

Episode 124: Jordan

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 Jordan, an accredited social worker and clinical supervisor. Jordan has worked in a variety of fields such as service coordination, aged care, mental health, drug and alcohol, and currently works within schools. Jordan is passionate about connecting with others and hearing their stories.

Yasmine Thank you so much, Jordan. Lovely to meet with you today and thank you for taking the time out and having a chat about your experience so far.

Jordan No worries. Thank you so much for having me on your show.

Yasmine Yeah. I'd love to know what got you into the profession. When did you start in social work and why?

Jordan Oh, see, this is a very interesting question that seems so straightforward, but it's not, because it challenges my identity as a social worker, as it was never my dream to be a social worker and I never thought much of social work. But it's a career that I've been so happy with that I made that choice and that I stuck out my dream of wanting to help others. Because it's paid dividends, not just in how I feel about my work, but in the outcomes I've seen for people that I've worked with. So leaving school at 18 with a great ATAR, I wanted to be a psychologist, as you know, all 18 year olds want to be. And I did not enjoy uni at all. And I thought I would enjoy uni and I was very disappointed at how different uni was to year 12. I flourished in school, and my year 12 teacher was like yep, uni will be fine, it'll be easy, you've got this. And it wasn't my experience. And I almost dropped out towards the end of my Bachelor in Science which specialises in psychology. But during my undergraduate I fell in love with sociology and anthropology, and not wanting my degree to go to waste, I stumbled across social work. And I'm so happy that I decided to give uni another crack. And I ended up doing my Master's of Social Work at a different university and loved every minute of it, and I haven't looked back since.

Yasmine Yeah, and it's hard to say whether it was that particular uni or if it was just the way that it was taught with those specific subjects, but yeah, obviously you've been guided in the path that fits well for you.

Jordan Yeah, I think it was evident in my grades that I was barely passing my psych units, which were very medical model, where I was getting high distinctions in sociology and anthropology, which aren't too different to social work. So I think there was something guiding me there going, hey, I think you should look in this direction. Because they were only electives, so I just chose them on a whim as something fun to do around my main subjects. And yeah, here we are all these years later.

Yasmine I don't know if it was all that obvious when I signed up to do psychology, how much maths was involved. And having done three unit maths in high school, I thought, yeah, I've got this. Get to third year psych stats, and I was just over my head, just had no idea. So I don't know if psych stats did your head in, but I found the developmental and the social stuff really interesting.

Jordan Yeah, look, I was devastated when I realised I had to do statistics. I thought year 12, that was the end of maths. And I almost didn't do maths in years 11 and 12, but my parents made me. And I'm so glad they did because, yeah, I was devastated that I had to keep doing maths. But so grateful now for what that course has given me in being able to look at journal articles and decipher the information and the evidence. I am grateful for it, but it was not a good time. The subject I found the hardest was actually all about the ins and outs of the brain. So while I can tell you amazing things about the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, I can't tell you about all the veins and arteries and all the little tiny bits of the brain, and that course was probably the hardest course that I've ever had to do. And it definitely dampened my view of psychology. That, and the uni I went to focused on dyslexia and driving under the influence. And I wanted to help people. I didn't really wanna do research, and I picked a research heavy uni. So I think that made a big difference, where the uni I did social work at was very practical based. So it was really looking at how the degree would actually function as a career. And I think that spoke to me on other levels as well, because I could picture what we were learning in class and I could see how it was gonna work in practice.

Yasmine Yeah. I really loved doing anthropology as well. That was one of my, I guess, minors before I actually had to decide, no, you need to go more the path of sociology and psychology. And I think what stood out most for me is just the diversity. And I still probably use quite a lot of that in terms of the socio-political things and how that was translated to more modern or Australian contexts. Do you remember much about the anthropology undergrad?

Jordan Oh, I remember bits and pieces. I think it helped me understand how to view different perspectives and how to translate that into what we're seeing in modern Australia, and looking at our histories and how our histories have a really big role on our current day and where we're heading in the future. And I suppose that inter generational trauma stuff really came up in anthropology. But it was my sociology stuff that's probably stuck with me a little bit more. Particularly this amazing unit with this really amazing, older, white Caucasian male professor that taught a course on gender, and it looked at gender diversity. And this was probably my first real step into gender diversity. And he was not the professor you thought would take a class like that, but it stuck so much with me seeing everything as a spectrum and not putting anything in black and white boxes. Where then you'd go to a psych class. and being very medical model, very clinical, we went back to boxes. And I was like, no, spectrums, let's go back to all the grays. Let's stay over here, we can paint different pictures and we can see the individual and it's really holistic.

Yasmine Yeah, that's obviously speaking to the social worker in you of enjoying that murky middle instead of a very black and white approach to things. So obviously fast forward to social work and that really resonated with you.

Jordan Yeah.

Yasmine What were your placements? What were your introductions to social work?

Jordan So I had an interesting first placement, and because of my first placement, I do not recommend to people who ask me about whether they should do their placements at their current place of employment, I strongly recommend not doing that. It wasn't a bad placement. It was very successful. We did the 500 hours, everything got ticked off. There was a social worker at the place I was working at the time who was originally from overseas. So she brought this really diverse lens to my social work education, but it was underscored by manipulation and feeling stressed about the different roles and how I'm gonna please everybody. So I think if I

could go back in time, I would have either chosen not to get paid, because I also got paid during that placement because I stayed in my place of employment, or I would go somewhere completely different. But at the same time, I'm also grateful for that experience as well, because I think it made me stronger in setting boundaries and moving forward as well.

Yasmine And how about your second one?

Jordan The second one, it was also interesting. I did it in an organisation that I had worked with but not for, and it was a research project. So we were looking at how their community program that worked with recently released people from prison, and how that program was helping people, I suppose, transfer back into community. We hit some hurdles with ethics and delays there, but I want to say I wrote an amazing literature review on working in the detention exit program. DECO, as it was called. It also offered me some other insights in that that company had other programs and I got to spend a few days in a youth house working with their youth coordinators, and it was interesting to see what it was like to be in a youth home. This was a home that had 17 and 18 year olds in it, so it was a little bit older. It was interesting to see how it was run but also how restrictive it was as well particularly when you consider that they're 17 and 18.

Yasmine And were you still working at the former employment while you were doing all this?

Jordan No, I quit two weeks before my last placement. So I worked right up until two weeks beforehand. All because I grew up in Canberra. I started my career in Canberra and we decided, my husband and I, that after my second placement, that we were moving away from Canberra. So I quit my job, which was also such a risky thing to do, put myself in placement, and then next thing I know I'm in rural New South Wales. And yeah, haven't looked back since.

Yasmine Wow. And you're in Orange, right, now?

Jordan Yep. So I'm now in Orange. So I had originally moved to Bathurst. I actually got a job working for the company I did my second placement at, but their Bathurst office. Did three months there. There were some contract issues which were disappointing and frustrating, but I stood my ground and decided to leave and ended up in what I would say was the start of my actual career as a counsellor. So whilst I identify as a social worker, me as a social worker is doing counselling, and my job at that point then put me on the path to where I am now. My previous jobs provided me with an amazing foundation in order to be able to get to where I am. And I'm grateful for them, but this job that I got in Orange which is why we then moved to Orange, it really started everything.

Yasmine And was the counselling role in sort of inpatient mental health, outpatient, private?

Jordan Yep so it was as a community drug and alcohol worker for a not-for-profit. So we would meet with people either in their homes or in public places or they would come to our offices, and it was providing, I suppose, I don't wanna say basic or entry level, but it was kind of that first point of call for wanting change from addiction. So sitting with a person, learning their story, connecting with them and working out what their goals were. What was bringing them to us to want support and then how could we help them get there? Sometimes that led to them going into a detox facility and then onto rehab. Sometimes it wasn't about abstinence or quitting, it was just about finding control. A lot of trauma work in there, but our focus was how do we help

someone work out where they are at with their substance use? And yeah, it was such a fascinating job. And sometimes I wonder if I could go back there and just do it all again and maybe slow things down a little bit. I've moved quickly, I wanna say, up my career path. And sometimes I feel like in order to get where I am, I've sacrificed time at some of these stops along the way. Because that job, it was amazing, and I loved every minute of it. But part of me always wanted more, which then led to me going to work at our rehab as a mental health clinician. And whilst I loved the work of clients, I couldn't handle the environment around the work with the other staff, with the policies. And then that's what then led me to school counselling.

Yasmine Was it difficult moving from a large city to a very small town, where I imagine working in alcohol and other drugs can be quite challenging, just from a, everyone knows everyone's business kind of perspective?

Jordan Yes and no. The benefit for me was because no one knew me, there was some more openness from clients and more willingness to engage with me, because no one knew me. Who's Jordan? No one knows who Jordan is. So it provided them with, I suppose, that extra level of privacy, but it also provided me with some privacy as well in that I didn't have backstories going into these people's lives and they didn't have backstories about me either. So it was, we were meeting on equal ground. But it made it harder with colleagues. So whilst it made it easier to work with clients it made it a lot harder to connect with colleagues, because they've got long-standing connections of other people from this region. So the people I count as my friends are also people who weren't from here, which made that really tricky, particularly when if you're working, for instance, in the rehab, everyone had known each other for years and I was a new kid on the block and that made it so much harder to survive in that environment.

Yasmine Sure. I have interviewed one of the wonderful people up at UNE who was part of the Social Work in Schools development, and just such fascinating work and I think it's wonderful that social work has been recognised in schools and the important role that we can play. How did that role come about for you? Because it is quite a different experience to what you'd had before.

Jordan Yeah, so I had originally interviewed for a role with my current organisation. So they're a Catholic organisation, so we work within Catholic schools across a really wide area of New South Wales. I'd interviewed just before I got the job in drug and alcohol, and they said come back when you've got more experience. And I always challenge interviewers when they ask that question, like, what do you mean more experience? Like what experience are you looking for? And they gave me an answer that always frustrates me, which is go and volunteer at Lifeline. Now, I've got nothing against Lifeline. I think it's an amazing service and volunteering there can be really beneficial. The problem is, when you're trying to start out in your career, you're often going for full-time jobs, but you're also trying to balance your self-care, how do we fit volunteering at Lifeline, which has requirements on its volunteering, a set number of hours, a set number of training hours as well, it becomes really hard to balance and be able to do all of that. In the end, I didn't need to go look for volunteer options. I was able to get the job in drug and alcohol. And then year and a half, two years later, another job came up within those same schools, went for it and got the job. So for me, it was right job, wrong time, and then became right job, right time. And I don't think I would have been as successful in an educational facility if I hadn't first experienced working with adults in a rehab. The learnings you take out of working with adults in a rehab really sets you up for being able to manage the challenges of an educational facility. Because working in either a rehab or education is so different to working in a community setting.

Yasmine I mean, I'm slightly biased. I'm always going to say yes, because I love rehab. And that's where I've worked for the last 15 years, but probably more than that actually now, I love taking students. And I work in physical rehab rather than drug and alcohol rehab, but a lot of the principles are the same in terms of you've got this crisis, how do we deal with the immediate fallout? Then how do we help build capacity and strategies around hopefully supporting someone to then integrate back into community and look at goal setting. I always love having students because I do think, as you were saying, it's a wonderful learning ground. It's a wonderful opportunity to figure out who are my stakeholders, where are the other services that I need to be working with, what are the other allied health professionals that are going to help us on this journey, because rehab is never a single kind of professional type work. So yeah, absolutely right. You would have learned so much that then translated into the school context.

Jordan Yeah. And similar to the rehab, in a school context your clients are there, not quite 24/7, because the schools aren't open 24/7, but they're there the whole time you're there. Where in a community setting, you're either coming and going from other people's homes or they're coming and going from your office. So there's an ability to be able to switch off when you're working in community, whether it's between sessions, doing a case note and chatting to a colleague or having a cup of tea, or when you're driving to the next job. But at the rehab and at the schools, clients can knock on your door at any second. And it's a lot more being on all the time. So you don't quite get the same opportunity to switch off, decompress before the next client pops in. Particularly because you never know who's gonna come around the corner and knock on your door next. So it's very different to community in the fact that you have to be ready to go at any moment's notice. But I also love that challenge about it. It keeps you on your toes, it keeps it fresh and it keeps it exciting, which stops it from becoming boring as well.

Yasmine It sounds like that meme though, that has, you know, a social worker's brain is like a computer that has a hundred tabs open at once. You just have to know everything about everyone that could potentially walk through the door, right?

Jordan Yeah, so having a good understanding of each year group, of the different teachers that are in each year group, and really keeping your, I suppose, finger to the pulse of what's happening within the school but also the broader school community. Which is slightly harder in a larger town like Orange. But I've done some work at smaller schools in very small towns, and you get much more of a feel for what's happening in the community. Because as you said before, everybody knows everybody and everybody knows what's happening in everybody's houses. Which adds an element of support because you know what to expect or what you can prepare for, but it also doesn't help you to not necessarily remain unbiased. You're going to make judgements because we're human. And depending where you've heard the news, that's gonna have an interaction on how you take that news in and perceive it, which adds a challenge to it. Because also you wouldn't have that in a community setting. You wouldn't have teachers telling you what's happening three doors down from their house over a cup of tea at lunchtime, because they're not there in a community setting.

Yasmine Yeah. And especially as a newly, still developing social worker, I imagine the desire to say yes and the difficulty saying no to things, come back later, would have been really difficult. How did you navigate that and how did you look after yourself in that space?

Jordan Funny enough, one of my earliest bosses gave me a button that says no in ten different ways.

Yasmine Oh, I have that at work.

Jordan Yeah, made sure I pressed it at least once a day to learn what the word was. Yeah. I don't think I've ever worked out how to say no. I say no but I give options, which makes me feel better, because I'm very much a yes person. And through my schooling and through university, it was always observations coming back from people in my life going, you've always got a lot on, how are you doing it or how are you managing it all? But I suppose I like being busy and I like being needed. Like, who doesn't? So saying no is so hard, but it's setting boundaries. And it's how do we say no that works for us? So when I say no to people, I like to say no and give options. So in my mind, I see it as saying no, but leaving the door open for a conversation down the road, maybe when I can say yes. So that might look like going, no, I can't do that right now, but I could do it later, or no, I can't help with that. But have you tried these people, or have you looked at this website, or have you asked these questions to work out whether or not you actually need to be here today? So it's always no with a but, with a door opening, with an option. I'm still working on the hard no. We haven't quite got there yet. That button's probably not working very well for me.

Yasmine I think that process though works best when there's a culture of trust. So if the people coming you for support trust your integrity, that you're not saying no just for the sake of it or because you don't want to work with them. It's no, I hear you, I get it, here is when I'll get to it, which is exactly what you're doing. You're not saying someone else is more important. You're saying I just have these other things to do and then I'll come back to you, and you're giving them a time frame. Which I think is really respectful.

Jordan Yeah. My current manager introduced me to a saying to have in my reflections when requests are made to me, is if I say yes to this, what am I saying no to? And that helps put things in perspective of prioritisation and triaging. If I say yes to continuing service with a client that maybe is at that point where they need external support or they're not really engaging or are at the end point but they're wanting to drag it out, if I keep saying yes to them, does that mean I'm saying no to these new referrals that maybe are needing me more right now? So it puts things into perspective, which helps with the saying no.

Yasmine Yeah, yeah, I wish I had that advice when I was a younger social worker, but I think you hear it when you're ready to hear it as well.

Jordan Yeah, and that's the other thing. I made a note coming into today of wanting to talk about self-care. Because we hear it a lot in our degrees, self care, self care, self care, and you're like, yeah, I'll eat lunch away from my desk and I'll go do these other things and look after myself. But it's not until you actually start working that you really realise the value of self care and what self care actually means. But I think it comes back to what you said about being ready to hear it. When we're students and when we're looking at starting our careers, we're full of energy, we're full of passion and we just want to go. And it's not until things start to fall into place that we realise that it's okay to stop and smell the roses every once in a while and that we really need to do that otherwise we've got to burn out.

Yasmine Here's a bit of a, I guess a left of centre question then, because I'm thinking back to when you said you wished you'd had time to really sink your teeth into some of these roles before moving on to the next one. How do you, in the moment, how do you do that without feeling like you've left a part of your potential behind?

Jordan It's hard. I particularly feel like, I'm in a leadership role right now that I sacrificed being a counsellor on the ground at schools in order to be a team leader. So I don't think I've

worked out yet how not to leave bits of myself behind whilst going on these other journeys. I know though that if I hadn't gone for my current job, if I hadn't tried, I would have sat with a lot more regret than I sit with now. So I think it's about asking ourselves not just what's important for us career-wise, but what's important for us personally. So for me, I always have navigated towards leadership naturally without sometimes even asking to be in leadership, whether it's playing sport or, you know, groups of friends, you know, who's going to be the person that organises the group. It's generally me. So I've always kind of naturally fallen into these roles. And I think personally, it would have had a bigger impact on me than it has professionally if I hadn't gone for the opportunity. And there's always a sense of if I don't try now, when will I get the next chance. Because it gets tinier at the top, there's less options. So if I don't go for this job right now and someone else gets it and it's one of my other peers and I roughly know their ages and how much longer they've got working, I've probably not got another opportunity at this particular organisation. Which I think is one of the challenges in social work, is how do we provide scope for practice development, even though there's not many places at the top to move into until other people retire or move on. I'm not entirely sure that answered your question though.

Yasmine No, it does, 100%. I'm just thinking, I'm a big believer in having opportunities, like you're saying, of acting up and being able to try before you buy, because so often the social workers that I speak to who are in leadership positions just found themselves in those positions because someone stepped back, they're the next logical person. Someone has said, hey, we think that you'd do a good job here. And they just haven't had the opportunity to test the waters, to, I did see that you've done additional training in leadership and management, which is wonderful, be able to get the background and the theory and the how do we do what we do and how do we make sure that we've got enough support to do what we do and not feel like we're missing out professionally because we're not on the ground. I think that's a big thing. I love leadership. I don't like management. So last week I was acting team leader and I was just so happy to hand the reins back this week, because I love my colleagues, but you see gaps, you see cracks, and you think, okay, this is not how I would do things. And that's why perhaps I wouldn't be the best leader because I like things done a certain way. So what are you finding as you're working more in the leadership space?

Jordan I definitely feel that there's a few things about it that I love. So going back to connection, which is something I always come back to as a social worker. Connection's why I do it, connection's what I want to get out of it, and connection's my philosophy, not only as a social worker but as a counsellor and as a person. So I love being able to connect with my colleagues, my peers, across all the different areas that they're working. But I suppose the biggest drawback is the restrictions because we're not at the top of the food chain. Even if we were, there's funding restrictions, there's time, time's always going to be an enemy. There's not enough time in the day to achieve everything we want to achieve. And then there's admin. And oh, it's probably the thing that gets it down the most, because it's like doing a case note, but it's a case note that carries a lot more weight to it because it's going to impact the worker and then their client if they've brought an issue to me. Or it's going to have other flow and effects to other things which ultimately will affect clients. So there's a lot of weight to that admin stuff. And I think it takes away from that leadership stuff because the admin, I feel, sits under that management banner. It's that I have to do it in order to lead, but really I just want to be over here, helping people and walking alongside them. But no, I've got to go over here and look at the budget and I've got to look at the cracks and I've got to work out, do we have enough money and time to fill in some of those cracks? Oh, but wait, I need to go back over here because this person's experiencing compassion fatigue. How do I sit with them? How do I support them? And yeah, it's that divide across the two that can be very tricky to manage.

Yasmine Yeah. Have you managed to keep a caseload while you're doing the leadership?

Jordan I did for the first 12 months. However, after 12 months I gave up my caseload for balance for myself. My professional self hates that I gave it up, because I love counselling, particularly school counselling, but I needed to give it up so that I didn't burn out. Because it was that, coming back to that if I say yes to this, what am I saying no to? If I kept saying yes to a caseload, I was saying no to supporting the social workers that were under me and the social workers that I want to achieve greatness. So how do I support them to achieve greatness if I'm not even there to help them because I'm too busy with my own caseload? So I had to give it up ultimately. I think you can find balance depending on the job and what supports they're going to offer in finding balance. I know there's a lot of people who advocate for keeping a caseload because it keeps your skills fresh, it keeps you on the ground and seeing what's happening there, but at the same time at what cost does that come to? And for me it was my burnout. And it was pulling me away from the people that I really need to put first.

Yasmine Yeah. And what is your team makeup? It sounds like you've got some social workers, but maybe other professionals?

Jordan Social workers, counsellors and psychologists.

Yasmine And you're providing supervision to them as well, yeah?

Jordan I do. So whilst I gave up my direct counselling caseload, I've picked up clinical supervision. So I provide my team with clinical supervision and then I'm trying to get my own practice of clinical supervision up and running as well, because I am finding it's professional counselling in a sense, and it's filling my bucket of wanting to help people and do counselling without also taking away the energy I have to be a team leader as well. So it's filling that gap at the moment, and it might be somewhere that I go more into in the future. Right now I'm just trying to find my current balance with the jobs that I've got. But it's been a nice job to have there so I don't feel like I've abandoned counselling altogether.

Yasmine Yeah. How do you find then the approach might be different if you're supervising counsellors or psychologists as opposed to social workers?

Jordan Oh, I actually don't think I approach them differently. I go in as me, and I'm very open that I'm a social worker that's got case management experience and counselling experience, but ultimately I am a social worker and this is my identity as a social worker. And then I connect with that person as who they are. So it doesn't matter if they're a psychologist or a counsellor or another social worker, they're going to come in with their needs and it's my job as the clinical supervisor at that point to work out what those needs are with them and how I can assist in filling that gap. And sometimes I'm gonna be the right person and sometimes maybe they're gonna be looking for something that I can't provide. And that's okay, because that's the same in counselling. We're not always gonna click with the first counsellor or therapist whose door we walk into. Even though they might be amazing, we need to find that person we connect to, that we click with. So I don't know if I necessarily have any differences. I suppose it's how I'm authentic to me. And how do I share that when I connect with the person that's coming in for supervision?

Yasmine Yeah, you mentioned multiple jobs. So you've got you've got the school, you've got the leadership. You're also working at a university, from what I could see. And you're also

mentoring through the AASW. Tell me a little about those roles and then help me try to understand how you managed to do everything.

Jordan Yeah, so OK, so. You sent me through a question which I think will answer this perfectly, which is where are you currently working and what does a typical day look like? And I think ...

Yasmine There is no typical day.

Jordan There is no typical day, but Tuesday to Thursday, so three days a week, I work as a team leader. So a typical day there is lots of meetings, whether it's clinical supervision, check ins, leadership meetings, a lot of emails, and it's supporting counsellors through managing crises in their school communities or their own crises, whether it's compassion fatigue or something else. Mondays, Fridays and weekends is where I set my own schedule. Well, I'm attempting to set my own schedule. It's always a work in progress, but I think I've got it fairly sorted out. So I spend a little bit of time in the mornings, for an hour or two, looking at what I want to do in my own practice. So whether that's doing up some new posters on Canva that I then share on LinkedIn. I'm looking at trying to roll out a short series of videos called 60 Seconds with Jordan, where I talk about small elements of counselling or social work, whether it's like a stress bucket or the importance of clinical supervision. So I've got those ideas brewing in my head, but then I'm also enjoying the flexibility of working casually for a uni, where I do group supervision as well as supervision for students on their counselling placements. And I mark a lot of papers. So I just spent the last days marking 24 essays, and I have two weeks off before the next lot of 24 essays come in. And it's been invigorating for my passion for social work because it's taken me back to when I was a student, and it's making me recall the things that I was learning when I was a student and how they work into practice, whilst was also giving me a chance to share what I've learnt on my journey. And I found that I'm quite passionate about the work I do for the uni, although it is a lot of reading at times.

Yasmine Do the staff that you're supporting have the opportunity to supervise students, either social work or community services?

Jordan We've tried. So in the three years that I've been a part of the team, we've been able to have two students, both social workers, come on board for placements, one of which that I supervised before I became team leader. The really tricky thing is timing, but also location. So going back to right time, right place, right people. Because the program works in schools, we've really got to make sure that we're setting up the school for success, but also the student coming in for success as well. And that's been the hardest thing, because a lot of our staff are part-time or they're transitioning in and out. So there's a bit of turnover as well, which can make it hard to set up a placement, particularly for social work when it's 500 hours. That's a long time to try to provide stability for them, and that's something they really seek to do, because the leadership team at the moment is all made up of social workers. So we've all had our own placement experiences and we really wanna make sure that if we're offering placement, it's going to be a positive for the student that comes on board, but also for the school so that they're willing to continue to do it as well.

Yasmine Yeah, yeah, it's hard because you wanna demonstrate that it is possible and that the students are having good outcomes.

Jordan Yeah, the student that I supervised, oh, would have been over 12 months ago, she's coming to the conclusion of her second placement, which she did in aged care. And she's going on to do her honours, and we've remained in touch, and it was a really wholesome

experience. And I loved having a student there because it also invigorated my practice at that point. When I was at the rehab we didn't have social work students, but we had student paramedics coming in to do their mental health component. but it was a shorter placement. So I think it was like three weeks. It was really easy to make sure that for those three weeks we had these students coming in, that we were offering a positive experience and that it was beneficial for everybody. And it was stable as well. But I loved teaching, I suppose, which is where I admit that teaching's always been my backup plan. All else fails, I will go with teaching.

Yasmine Yeah, I was actually gonna ask, what does that look like? Do you think once, you know, once you feel like you've achieved everything you can here, would you stay linked in with the university, maybe look at lecturing, that sort of thing, or even research, since you have that background?

Jordan Yeah, I think so. I'd love to come on board as a lecturer if I was given that opportunity. I've also sat there and wondered if I want to go as far as to do a PhD in social work. I had a psychologist that I was seeing a couple of years ago challenge if I was doing it for the right reasons. I might have led the discussion with, I'm doing it so I can be called doctor. They didn't think that was a good enough reason. I suppose what's stopping me doing a PhD or going into research, is I want to find a topic that motivates me to go back to doing it, particularly considering the cost financially and time wise. I've just paid off my HECS and it's amazing to be debt free, and I'm not sure I'm ready to go back to that yet. I also think I want to spend some time sitting with where I currently am and actually stopping for once and breathing here right now, because I've got a lot of great opportunities right now that I can explore and go down different paths. But I think it will always be there. Maybe come ask me in 10 years time.

Yasmine Yeah. Well, I hope I'm still doing the podcast in 10 years time.

Jordan Oh, that would be awesome.

Yasmine So what do you think you find most enjoyable? What's going to keep you in this role, do you reckon? You mentioned there are a bunch of different opportunities that could be available to you.

Jordan Yeah, so I think what keeps me working as a social worker is connection. So I think as long as I'm working in a place that provides me with the ability to connect with a diverse range of people on different levels, I will keep doing social work, because that fills my cup. Sharing stories and laughing, crying together, that kind of stuff makes me feel alive and human. And I feel like we're in a society now where we're so fast paced that we've got really superficial connections and we don't take the time to sit with other people. And I now look at the teenagers coming through the service that I've been involved with, they can have hours of conversation by a social media with a person all night, you know, these really deep and meaningful conversations where they're spilling their heart out completely with no hidden areas, and yet can't meet with that person the next day and say hi. And for me, that worries me, because it's not a real connection then. So I love meeting with people and having that actual connection. And that's what's going to keep me working in social work, I think for a very long time. Because I don't know if you can necessarily get that anywhere else. Like, I'm thinking jobs that involve numbers, like being an accountant or working at a bank, I just don't think it's the same.

Yasmine Yeah. I mean, you have customers, I guess that's a different interaction altogether.

Jordan Yeah, I'm seeing people generally at their worst day, or what they think is their worst day at that point in time, or when they're feeling low or they're feeling vulnerable, fragile, they're raw at that point. There's not a lot of masking generally happening. And for me, it's a privilege to be able to sit with someone at that point in time and just be present for them. And for me, that's social work.

Yasmine Yeah. What's the process been for you in terms of trying to set up your own business, your own practice? Have you had any mentors that are guiding you through that process or are you just like, I'm gonna figure this out?

Jordan A little bit of both. So there's been a little bit of figuring it out, but I have enlisted a social work coach who, she's also in private practice and does clinical supervision as well as a few other social work things. But she's been really instrumental in helping ground me a little bit when my ideas get a little bit out there, and going through some of the really mundane stuff like getting an ABN and, you know, setting up a bank account and looking at, you know, invoicing platforms that we could use. Some of that stuff that when you're thinking big picture, you kind of forget. So it's been really helpful to have a social work coach doing all of that. So thank you, Jasmine. It's just been amazing. And I think that speaks to the broader level thing, whether you're going into your own business or you're starting out as a social worker, having a coach or a mentor or a clinical supervisor is just essential to really help keep you grounded, but also walk beside you through those struggles that you're gonna come across. Because it's not easy. Nothing in life that's worth doing, I think, is easy, though. But we shouldn't be doing it alone, particularly as new to the field or new to a particular area. Because there are people out there that we can connect to and work with that are gonna help us and make it a bit easier, which might just make it a little bit more successful for us.

Yasmine I guess that's the biggest red flag I can see for you, necessarily, given that connection is so important to you. If you were to move out of a situation where you were doing multiple things at once into solely private practice, the potential is there that you've isolated yourself from the people that you need to build that support and build that network. But I'm sure you'll find a way around that when the time comes.

Jordan Yeah, I think so. I don't know if I'd ever go 100% private practice, which I think will protect me a little bit. So I think you're right, it is a red flag. And as a person that I will admit, I'm introverted in my personal life, having connection at work is really important, not just for being a social worker but for me as well as a person. I like having the protection of an organisation, of colleagues, of knowing that when I go into work, someone will miss me if I don't walk through the door and will be like, oh, where's Jordan? Is she okay? I don't know if I'll ever go fully into private practice because of that. I also think, I think you're right, I think I'd probably get not necessarily a lack of connection, but I think I'd get bored at one type of connection. Because at the moment I've got connection with peers, I've got connections with students, I've got connection in multiple different areas which means that my cup of connection is being filled through different pathways, which keeps me fresh, which keeps me happy, I suppose.

Yasmine Yeah, it's like a rainbow Slurpee. I used to not want one flavour. I just mixed them all up. It's good fun.

Jordan Exactly. And we'll always have a different flavour every now and then that we like that little bit more. We'll try to leave for last, but we will need all those flavors in order to be able to appreciate that flavour.

Yasmine Yeah. Do you think you would ever do the accredited mental health social work registration? Is that something in your future?

Jordan Ooh, that's, I want to say that's a loaded question because I think it's something that's, a lot of emphasis is put on. And a lot of jobs out there now have that restriction of wanting accredited mental health social workers. For me, it's a no. So I had an opportunity to kind of go work with this other organisation, but their kind of requirement was being accredited as a mental health social worker. So you could do Medicare, because it opens up the client pool, but it's extra money, it's extra time. And I'm not entirely sure that my path has needed me to go down that route. And I don't know if my current path requires that either. I mean, for the first time ever, I'm an accredited social worker. So for the first time since I registered with the AASW I finally imported into the system enough hours. I actually went over and above on some of those hours. I was like, damn, can I like save them for the next year? But no, you can't. So I'm happy that I've done that and I wish I'd maybe done that a bit earlier because I think it's just that level of going, yes, I'm a social worker, but I'm a social worker that's committed to ongoing professional development, which I think is really important. But I'm a kind of a no vote for wanting to do the mental health accreditation, and the cost and the time is a really big factor, particularly when considering the average wages of social workers, the current cost of living crisis, the amount it already costs to be registered with the AASW. And I wonder if it's going to restrict us and not help us grow as a profession.

Yasmine That's a really significant example of having said no. I'm just gonna point out, in a good way, because you've thought long and hard and said, this isn't for me, at least not right now. So, I'm really glad to hear it. Social work in schools is in the grand scheme of things a relatively new concept and program. Do you know whether there's been much research into the impact of social work in schools and the support and effects that's had?

Jordan I'll be honest, I'm probably not up to date with the research around schools and social work specifically. I think it's unfortunate that social workers have been restricted or kept out of schools for as long as we have, because we can fill a gap in service that is required by local communities. There's not just a gap that social work can fill, I think we need to do more around getting OTs into schools as well, being more holistic in our approach. You know, if you think of a hospital and the allied services there, you've got social work, physio, OT. You've got a variety of other professionals all working together on a whole person to help that whole person. Yeah, I feel like schools, which is a growing space for us to really do work in, still isn't ready for that level of commitment yet for helping out our students. I still think it's unfortunate that if I wanted to work in the public school system right now, I wouldn't be able to, at least not doing the same thing I'm doing right now at a Catholic school. And I think looking at the team that I worked with and the fact that we've got psychs, counsellors and social workers, our position descriptions are the same, but we bring different things to the job, which we share with each other in our team meetings and our group supervisions. And then we take that back and it's shared with our school communities, where if we were only looking for a particular type of social worker or a psychologist, I think we would be missing out on a wealth of knowledge, but also a large part of our workforce would disappear. Particularly when you think of the reasons why I said no to becoming a mental health accredited social worker, if they can't get the job because they don't have that, how are they ever going to get that accreditation as well? So I think it's definitely an area to watch and get involved with. If you're interested in working with young people, how do we do more in schools? Because that's where the kids are and it takes stress off families, because they don't have to try and bring the kids to you. Which helps as well.

Yasmine Yeah. Are there any programs or projects that you get to work on within the school?

Jordan Yes, so depending on the school community, there might be certain projects or certain directions we go down more with the school. So some schools really push social skills type projects and developments. So they're, some are more looking at, say, facilitating the Love Bites program that NAPCAN does, and how do we really bring in consent to the conversation? How do we bring in safe relationships, not just romantically, but with our friendships, and particularly that online space that's so big these days. I did do some work on a transitional program to help year sixes into year sevens. My big goal at that point was to try and incorporate a transition program for every year, based on the fact that change is the only constant in the world. So if we can better prep children to manage change, then they're going to be better prepped to manage change throughout their whole lives. Which I think would reduce a lot of stress and would reduce a lot of other things that, you know, take away from our wellbeing and health as well. So there is some scope for that. I suppose the hard thing is it comes back to time and it comes back to if I say yes to this, what am I saying no to? And our schools are busy. We have a lot of students that are needing support or a lot of families that are needing support. And as it is, I'm not sure that we've been able to achieve what we really want to achieve, which is every kid being able to see a counsellor. Because if you've got a school of a thousand students and only two counsellors, it's just not going to happen.

Yasmine Yeah. If anyone wanted to know more about the type of social work that you do or have done, so it could be the rehab stuff, it could be the school social work, are there any resources that you'd recommend. Or media even, anything accessible?

Jordan Yeah, so I would definitely recommend looking at places like NAPCAN, in and around their Love Bites programs. If you're interested in doing some stuff with young people, whether or not you've got a job in an organisation that works with them already, you can get trained up as facilitators in programs like Love Bites, which means you can start to build connections and networks with people in the local community. Like, an ideal Love Bites facilitation will have some people from each organisation in the community. So a couple from Headspace, if you're lucky a person from the local police force, from other organisations, and it brings everybody together which I think can be really helpful for all of our communities if we work together. Doing other programs as well that can be potentially beneficial, so I always recommend doing lifelines DV Alert. That's one that I say that every social worker should do, particularly with the growing, I suppose, media attention on domestic and family violence. I think we need to make sure we're ticking that box for ourselves so that we're being aware of it, because it's everywhere. So even like I work with students right now, those students are going home to families. Or those students are beginning to have relationships. So how can we be aware of what's happening and how can we be preventative and supportive at the same time? When it comes to training and stuff, I always recommend Emerging Minds and Orygen. So they offer free online modules. Origin's probably more towards your teens and adolescents, Emerging Minds, your children and families, but they're a really great place to start. They're simple, they're easy to go through, but really informative. And it can start pointing you in the right direction. So I always recommend them to new staff when I'm onboarding or to new clients in clinical supervision, particularly if they're wanting to do more with young people.

Yasmine Yeah. A couple of episodes ago I was chatting with one of the other lovely social workers about media and representations of social workers in media. And she was talking about things like Lilo and Stitch and some really hilarious things. I've just kind of remembered, have you seen the movie, Precious? It was actually a book before it was a movie.

Jordan I haven't seen the movie, but I've seen the trailer.

Yasmine Okay, so there's a social worker played by Mariah Carey, of all people. And if you didn't know it was her, you probably wouldn't know it was her, because no makeup, no anything, just completely natural. And she does just such an incredible job, but she's the school social worker. So perhaps, you know, check it out. It's, it's super interesting just from a, I mean, it's a really horrible, sad story about how this poor student comes to see the social worker and then the social worker feeling so incredibly helpless in how do I break down the systems of inequity that's led to this person's journey and their opportunities going forward? But I'm wondering if there's any other sort of representation of social work that you think of when you do your work, or things that get it really wrong or things that get it right?

Jordan There's a movie with Woody Harrelson as a teacher. So he's not a social worker, he's a teacher and there's a student and she's played by, I want to say her name is Hailee Steinfeld, so she was in Pitch Perfect, one of the later movies. So what I really loved in that movie is he connected with her. He didn't just put her in a box as a student that wasn't maybe committing in class, or wasn't trying her hardest, and he connected with her story. I mean, there was some personal boundaries being crossed, I'm fairly sure she came to his house, which I would not recommend as an actual social worker. But that movie stands out for me because of the connection and actually seeing her as a person at that point and not going, oh, she's just a teenager and she's not trying hard. This is where I admit I tend to stay away from movies or shows that show a lot of social work or stuff that I'm sitting with, because for me when I'm watching something I almost want it to be a break from what I'm living. In saying that, I love watching medical shows, and they never show social work enough. Yeah. So I'm currently binge watching The Resident and it's making me never want to go to hospital again, because I'm really questioning some ethics. But there's so many opportunities. I was like, why didn't you get the social worker? Like he or she could have sat and connected with that patient at that point in time. We could have actually had some informed consent. We could have maybe got them out of hospital quicker because of supports in the community. So I wanna say to medical shows, do better. Actually put social work and actually put positive social work on the spotlight because we're such a big part of people's recoveries. And same with shows that are potentially going to have schools and stuff, like counsellors and career advisors, which is more of an American version, we're such a big instrumental part of helping students. Because teachers are busy, teachers are tired. And you know, if we can take that load a little bit and we can be the person to connect, we're going to make a big difference, not only for our students, but for our teachers as well.

Yasmine That's really important to shout that out. I'm even thinking something like Scrubs that was supposed to be such an accurate representation of medical journeys had one social worker that I can remember, and she was a love interest. It wasn't about what the social worker was doing, it was just she's a hot gal. Like well, I mean, aren't we all? But that's not what we're here to do, you know.

Jordan I think that's right, challenging that stereotype that social work isn't some soft person in the hospital that's just going to come in and make people smile. We do serious work and we're not just women, and we're not just love interests, we're more. We're complex human beings as well with our own stories that deserve to be told. We've had enough of surgeons, turn the lens on social workers and physios and OTs and dietitians, and everybody else that helps the hospital run.

Yasmine Yep, 100%. Jordan, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to make mention? I'm aware of time and don't want to keep you too long, but is there anything else that you wanted to say about your experience or social work in general?

Jordan Yeah, I think when I look back at my experience, it's diverse. I started in case management and I moved into aged care assessing. And then, you know, I did my placements, I shifted to a new town and I did work in mental health and then drug and alcohol, and now in the education system. I feel like sometimes there's this push to pick one thing and stay there. And I want to tell people it's okay to shift. And I've shifted across, I've shifted diagonal, and my skills have been transferable. And if you're a social worker listening to the podcast and you're experiencing burnout and compassion fatigue, sometimes we question whether or not we need to stay in the profession. And then sometimes guilt keeps us here because we know we've done, you know, a uni degree, we've got a HECS debt because of it, but our skills are transferable. And I've actually yet to work in a job where I've had the title of social worker. So I think it's okay if we do other things, because we're still going to take our social work identity with us. And I think that's the biggest thing, is that it's such a diverse identity, it's such a diverse community to be a part of, but we just need to break some of those stereotypes down about what social work actually is. And a stereotype we haven't talked about is the fact that in Australia we think of DCJ when we talk about social workers, and child protection and that intergenerational trauma. But we're so much more than that. So don't feel like you have to pick hospital social work and stay in hospital social work or pick drug and alcohol and stay in drug and alcohol. So I feel like I've done more drug and alcohol counseling working at a school with teenagers than I have when I was working in the community as drug and alcohol, where the predominant counseling I was doing was trauma. So, you know, be open, be diverse and have fun with it.

Yasmine Yeah, I think you're absolutely right. Only a third of my roles have been a nominated social work role. So it just speaks to the diversity, as you were saying, the capacity to find a gap in a service or in a system and say, hey, we have this really strong foundation. Here's how we translate that support. So as you said, you've taken that dream that you had of helping other people, and university was difficult for you because it wasn't speaking to your values. It wasn't what you were really passionate about and interested in, in terms of putting people in boxes instead of putting people first. So I think it's great that you had lots of experience with things like that restorative justice research that you were able to do. That's an excellent skill to have. The community-based alcohol and other drugs support was great as well, but it's okay to shift. It's okay to keep moving forward and keep building your ability and keep expanding your toolbox, I guess. I think what's also important about what you were saying is the need to set boundaries. And I think as your career progresses, that will change as well. Your boundaries will shift and it will be based on whatever the priority is for you at the time. But as you said, it's not saying no necessarily, it's saying not right now or here are some options, come back.

Jordan Yeah.

Yasmine You've been able to develop your supervision skills and you said your focus is on seeing the person and their needs rather than seeing the professional or the counsellor or the psychologist that's in front of you. And now you're taking it even further and thinking outside the box and going, okay, how do I educate the community? How do I use different kinds of media to be able to increase people's awareness of an issue or to be able to help someone understand a concept. And yeah, I think all that's wonderful. The other thing that I guess I just want to hit home is when you were talking about through your job application processes, it's really hard and it's soul destroying sometimes to be said, no, you're not the right person or it's not the right time,

but you've sought feedback. So you've gone to the person and said, thank you very much, but can I get some feedback or is there something I can improve on? Which, you know, it takes guts and it takes a lot of energy to do, but ultimately it's helped you to understand this is something that is a possibility for me. I just need little bit more under my belt or a little bit more confidence or I need to pitch it in a certain way based on what they're looking for. So that's really good advice.

Jordan Yeah, and that's the advice that I would give and give freely, that ask for feedback. Because the worst case the person's going to say no and they're not going to give you any feedback, and you've got the same amount of information you had before you asked the question. But you could ask that question and they could provide you with feedback that could change the course that you're on, whether it's going and getting experience somewhere specific, or is it going and practicing a certain skill that you can utilise during interviews? Because maybe you're super nervous and you weren't able to get out clearly what you were trying to say. So do you go and practice how to do that? This is where I admit I study for job interviews like they're an exam. So I learn everything I can about the organisation, about the job, and I have cheat sheets, and I walk in with a folder. And I have questions that I wanna ask as well. Cause remember you're also interviewing them, too. So if you go in, even if they offer you the job but you weren't feeling like all the boxes were ticked, that's where you've got to set a boundary for yourself. Cause for you to do your best work, you've got to be somewhere where you feel safe as well. But don't be afraid to ask for feedback. And as someone that now interviews people for jobs, I love it when I get asked, what's some feedback. Because I can go, cool, we really liked this. However, we need to strengthen this area. Here are some options, these are our suggestions. You know, come back when you've been able to do that and then maybe it will be a different story. Maybe it will be the right time for us. Or maybe it will put you in a direction that takes you somewhere completely different. Like for me, it pushed me into drug and alcohol, a field I never thought I'd work in, I wouldn't like, and I loved it. And I could go back to drug and alcohol tomorrow and be happy. And that only happened because I was told no, you need to get more experience, look at other things. And I went and did that and I had an amazing time and I've got amazing skills to carry with me.

Yasmine I think also coming back to your conversation around burnout and looking after yourself and culture, that's the sort of question I guess you could ask in a job interview of, do people tend to stay beyond the time that they're supposed to? Do they take work home? What is the culture? What is the expectation? Because I feel like you can very quickly gauge from how a person reacts to that question as to what kind of culture or workplace it is.

Jordan Yeah, and you definitely wanna read between the lines as well, because obviously everyone's putting their best foot forward on interview day, organisation and interviewee alike. So always look for that initial reaction, like you said. But also just have a look at the general vibe. Like, what are the people in the room, what vibe were they giving off to you? When you walk into that space, if it's their office building, does it walk in and feel like home? And by home I mean, do we walk in, does it feel comfortable and safe? And for me, light and bright. Or does it feel dirty and old, or something else, and you're like, oh, I don't know if it's the right fit.

Yasmine Clinical.

Jordan Clinical as well, you know, is it very clean and very white, because that's probably not an ideal thing either. And it's okay to say no to opportunities and keep waiting for the next one, because the next one might be more right as well. But I think that's also pressure as a newer social worker, is staying where you are and waiting for the right opportunity. There was a

person I worked with for a very brief period of time who was studying social work and I had just graduated, and she couldn't believe I was staying in the job where I was in. But I was like right now I've got other things that I'm balancing and managing. I just moved towns and I was okay staying at the level I was at, but she couldn't believe that I would do that as a qualified social worker. I'm like yeah, but the right time, the right place and the right opportunity will come along. And it did two months later.

Yasmine Wow. I think also talk to other social workers. Don't just assume this is what it's gonna be like.

Jordan Yeah, yeah, reach out, talk to different social workers. Join social work networks. There's one here in Bathurst that has a bunch of different social workers from hospital, from community organisations, doing very different work. And I think that offers an opportunity to be able to see what social work can look like in different contexts. Because doing two placements isn't going to give you a really broad understanding of social work.

Yasmine Yeah, such good advice. Thank you so much, Jordan, for meeting with me today. I've loved having a chat with you and hearing about your experience. So yeah, just can't thank you enough for your time. And I look forward to seeing where it takes you next.

Jordan No worries. Thank you so much for having me and thank you for reaching out. It was a new challenge and I'm glad I said yes, because I've had an amazing afternoon just chatting with you.

Yasmine Thank you.

Thanks for joining me this week. If you would like to continue this discussion or ask anything of either myself or Jordan, 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 Dr Josie McSkimming, who has practised in a wide range of settings for over 40 years, including hospital social work, inter-country adoption, post-adoption services, drug and alcohol treatment, individual and couples therapy and adult mental health. In addition to her private practice providing therapy and clinical supervision, Josie is an adjunct lecturer at the University of NSW and the author of two books, 'Leaving Christian Fundamentalism and the Reconstruction of Identity' and 'Gutsy Girls', a memoir to be released early 2025.

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