

Episode 98: Kristin

Hi and welcome to Social Work Spotlight, where I showcase different areas of the profession each episode. I'm your host, Yasmine McKee-Wright, and today's guest is Kristin, a qualified social worker with 17 years of experience in youth justice, child protection and the family court. Kristin qualified in Australia but has lived and worked in the UK since 2012. Now alongside her social work role, Kristin supports other overseas social workers making the move to the UK.

Yasmine Thank you, Kristin, for coming onto the podcast and having a chat with me about your social work so far.

Kristin Thank you, it's great to be here.

Yasmine Can I first ask when you started as a social worker and what brought you to the profession?

Kristin Yep, so I went straight from school to uni to study social work. I was 17 when I picked my uni preferences. Didn't really know what a social worker did, but I had a really strong sense of social justice, even at that age, and I knew I wanted to help people. So I picked social work and I graduated in 2006. Yeah, so I've started doing social work for a while now. And I initially started working in like an NGO with child safety, child protection clients, and I really, really loved it. But I think, you know, I was 21 at the time and it was really difficult to work with parents who had children involved in the child protection system. You know, there was lots of questions around how old I was, whether I had children, whether I really understood what it was like. So I think that experience kind of made me naturally gravitate towards working with young people. And then I think I spent most of my time working with kind of children and young people.

Yasmine Yeah. And did you have any good mentors in that first role, that kind of helped you through that process?

Kristin Yeah, I had some really great colleagues. So I actually started with that service as a youth worker while I was studying. And then I did my final placement there. And so I kind of went from youth work into more of an, it was like an assessment intervention team. So doing kind of a bit more of a therapeutic role, and definitely had some really amazing colleagues who I'm still really good friends with, who yeah, gave me some support and advice. But I think it just wasn't quite the right fit for me. So I went from youth work into that, and then I moved, so then I kind of thought, I want to work with young people, you know, what else is there? So I went into youth justice. And I then spent the next six years working in youth justice in Queensland. So I, I think I initially found the transition to working in like a non-voluntary organisation quite difficult. Yeah. It took a bit to kind of get my head around that and having gone from working with young people who really wanted to see me, to were there because the court said they had to be, was a little bit difficult. But I mean, I really enjoyed it. I stayed for six years and I think I quite liked the kind of processes and that you really got a chance to build a relationship with these young people because they had to come and see you every week. And eventually you'd be able to build that relationship and build some trust and rapport with them.

Yasmine And were these kids who were still incarcerated or still in sort of systems, or they'd been released to community and this was part of the program of helping them transition back into society?

Kristin It was all of that. So they were young people who had committed an offense and been given a court order to come and see us, maybe given some community service. There were young people who were in custody, serving custodial sentences, maybe on remand, or they had been released from custody. So I guess, yeah, a kind of wide range and working with, at that time, the Queensland system was only up to 17 and then they transitioned to the adult system at 18, but working with boys and girls who could be incarcerated anywhere across the state.

Yasmine Yeah. But I guess the work that you did would have been quite important in terms of then transitioning them to the adult system, right?

Kristin Yeah, absolutely. And I think it was always quite a difficult transition for them, because the adult system was very, very different and much less kind of nurturing than the youth system. We were more flexible. We'd take into account their ages a lot more. So it was quite a lot of work to try and prepare them if we knew that they were going to be transitioning over, into what the expectations would be as an adult.

Yasmine You said the positionality in child protection was hard in terms of a lot of challenging questions and that sort of difficulty, but then you're so close in age to the people who you were supporting in the justice system. Was that hard?

Kristin Yeah, I think it had pros and cons. So when I first started, there were some young people who had, you know, they got their orders quite close to their 17th birthday and so they were still involved in the youth system, even though they were like 18 or 19 and, you know, by this point, I think it was probably 22. So that was a little bit crazy, and I thought we could have been at high school together, you know. We weren't, but we could have been. Yeah. But I think it also, it did really help with building a rapport. And where I think, although I didn't, you know, hadn't had the same experiences as them and necessarily faced the same challenges, they did see me as, as being able to understand more. You know, I could remember what it was like to be their age. Whereas, you know, if they looked at someone who was, you know 30, you know, so old in their eyes and couldn't relate to.

Yasmine And then what was the decision process around moving overseas from there?

Kristin When I was studying social work, I remember someone talking to us about doing social work in London, and kind of there were programs at that time set up to help people if they wanted to move to the UK to be a social worker. By the time I'd graduated, those programs kind of weren't around anymore, and just circumstances meant that I had commitments in Australia. So I think things changed for me for my personal life, and I decided, I remember saying I'm going to move to London in six months. And my family was a bit like, okay. And then I did, six months later I was on a flight to London. I didn't have anyone there. I didn't have a job. I didn't have anywhere to live. I'd kind of booked some temporary accommodation, but I just really didn't want to have regrets. And I thought, you know, worst case scenario, it doesn't work out. I come back, you know, in a few months and I'm like, remember that time I, you know, I thought I could live in London. But at least I would know I tried.

Yasmine Yeah. Okay. So did you have something lined up in terms of work, or you just kind of got over there and thought I'll start applying once I get here?

Kristin So, so I went on the, they call it a youth mobility visa. So it's like the working holiday visa. And so you didn't have to have a job lined up. We just had to have a certain amount of money saved. And in the UK recruitment agencies play quite a big role in social work recruitment, which was something that I wasn't familiar with and it felt quite strange and took a bit to get my head around, I think. So I had been in touch with the recruitment agency about doing some like local or temporary work, but I couldn't apply for jobs until I got to the UK because they needed to do my criminal history check and I needed a UK address to do that. So it meant, although I'd started those conversations, I couldn't actually start work yet. So I'd booked some travel when I first got to the UK. Thought I'll get some paperwork stuff done, then I set off on some travel. Yeah, but I didn't have anything lined up yet.

Yasmine It's kind of terrifying, isn't it? I would be, you know, just having the security of something to come back to, but I guess you kind of have to put it out of your head and go, I'm just going to enjoy this holiday and then I'll worry about it later.

Kristin Yeah, and I think because I'd, so I'd taken unpaid leave from my job in youth justice, so I kind of knew I had a bit of a safety there. I know that I could always come home, I hadn't sold my car, like I think I'd gone over knowing I had this safety net around me that I could come back quite easily. And I knew that there was lots of social work jobs. I guess it was just about being in a position to be able to actually apply for them. And I mean, when I, I look back, I think, I can't believe I did that. Like I went there with no kind of network or anything in place, but you know, it worked out, it was tough. It was really, really tough, particularly in the beginning. And I remember someone telling me, you just have to give it at least six months. It's going to be really hard at first, but if you can get through the first six months, it'll get better. And, you know, there were definitely times early on where I was like, what have I done? Why am I here? But it, you know, I gave it six months, and just as I'd been told, and it definitely got better.

Yasmine And what was the first role out in London?

Kristin So I went into youth justice. So that was what I was familiar with. And I thought, it's fine, I can kind of hit the ground running. I know how to do this. And I started working in a youth justice service in South London. And it was like a whole different world. So it was a part of London where they were quite significant gang issues, lots of serious youth violence between young people, just things I hadn't been exposed to in kind of small town Queensland. And there was like a metal detector in our office, there was security, there was, you know, reception was behind glass. And I remember just thinking, what are these kids going to be like? And then when I started working with them, actually, they were the same. The way that I talked to them and the way that I worked with them, you know, it was the same. They just, you know, had other issues that I guess they were facing in their community. But it was definitely a steep learning. And yeah, the young people, lots of different slang. I remember thinking, I can't understand anything these kids are saying. I don't know what all these terms mean. Felt really out of touch, but I also use that to my advantage. So I would kind of play the like naïve Australian card and be like, I don't really understand how gangs work. Can you just, can you tell me about how that works and why this happens? And they'd be like, right, so what happens is, yeah. And I think being Australian as well, it wasn't such an issue around class issues as there often can be in the UK. So then no kid ever thought that I was posh because my Australian accent just helped me to sound a lot more, I guess, relatable or something.

Yasmine And was it a permanent role or a locum contract?

Kristin So that was a locum contract. So it was most, locum contracts start off as a three month contract. So it was three months, but they kept extending it. I think I was there for about 18 months. And the only reason that I left that role is because by that point, I decided I wanted to stay longer and my two year visa didn't have long left. And I needed to find a permanent job that would provide me with sponsorship. So, you know, I was quite fortunate because social workers are considered a skill shortage. So it was a lot easier for me to get sponsorship than it would have been if I wasn't a social worker. So then I moved into another youth justice role and I stayed there, I think, for another six years or something. And I kind of left for a little while and did some frontline child protection and then came back to youth justice. And I stayed in that role until 2020 when I decided to make a move into the family court system, which is where I am still working at the moment.

Yasmine Wow. So at that point, were you like a permanent resident in the UK? How does that all work?

Kristin Yeah, so you have to be on the same visa type to kind of get your permanent residency, which they call indefinite leave to remain. So when I changed to being sponsored, my visa type changed. So then my five years started from there. So I guess I was on visas for seven years. Then I got my permanent residency and then I applied for citizenship. And I remember it was actually still during kind of COVID times that I got my British citizenship. And so instead of going to the town hall and having a ceremony and you kind of get dressed up, there's like a room full of people, I did mine via Teams and I was like on a work call, cancelled that. joined to my citizenship ceremony, they said congratulations, you're now a British citizen. I was like, thank you. And then I just continued on with work on the same kind of laptop that I'd been doing my citizenship ceremony on.

Yasmine Okay, so you had sort of a working holiday visa which transitioned into more of a permanent visa that was sponsored by the employer at the time. And then you were eligible to apply for that more permanent, you don't have to go anywhere, you can then be eligible for citizenship. So there's quite a process to it. Did you have to leave the country during those periods?

Kristin It was only in between the working holiday visa and the sponsorship visa. So I had to leave. It was all very kind of tight timeframes. I think I got the permanent job offer like three days before my visa expired or something. It was, so I'd already booked a flight out of the UK knowing that I didn't want to overstay on that visa. And then hadn't yet booked a flight back to Australia because I wanted to make sure I got that job to know if I had to pack up my flat. So it was all a bit complicated.

Yasmine Sell the car. Yeah.

Kristin Then I had to get back to Australia and yeah, apply for the next visa. But since then I was able to do anything, any extensions or changes within the UK.

Yasmine Yeah. Amazing. And there were no restrictions then on having that dual citizenship.

Kristin No, it's great. I mean, since Brexit, the British passport doesn't kind of have quite as many perks as it used to, but it's nice to have both passports now.

Yasmine Yeah, cool. Come COVID 2020 when all this was happening as well, how did that affect your work?

Kristin So I had started a new role three weeks before the first lockdown. So it was in the family court system, which I hadn't worked in before. It was a whole different world. And suddenly nobody knew what they were doing and how to do their jobs, because we were all immediately kind of doing those from home and, you know, the court was trying to figure out how best to do court hearings. Yeah. So that was, it was certainly a challenge. But I think, because everybody was fumbling their way through the system, it helped to cover up that I didn't necessarily know what I was doing.

Yasmine Okay, so you mentioned you were then working in the family court and that's where you still are. What is that role and what does a typical day look like for you?

Kristin So I work to represent the child when they are in what we call care proceedings. So the child protection social worker will bring the matter to court when they're really, really worried about a child or a young person for a judge to make a decision about what should happen. So that's often looking at whether or not the child should remain at home or whether they need to be in out of home care. So I am appointed as an independent person by the court to represent the child in those proceedings. So I instruct a solicitor for them and I am, I guess, the voice of the child. So if they are old enough to articulate what they want to happen, then that's what I will tell the court. If they aren't old enough, then I guess I will tell the court what I think they would want to happen. And either way I make recommendations about what is safest and best for them. So it's really amazing role actually. And I think it is the role where I've most felt like I really have a big impact. And what we say in court, I think has a lot of weight. You have to be a really experienced social worker to do this role. And I guess the court sees us as the eyes and the ears of the court and we are independent. We don't necessarily agree with what the child protection social worker is saying. You know, sometimes we will, you know, be supporting what the parents say. Yeah. So it's a, it's a really great role. It's just a bit, I think with COVID everything slowed down. Matters weren't concluding as quickly, assessments were getting held up. So it meant caseloads increased quite significantly and things got, got a bit overwhelming at times. And so actually at the end of last year, I decided that I just needed a little bit of time out. And I had a really strong sense of just wanting to go home for a while. I'd never planned to be in the UK this long. Couldn't get back to Australia because of COVID. So I went home for six months. Still did my role kind of part-time, you know, waking up and doing court hearings at 2am and things like that. But it meant consistency with the children and young people I was working with, and COVID showed us that I could do that remotely. And yeah, so I spent some time in Australia just kind of traveling around and spending time with family and friends and just reflecting, I guess, on what it is that I wanted to do next. So now I guess I'm doing my family court role part time and I am now also supporting Australian and New Zealand social workers moving to the UK. So I sort of thought, is there something else I can do using my social work knowledge and experience to help people, but I guess, not always as challenging conversations as it can be in social work. So I reached out to recruitment agency and said, you know, is this something that you would want? Is this something that we can do? And they were really, really keen to put the extra support in. And, you know when, I know when I first moved over, it was really hard to navigate the system. I thought it would be a lot more similar than it is. There wasn't anyone who could tell me what it was like to make that move. I really struggled to find answers to my questions. And I just, I really want to help people have a smoother journey, I guess, than I did and be able to share my experience and my journey with them to help make their move a bit easier.

Yasmine Sounds like there's quite a bit of difference between social work in Australia and the UK. Is there much of a difference between Australia and New Zealand, that you've noticed since you've been supporting both?

Kristin I mean, I still, I guess I'm getting my head around the New Zealand system. I think it's a lot more similar to Australia, but it's not broken up into states the same way, obviously. And I think they do, you know, some of the kind of kinship care stuff a lot better than Australia. And I remember speaking with a New Zealand social worker about what it's like for children in out of home care in the UK. And she was really surprised, I guess, about the lack of kinship placements. And I think New Zealand's a bit ahead of Australia as well in that regard.

Yasmine I guess you still get a lot of that clinical work, working part-time in the family court. So you don't probably miss it quite as much as if you were just doing the recruitment full time.

Kristin Yeah. And that's definitely why I want to keep doing the social work in the family court. I didn't get any new cases for six months while I was in Australia and I really missed it. So I still had lots of children and families that I was working with, but I definitely was missing having kind of new children and families to get to know. So I definitely want to keep my hand in that. And it's a really flexible role as well in terms of, there's no expectation to be in the office. As long as we are visiting children and families and we're attending court, then we can do the rest from wherever and however we can fit into our days.

Yasmine And I assume there's some flexibility for the kids who want to or have benefit being in the court themselves, versus the ones who just use you as an advocate or a guardian in the process?

Kristin Yeah, so I guess generally children and young people won't attend court, in terms of hearing, what's being said, if there's evidence being given, that kind of thing. It's really difficult process for parents to sit through. So it would be particularly difficult for a child or young person. What we would often do is have, if they want to speak to the judge directly, we would arrange a meeting when we're not sitting in court for them to come to the court and meet the judge and ask some questions, tell the judge what they want to say. But I find often, most children and young people want to either write a letter or they just, they want me to tell the judge what they want to say.

Yasmine What do you find, for both of the roles, what do you find most challenging as a social worker in these areas?

Kristin So I think for the family court role, although it's a really positive thing in terms of how much value I think that you can bring and how important your recommendations are, it's also quite a lot of pressure, and people will often be like, well, what do you think? What do you think? And knowing that we hold quite a lot of weight, parents often are trying to kind of convince us of their stories or yeah, I think it can be quite scary sometimes in terms of like thinking about how important these recommendations are. And I think also the other thing is definitely like a bit of imposter syndrome at times, where particularly when I very first started at my confidence took a real knock. And you know, I'd been doing social work for 13 or 14 years or something, and then suddenly I felt way out of my depth and I was like, should I be doing this role? Like, it is so important. Like, I don't think I should be here, why would anybody want to listen to what I've got to say? And that still can happen, I think, because, you know, everybody's

always asking for your views and sometimes it's, you know, well it's usually quite tricky. It is not, not ever like a straightforward answer.

Yasmine Yeah. And what support do you need when those triggers come up for you, that cause you to start doubting yourself?

Kristin Well, I guess one thing that's really quite unusual about that role is that you work quite in isolation. So although I'm part of a team, we work quite separately and independently. So you are responsible for that child or young person, not the whole service. You are appointed and the named person on the court order. So we don't kind of have our colleagues around us to kind of bounce ideas off or to check in with, but what you do have is, each case you will have a solicitor. And so you pick which solicitor you want on that case. And I think they kind of become your colleague and someone who you can kind of bounce ideas off. So they can give you advice from a legal point of view, but you can also run things past them. And also the management is really amazing. So we've got really great supervisors, even though everybody's really, really busy, they always will make time if you've want to bounce ideas off them. If you're unsure, you know, there's times where it feels like your recommendation is so separate to what the job protection social worker is recommending that you're like, am I missing something? Like how have we got such polarised views? So there's always someone that you can run things past and who will give you a little bit of a confidence boost if you're doubting your abilities or questioning yourself.

Yasmine Yeah. But given that there is such a strong ownership over each of those cases, does that make it hard to go and leave? How does that work?

Kristin Yeah, absolutely. And I think, although you can have someone else kind of cover a court hearing, if it's just a court hearing where they're making decisions about which assessments are needed or re-timetabling when things are going to come in, you can have someone else cover that. But if it's a final hearing where decisions are being made and the court is going to want to hear evidence from people involved in the case, no one can cover that for you. It is your case. It is your evidence. It is your report. So I can think of a time when the judge was going on leave and I was going on leave and so there was going to be a period, you know, it was going to mean a delay for the outcome of the child. And I felt really pressured to agree to make myself available during my leave so that there wasn't a delay for the outcome of the child. Which is not okay actually, and I should have just said I'm not available. You know, I need to look after myself as well.

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

Kristin Working with such a variety of children and young people, so having spent over 10 years working in youth justice and just working with teenagers which I love, it's also nice now to have a variety. So where one day I will be sat on the floor kind of colouring or you know, playing with a baby, and then the next day I'll be speaking to a teenager about, you know, some of the, you know, decisions that are being made in their lives and how they'd like to communicate with the judge. So I really love the variety. I love being able to write reports and directly put in a child's words. I love, yeah, how much weight, I guess, and value's put on what a child has to say and what their wishes and feelings are.

Yasmine Yeah. Have you seen a lot of changes over time in this area? I know you can probably only speak to the UK context and what people have told you about pre your time, but what changes are happening in the space or what would you like to see happening?

Kristin There's some really good stuff around a more kind of trauma informed practice across the board. So I think working in youth justice, a lot of the young people that we work with have experienced trauma, either at home or, you know, for witnessing serious youth violence, having, you know, having friends stabbed. you know, knowing people who have died. And I think just generally the whole system has become a lot more trauma informed in terms of how you just, you carry out your work with young people. There's also a lot more focus on harm that occurs outside of the home. So there's a model of working called contextual safeguarding, and it's looking at harm, I guess, that happens from outside the home, rather than the traditional child protection system is set up to deal with harm that happens inside the home or, you know, where children are not safe living at home. But I guess looking at children and young people who are being exploited by peers, and how we can keep them safe and looking at a kind of a wider community response to them. So I think that's some really good stuff that's happening. I think one thing just to mention as well, I guess, in the justice system in the UK, it's a multi-agency system. So there's a lot of services that they can get access to that they wouldn't if they weren't involved in the justice system. So within the team, there is at least one social worker. There's obviously a whole team of case managers. There are police, there is substance misuse worker, there is a mental health worker, a speech and language therapist, an education and employment worker. So there's some really amazing resources, I guess, that they can get access to. And so just to kind of touch on the speech and language therapy, for example. I think the stat is something like 60% of young people in the criminal justice system have a speech, language or communication difficulty. And I think like 90% of those young people, it was undiagnosed before they came into the criminal justice system. So it always really surprised me the amount of young people that I worked with who couldn't read an analogue clock, who couldn't tell me the order of the months of the year. And they, you know, they were 15, 16, had been going through, you know, school system in the UK. But all of these additional needs were being missed for them. Yeah, I really think that was a really good way of working.

Yasmine Yeah. Tell me about the recruitment work and a little bit more about, I guess, what you found surprising or things that you struggled with that you'd love for other people not to have to go through.

Kristin Yeah. So I guess the first thing is that social work is a registered profession in the UK. So you have to be registered as a social worker to be able to work as one. And each part of the UK has a different registration body. So for England, it is Social Work England. I mean, I guess that's predominantly where, in my experiences, that's who I'm registered with. And most people who I've worked with who are moving over, want to live somewhere in England. Social work is a lot more narrow and specific. So it can be good in that people usually have some idea what a social worker does. Whereas I found in Australia, people would be like, okay, and what does that mean? I think one thing that really surprised me as well is, you have to be a social worker to do a lot of these roles. So where I'd come from a system where, even within child safety, you didn't have to be a social worker. You'd have some kind of similar degree and you had this kind of multi-disciplinary approach. Here, when I worked in the child protection system, everybody in the team is a social worker. You have to be a social worker, you have to be registered. So I think what can be really difficult is if someone's been doing a similar role in Australia, but doesn't have a social work qualification, and then they come over and they're not able to do that role here. So I think that's really challenging. And I think I felt really lucky that I happened to have, when I was 17, picked social work, because it meant that I was able to do

these roles in the UK, and it meant that I was able to get sponsored and stay here. If I had chosen something different, which could have easily happened, then that wouldn't have been possible. So I think most social work roles in the UK fall within the kind of statutory system. So either child protection or kind of adult social care. So working with really vulnerable adults. And You know, they do have, obviously they have social workers within youth justice, I did that for a long time. They do have mental health social workers. There are others, some, you know, some other kind of niche areas, but I guess, you know, almost all roles fall within those statutory systems. So I think when social workers move from Australia, it can sometimes be a little bit tricky, because social work roles might not quite equate to a UK social work role. So that can make it a bit tricky in terms of registering with Social Work England and trying to demonstrate that they've got the right experience and they've been updating their skills and knowledge in what they consider social work practice.

Yasmine Is there much of a cost for the registration process, similar to Australia?

Kristin Yeah. So for an overseas social worker, they call it a scrutiny fee and it is £495. So, you know, almost a thousand dollars. At this time, at least, this is the most frustrating part of the process for overseas social workers. So the Social Work England website says that they will process applications normally within 60 working days, but in reality it is taking 6, 9, 12 months for applications to be processed. So I think it's a really big factor and it's something, I guess, if people realise how long it's going to take then they can start sooner. But what's often happening is people coming over on these working holiday visas, starting their applications two months before they come and then not being able to practice as a social worker here. So they, you know, they can go into kind of support roles, like family support roles or social work assistant roles, but they're not able to actually practice in the field and learn the systems, I guess, that they came over to do.

Yasmine And call themselves social work.

Kristin Absolutely. Yeah. So I think, you know, my biggest advice to people is always start this process much sooner than you think you need to. And I think part of the reason for the delays is that the guidance that they give you is not always clear in terms of exactly what you need to provide and how you should provide that. So I've put together some resources that I am happy to share with anybody, just in terms of some additional information about what to share so we can try and avoid the asking for more information which causes more delays.

Yasmine I've had a lot of people who have told me that Australian social workers are held in quite high regard in the UK. Is that because we have different sorts of experiences as an undergrad? What does that come down to?

Kristin I mean, I absolutely agree that we are definitely held in high regard. Our qualification is a year longer than the UK one, but that's never mentioned. So I'm not sure that people even really realised that, or, you know, it's certainly in my experience, that doesn't seem to be the reason. I think it's because we, you know, I guess our systems have similar values in terms of caring for vulnerable people and making sure that children are safe from harm and abuse. So I think there's some alignment in terms of that. I also think that Australians are just generally regarded as having a good work ethic, and people will kind of just get on with it. We're really keen to learn, you know, we've come over to the other side of the world to learn a new system and to kind of contribute to that. So I think that's a really big factor in how we're viewed in the UK.

Yasmmine Yeah. I feel like you got fairly lucky having been able to transition pretty directly between the work you were doing in Queensland and the work you were doing in the UK. But let's say hypothetically that work wasn't available for you or, well you said there's a bit of a shortage with social workers, but I don't know if that's because of the system or because there just aren't as many roles. If you weren't doing this kind of social work, what do you think you'd be doing? What are you interested in giving a try? Especially given that you've got your foot in the door in terms of recruitment, so you know what else is out there.

Kristin I think because social work is quite narrow in the UK, it doesn't feel like there is lots of avenues. To be honest, I think if I wasn't doing what I'm doing, I'd probably go back into criminal justice. I also have like a great love of animals. And I've recently been reading about some of these amazing projects in the US where they have rescue animals in prison settings. And I feel like that would be my dream, to be able to combine animals and criminal justice. So the research is showing that these prisoners who are caring for these kind of cats and dogs who had been at animal shelters, have more empathy, they have more responsibility, they're then able to kind of adopt these animals, there's less violence in the prisons and yeah, I feel like that would be my dream.

Yasmine Similar to what they have in hospitals, I guess, for therapy animals, or residential facilities have them too.

Kristin Yeah absolutely.

Yasmine That'd be fun. Yeah. Are there any resources that you can think of, you've already mentioned the trauma-informed approaches and your resources, and I think you've got a blog as well. If people were wanting to know a little bit more about what you do or social work in the UK, where would you direct them?

Kristin I mean, if anybody is thinking about moving to the UK, I would definitely recommend having a look at my blog. So it's ukworklife.com. I think it's just a really good starting point, and I've really tried to pull together resources for people so it's all in one place. You can kind of get your head around how the system works, what social work looks like, how you register with Social Work England. There's some other really good resources. So the British Association of Social Workers has some free resources. They also have a really good podcast, which I think is really good to listen to in terms of just understanding UK terminology, getting your head around some of the legislation. There's also a service called CoramBAAF, which I can give you the details, because it's spelled a bit strange, and that has some really great resources as well. And I have asked some of my international social workers for some recommendations, so if I get any of those through, then I will send them over to you as well, in terms of stuff that they've found helpful when they've made the move over.

Yasmine That would be amazing, thank you. And I can pop all that in the show notes for people to go off and do their own reading or research. Is there anything else that you feel like we haven't touched on, anything else you want to mention about your experience or the work you do?

Kristin I mean, I guess just to say that, you know, if anybody is thinking about making a move to the UK, although you know, I've kind of touched on some of the challenges that we have in terms of the system here, it has been the most amazing experience, and I think if it's something you're thinking about then you should do it. And coming to the UK, I was able to learn a new system and practice in something that I'm really passionate about, but also there's

obviously lots of perks around travel and being able to get on a train and be in Paris for the weekend or, you know, exploring cute little English villages and that kind of stuff. So I think there's lots of really positive things, and I would recommend it to anybody if, you know, if that's something that's kind of on your wishlist or, you know, something that you're considering.

Yasmine And especially if there's so much contract work compared to permanent work. I guess you do have a lot more flexibility just to take yourself off for a week somewhere and go see things that it would take you a whole day to travel from Australia.

Kristin Absolutely. I think there is a shortage of social workers in the UK, so there is lots of kind of contract or locum work, but also if you need sponsorship for a visa, if you're not eligible for other visa types, then there's those options as well. So, you know, there is a big push at the moment for international recruitment, and I think the advantage of that is that it makes it a lot easier for social workers like myself to make the move over.

Yasmine And are there limitations based on age? I had the impression the working holiday visa was for younger people. Perhaps the sponsorship might be the route to go down for older people.

Kristin Yeah, absolutely. So the working holiday visa is currently up until 30. It's going to extend to I think 35 from maybe January, but sponsorship is any age. So if you're not eligible for that visa, or maybe you've already done the two year visa which is soon going to be three years, then sponsorship is an option. And also with sponsorship, some of those roles come with relocation packages. So particularly if you're moving over with a family or, you know, you've got, it's quite expensive obviously, to pick up your life and move to the other side of the world. So that is a possibility as well.

Yasmine Yeah. How do you manage the weather coming from sunny Mackay to London?

Kristin It is really hard. You know, I've been in the UK for 11 years now, and I still really struggle with the winters. But for me, I knew it was going to be rainy and cold, but I wasn't prepared for how dark it is during winter. So, you know, it is dark at 4pm and it is not light again until you're, you know, you're kind of at work. So I find that really hard. And my number one tip, which took me years, you can get these light alarms that mimic the sunrise. And it makes such a difference when you're trying to wake up and you, you don't know if it's 2am or 8am because it looks the same. But this light will let you know that the sun is coming up in your room and it is time to get up.

Yasmine Good tip even for our winter.

Kristin Yeah. But I think equally, you know, they have really long summer days as well. So, you know, where the sun's not kind of setting until 9pm, 10pm. So it means that you've got time to kind of do stuff after work. And I think really the travel in Europe is what makes it all worth it. So being able to, you know, I can fly to Amsterdam quicker than I could fly from Mackay to Brisbane. So, you know, that's really amazing. And then being able to, you know, really great train connections across Europe and just, yeah, all of that makes it worth it when it's miserable and gray outside.

Yasmine Sounds very glamorous. Kristin, thank you so much for sharing your experience. Even going from day one, your placement opportunity that you took in terms of creating employment options, I think that's a really good takeaway as well, for people to really look at the

importance of the networking and being able to draw on that to think okay, I've just graduated, but where to from here? Start with what you know, right?

Kristin Yeah.

Yasmine You mentioned also that you didn't want to have any regrets, which is kind of what prompted the big shift to a completely different continent. And then you, system and different ways of working, but you had that ownership of the processes and being able to really see the best outcomes and experiences for young people, which you had in Australia but then you could translate that to this different setting. Which to some degree meant that you really needed to understand your boundaries, so know your limits and know where to say no, and know again in this new system, what was OK without seeming like you were rocking the boat too much. But the work you're doing now, you have such an interdisciplinary approach. You get to work with all these other resources that you can tap into on a daily basis. And it just sounds so interesting. And it's really great that you've expanded a little bit. You've still got the clinical, but you've also got this recruitment work. And it keeps you, I think, coming back to the work that you loved initially, but then being able to share that with other people and use your experience of having moved to somewhere outside of your comfort zone to expand social workers in Australia's concept of what social work might be and where they can work. That's really powerful and I love it.

Kristin Yeah, it feels like a real privilege to be able to kind of help people who are making a journey over, and it feels really great to be able to share that knowledge and all the things that I wish someone had told me before I made the move.

Yasmine Yeah. I will definitely put links and resources and ways for people to reach out to you if they've got any other questions, because I'm sure for a lot of people this will bring up a bit of excitement, of hang on a minute, I could actually do this. This is a reality, and maybe just needing to chat with someone around the practicality of all that.

Kristin Yeah. absolutely. I mean, I would encourage anyone to get in touch with me. I'm really happy to chat all things kind of social work and life in the UK, even if it's just something that you're just kind of sort of considering and not really sure if you're going to. But yeah, feel free to get in touch.

Yasmine Amazing. Thank you so much for your time again. I appreciate it.

Kristin Great. Thanks so much for having me.

Thanks for joining me this week. If you would like to continue this discussion or ask anything of either myself or Kristin, 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 Shahil, who has worked across the areas of youth homelessness, disability and suicide prevention and aftercare and now works in policy, advocacy and social campaigning.

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