie 100%. And you know, when someone does have a hearing impairment or loses their eyesight over time, I love to think about the fact that with one impairment, you know, they get stronger in the other areas as well. Their sense of smell might get stronger, their sense of hearing might get stronger if they've lost their eyesight, so I love being able to see how they

then go through life seeing things a little bit differently than us, but also seeing things in their own unique way. And we have to really look at that and consider that a norm as well.

Yasmine Yeah. If you weren't doing this, I know it's very early and you love it, what else is interesting for you? I know you mentioned earlier the international community projects and green social work. Is that an option for you in future?

Sidonie So something I'm actually looking into further study, is I'm really interested in recreational therapy. So I worked with a young lady who was 16. Her mother just reached out to me as a social worker and asked if I would spend time with her daughter one on one to help her with her mental health problem. She was going through quite a depressive stage. And I found that myself and this 16 year old girl both love the idea of rock climbing. So we would go outdoors together and we'd go rock climbing together. And whilst we were doing that activity and while we were immersing ourselves into outdoors and rock climbing, we then were able to talk quite freely and quite naturally, and it felt very organic. So I loved combining outdoor support and, you know, working with rock climbing with that therapy space. So I'm looking into potentially going into TAFE to do my outdoor recreation leadership program course, to then be able to combine outdoor activities with mental health support and therapy.

Yasmine When this episode comes out, the Olympics will be on. And are you excited to watch the rock climbing?

Sidonie I'm very excited. I watched it in the 2021, I think they ended up being in 2021, and that was the first year they did it. And I love it. It's my favourite sport, and watching it was just incredible. So I've been following all of those climbers' careers since that and most of them are coming back to the next Olympics. So it's going to be very exciting to watch them go again, round two.

Yasmine That's so cool. And I knew nothing, like I had done the sport recreationally, but I didn't know how they were going to judge it. So even just that process of understanding how it was actually going to be judged and how you become such a good climber and all the different categories. So, yeah, you could go down a really fun rabbit hole.

Sidonie It's incredible what they do. And there was a little bit of backlash combining the speed climbing. I'm not sure if you watched that one, but they basically just run up the wall, it's incredible. But a lot of the other climbers who boulder and rope climb, they don't do that side of climbing. So they've now separated those two. So that bouldering and rope climbing is the same combination of the competition and then speed climbing is own competition now.

Yasmine That makes sense. It's a different discipline, really.

Sidonie Yeah, completely different.

Yasmine That's awesome. Is there anything else that you have, it sounds like you've always got something on the go. Are there any other programs or projects you're working on?

Sidonie Not at the moment. Right now I'm just very much trying to put all of my energy into my role and trying to, you know, reflect on how I interact with different clients and see what I can improve on. Yeah, that's kind of in the forefront of my mind at the moment. So nothing else much happening on the side, hopefully until I start TAFE. So that'd be really cool.

Yasmine Yeah, fun. Are there any resources that you'd recommend people check out if they want to know more about what you've done before or what you do now? You mentioned Braiding Sweetgrass, so I can try to find that as well.

Sidonie Yes, that's a great book. I follow a few different types of just individual people that show their stories. There's the social, I'm not sure if you've heard of this podcast, but it's the Social Work Stories.

Yasmine Oh yeah, Mim and Liz, I love that.

Sidonie Yeah, so Mim used to be one of our lecturers/professors in my Master's. So I very much follow that podcast. She's got a very soothing voice, very calming, and it makes for a very easy listen. So I find that really great. I also am a huge advocate for this guy called Elliot Connie. He's got a lot on YouTube on his channel, but he does a lot of solution-focused breath therapy and he just makes it really fun and quirky. And he's really great at how he explains this type of therapy. So I followed his career for the last couple of years as well. I find that really great. And then I also follow this lady called Dr Martha Beck. She is a sociologist from Harvard in America and she just has really great coping mechanisms and therapy solutions that she uses that are quite, like, abstract. So I like to kind of listen to her work and read her books as well. So she's really great.

Yasmine Yeah, amazing. I'll find those links and I'll pop them in the show notes so people can go off and do their own reading. Yeah. Is there anything else before we finish up, Sid, that we haven't talked about or anything else about your experience or social work that you wanted to mention?

Sidonie Nothing I can think of, but I just wanted to say thank you. I've listened to quite a few of your podcasts in the last couple of weeks, and I just, I love hearing about other people's experiences. And as I said before it's something that has really, like it motivates me to hear other people's stories and it motivates me to kind of see their journeys and keeps me very much on top of my own social work career as well and the goals that I wanna be doing. So to hear other people's journeys and their goals and their career movements is really special. So you should be so proud of yourself.

Yasmine Thank you. I do find it particularly inspiring as well. And yeah, just people are incredible. And I love the nooks and crannies of the world that we manage to find ourselves in and make it a social work role, even if it doesn't seem apparent from the get go.

Sidonie Yeah, no, the thing I love about social work as a career is that there's just so many different avenues you could go in. And I think that's so cool and powerful. And if we do start to feel a little bit of burnout, there's just 50 other areas that you can then go into. And I think that's really amazing. And they're all just so, you feel so good doing them. Like, it's a role where there's a lot of rewards, and I think that's really powerful.

Yasmine Yeah. You've tied in really well a lot of that early human behaviour and social science beginnings into what you're doing now, and that engagement with people's stories. And your passion for developing programs like eco social work and learning about other people's situations through your placements but also through all the other experience that you had as a student. And I think that second placement really developed your counselling skills and your narrative therapy, but your desire to create those connections with people and to help people who are injured at work or have been injured to reimagine what a meaningful work life might be

like and what balance might be like. Because for some of them they probably haven't had a whole lot of balance. And reconnecting with probably former colleagues, I imagine, because they'd be so disconnected from that world now. But you've built those connections with those long-term clients. You said you've been seeing some of them for over a year and some of them you're seeing every day, so it's creating again those meaningful and maintaining those connections. And everything that you're doing now just continues to work on building that experience and finding more interesting things to capture your attention and see where your social work journey can continue. So it's really lovely to hear about.

Sidonie Yeah.

Yasmine So it's really lovely to hear about.

Sidonie Oh, thank you. I think, yeah, at the end of the day, you know, there's just so many people in this world and it's so easy to kind of become a background character in our own lives. And I think with that narrative therapy space, it allows someone to feel like they're in power of their lives and that their story matters. And at the end of the day, sometimes all people want is to just talk to someone about their life and have someone listen to their stories and feel like their story is special and unique, which everyone's is. And I think I love being on the other side of that. And I love making someone feel like they're a main character in their life and allowing them to kind of create their own journey and to continue creating their own journey. And I think that's something I love about social work, so very cool.

Yasmine It really is such a privilege being welcomed into that space as well. There's an element of vulnerability and it's lovely that you've been able to build that trust with people.

Sidonie Yeah, it's really cool, and I love hearing these people's stories, and I think that they love the older generation as well. As I said, they love a good phone chat and they love just talking to someone. And a lot of the people live alone and you know, maybe they don't see anyone every day. So just knowing that there's someone who's going to call them and be like hey, Bob, what's up? I think that makes it really special.

Yasmine Yeah, well thanks again Sid so much for meeting with me today and sharing your experience, and look forward to seeing where it takes you in the future.

Sidonie Oh thank you Yasmine, thank you so much. I look forward to hearing all your future podcasts as well.

Yasmine I'll talk to you soon.

Sidonie Bye.

Thanks for joining me this week. If you would like to continue this discussion or ask anything of either myself or Sid, please visit my Anchor page at anchor.fm/socialworkspotlight, you can find me on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter or you can email swspotlightpodcast@gmail.com. I'd love to hear from you. Please also let me know if there is a particular topic you'd like discussed, or if you or another person you know would like to be featured on the show.

Next episode's guest is Harveen,

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