

Episode 33 | Bringing social workers and teachers together transcript

Welcome to CoramBAAF Conversations, the podcast series dedicated to adoption, fostering and kinship care. We asked children, social care professionals, and experts by experience to join us to share with us and you, our listeners, their experiences, reflections and knowledge. I hope you enjoy.

Welcome all. I'm Ellyse Hinder, Senior Marketing and Engagement Officer at CoramBAAF and today I'm going to be talking with Sylvia Ikomi and Lorna Stabler. We're going to be thinking about how social workers and teachers or those working in education can come together to help look after children and young people. Sylvia, would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Yes. My name is Sylvia as mentioned. I have been doing a lot of research into the education attainment level of children in care since 2016 and I am currently completing my PhD study on the ability vacation of black girls in state care. I am also a secondary school teacher.

Just a few hacks. Thank you, Sylvia. So Lorna, lovely to have you back. You've worked with us previously. You've helped us with. Events and around. Kinship care. So would you like to introduce yourself?

Yeah. Thank you, Sir. I'm Lorna. I am a researcher at Cardiff University. I do research really about anything to do with children, social care. So all the way through from kind of early support for families to have a social worker through to kind of care experienced parents and kind. Of what they. Might need to adjust to parenthood, but really my research focuses. Very much on the relationships that matter to children and what we can do is support those I'm also I grew up in foster care. Myself, in and out of foster care throughout my childhood, and then became a foster carer, a kinship foster carer for my younger brother.

Thank you, Lorna, and lots of different experiences there. So I think because our Members are social work professionals and professionals working within children social care, we wanna think about, you know, bridging that gap between teachers, education professionals and social workers, really. So if we can start with basics, my first question to you is what are the biggest challenges that looked after children face in school?

I would say that biggest overriding challenge that I have observed is a lack of a trauma informed approach by teachers.

Mind going into that a bit more, Sylvia, maybe just explaining what a trauma informed approach is for those that don't know and how that relates to teaching.

So a trauma informed approach is an approach that means that the teacher is aware of the impact of the adverse childhood experience that the child has had. So for example, for many children we have academic research that shows they find themselves in the classroom thinking, am I safe? Do you like me? However, if the teacher doesn't understand that and doesn't understand their background, so they're not well informed, there can be a breakdown in communication.

Thank you. So it's about having that sort of awareness of a child individually and their background and how they can be supported. Is that right? Yes.

I think for children who are in care. Some of the biggest issues are that, like quite often, they have moved through quite a lot of homes. So whether it's their family home, potentially into foster care, maybe into a different foster care place, then and then back to a family home and then back into foster care. Quite often people realise that these children are moving homes, but quite often they're also moving. Schools. So I personally think I went to 10 or 11 different schools throughout my child. 3rd and so that comes with the loss of friendships as well and loss of routine. You know, there could be lots of things going on in the background for children who are looked after, you know, around their relationships, their home life, their worries about what's happening with their parents, their siblings. And quite often they think one of the worries for children when they're in care and they're in the classroom is that. People don't know. So what's happening at home? So I think just building on what Sylvia said, I think it's teachers having that understanding that, you know, if this child isn't engaging, you know, whatever that looks like, it might not be because the child doesn't want to engage, but because there are so many other things kind of on their mind and kind of getting in in the way.

If. You're thinking about how. We can improve that and support children, essentially a poor collaboration between teachers and social workers can really affect them so. So I suppose strengthening that. Relationship would really help to sort of have a fuller. Picture. And have support across multiple areas.

Yeah, I would say, you know, teachers quite often are the ones that spend the most amount of. Time with children. So, you know, they know what the child's like around their peers. They know, you know, what kind of things really excite children. What they're what, what engages them social workers. You know, when children and care social workers may only see that child. You know, once every few months for quite short visits. So you know where teachers and social workers aren't collaborating and. You know, social workers aren't asking the teacher. You know how the child is and the teacher isn't learning from the social worker about, you know, that kind of trauma and those experiences, and what else is going on for the child? They can really miss that opportunity as professionals to kind of

learn from each other and kind of skill and kind of make the most of both professions to meet the needs of of looked after children.

Maybe advice for social workers to really lean on. Teachers, because, like you said, they're there constantly.

Absolutely. I would echo everything that Lorna has said. This is why this conversation does need to be a multi agency conversation. Oftentimes teachers say we're not social workers and the point that Lorna has made thinking about the time we spend as teachers with these children from September till June or July. Monday to Friday, often times from 8:00 in the playground until 3:30 every day. We have a lot of contact with them and I think there is a responsibility to have an understanding of the children's experience. And to ensure that the work that we do with them recognises that and is considerate. So I think the mark there when it comes to, I'm not a social worker, I think that is part of the gap that needs to be bridged in the conversation that is had with teachers and we're not expecting you to be social workers. However, we cannot delegate. Our own responsibility to the social workers, and so I think that's part of the conversation that does need to be had.

Yeah. And I think just again, building on what's obvious and teachers aren't social workers, but they are amazing professionals in their own right. And I have, you know, a lot of friends who are teachers who. You know, actually come to me as a, you know, as a research professional in this area, but also based on my own kind of care experience and experience in school when they have looked after children because they want to know, you know, the best way to act the child in their class and the best way to support them and staff and teachers don't necessarily feel like they've got that relationship with the social. The worker where they could just pick up the phone and say they think something's happened this week because this child is acting very out of character. You know they do, I think, want to have that resource to be able to kind of have that better collaboration with social workers.

Absolutely. I think that's growing momentum in the work I've done, for example with NASUWT teachers union, the teachers always keen and receptive to learning more, many of them become.

Yes.

Concerned when they hear about the situation, for example, statistically when it comes to the rates of children in care who don't do go on to college or university, they're Biostatistics and they are keen and and it's just a case of what are we going to do? Where do we take these conversations?

Yeah, I would say as well that quite often school is like a real safe space for children that don't have that clear routine at home or are moving, you know, between the. Different households and things like that, like school can be, you know, the routine of school can be really, really important. And even if they're maybe pushing back. That a little bit with their behaviour school and you know, a good, good engagement with school and a teacher who's paying attention to them, like can be absolutely transformative. For looked after children.

Absolutely, Lorena, I think that's another key message for teachers that the children always say to child welfare experts, that there was a the one teacher when they look back on their childhood, that really believed in them. And child welfare experts are always keen for teachers to know how valued their work is and when it is done properly.

Yeah. So what I'm hearing really is. Not just about social workers leaning on teachers, it's also teach leaning on social workers and sort of having that space for children to just be cared for really. So we've sort of covered what effect that relationship between teachers and social workers can have. A A child. Yeah. I just wondered if you had any more to say. About what benefits looked after children get from better teamwork between teachers and social workers.

I'd say that there are a few benefits. One of the key benefits is that teachers have a more considerate approach when we are managing the behaviour of the children in school. We are doing this based on a more holistic understanding of what is happening with the child in front of us and empathy. I think it does increase empathy and it means that the teachers are aware of the unique challenges of the children. It also means that we have a multi agency approach, so the support they're getting is joined up. If there is a problem. In the home environment, if there are concerns, those that are exhibiting themselves within the classroom and in the playground, those are escalated to the social workers, and if they're problems at home that can have an impact in school, teachers are aware, so it's not a case of one hand not knowing what the other hand is doing. I think the. Greatest thing for the children is that they have more comprehensive rich support and. Care and consideration given towards them and by the teachers.

Yeah. I would also kind of say that quite often, you know, we talk about advocacy for children and care like as if we bring in an advocate who's a person, you know, they're separate to the social work team. But quite often, if you ask a child who a trusted person is who could speak on their behalf at a meeting, quite often they will talk about. That teacher, you know? And it it's not always, you know, the safeguard and natural teacher who they feel knows them best, who can represent, you know who they are and what they want. So I think there's also that opportunity for teachers to be a little bit more involved in some of the

decision making around children in care and helping kind of children have a voice as well, definitely.

Definitely. I would say that the point you've made Lorna resonates with a scheme called the designated Teacher Scheme, in which a teacher specific teacher is given the role. Of monitoring and making sure that they spend time every day with a child, one of the children who is in local authority care or in America state care, it has been trialled in America as well in schools, and the feedback from the research in England from the children has been the issue that you've mentioned. Lorna, where there is a view that. This is the job of the teacher, who is the safeguarding officer and I think sometimes other teachers shy away and think ohh, you know something might go wrong. I don't feel equipped to really take up these types of. Rules, but the children have complained that in that case they end up with a teacher who teaches the subject that they hate the most and doesn't quite have a bond with them. And This is why I would recommend a whole school approach which does move us away from thinking that everything that happens when it comes to this work. Centres around the teacher, who is the safeguarding lead. And making sure that the children do have a voice. If you do have a designated teacher scheme in which a teacher is touching base with them, give them a choice and check with the teachers beforehand so they don't experience rejection. Look at the list of the teachers that they have and give them a choice as to who that teacher should be and also open up the training. Let's not have all the knowledge centred around the elite safeguarding lead safeguarding leads are under incredible pressure in schools, so I think the point that you've made, Lauren, just really wanted to emphasise that that even when things have been. There does need to be some consideration of how these initiatives have been implemented in ways that benefit the children.

So expanding on that, if you're talking about tools and sort of changing the way that things are currently.

Can you share?

Any practical tips, ways that social workers and teachers can communicate with each other? Things that we can improve to make sure that we've got that connection there to sort of encompass what you've said that we're we're incorporating the voice of the child but through collaboration and that. Multi agency. Approach that we've been talking about and just if you can touch on what can be done to make sure teachers and social workers share information about a child's needs and progress.

There are two key areas that come to mind for me immediately. One of the areas being the point that Lorna made about how frequently contact is made. For example, if social

workers have periodic catch ups with their children, but then updates are not given to schools regularly. So I think having more. Regular communication touching base more regularly with each other and not centering the engagement around there being a problem. And I think just having a more structured approach, that means even if it's just a quick update whereby there hasn't been a serious incident, but we are still communicating with each other. I think there needs to be more regular communication and I'd say that in terms of the training that we have, the material that we use in schools, the evidence base. That informs our teaching. I think we do need to learn more on literature. That also amplifies the voice of social workers and their perspectives on the work that we are doing with the children.

Yeah, I would agree. And I think the updates part, it's so important, it seems like a little thing, but when? And, you know, care experienced adults access their social work files quite often, the kind of the information that's included in there is so negative. And the information about education is really just about whether or not a child went to school and what grades they got. And I think teachers have, like, really, really rich examples of, you know, children. Kind of thriving and doing like things for the very first time or. You stand in front of the class and give it a presentation for the first time and things like that. And I think if some of those examples could be included in children's care files rather than just kind of really hard outcomes, like what grades or, you know, attendance figures, it would make such a difference to care, experienced adults looking back on their childhood and kind of understanding what they were like. As children, I think that could make a real difference to people. The other thing that I was thinking about in terms of kind of social workers and teachers kind of learning. About each other, I think shared opportunities to do training together would be would be great. So I think even if it's some, you know, professional development opportunities, conferences, things like that where teachers and social workers can learn a little bit about what the other does and kind of demystify it, I think that could be really important just. So that it. Feels like an easier conversation to have. You know, a teacher to pick up the phone to a social worker because actually quite often teachers are very stressed, they've not got time to be kind of quickly reporting everything but. If it felt like. That relationship was there. That might be, you know, a bit of an easier. Thing to do. And there's a project. We ran. We ran an evaluation at Cascade quite a large project which was about teachers. Sorry, social workers being based within schools in England. And actually, what difference it made, but there was an actual designated social worker within a school so that teachers could go and have those conversations face to face with a social worker when they have concerns. But also, you know, just to share progress and updates about children who are looked after rather than it. Feeling like an additional administrative task to kind of report on anything that was a problem. So I think

that can make a difference as well. Kind of those opportunities to kind of. Co locate and social workers and teachers together or even just have opportunities to to have more informal conversations.

I'd definitely echo what you said there, Lorna. The nature of teaching at its best, where the knowledge exchange we have as teachers. If I'm teaching a student and let's say Mondays, we all know Mondays are not child's favourite day, but in one one lesson they were suddenly really excited because they made a turning point with one of the activities. And I would then mention this to my colleagues during break. Time and also if there was any concern and with that we're seeing improvement, we would exchange knowledge, talk to each other and learn from each other. So I think that knowledge exchange in our culture of working together as teachers is very natural and organic. And so the point that you've made there and whereby it's not always very formal and very structured. In a way that makes the interactions quite stiff. I think that would be helpful for teachers.

I think you've given. A lot of examples there just sort of thinking back to one of the first points you made about, you know, those regular updates and sharing the positive and the not so positive, just sort of giving that sort of that rounded approach that you really can track the progress and not having a negative. Perspective or only touching base on something negative that's happened. That's one area that you've covered really nicely, I think. And then also what you touched on Lorna are? About writing about. Children and sort of thinking about how they're gonna eventually read that information and and and they're in that in mind. And then the collaboration. And so would you like to talk a bit more about your work at Cascade, Lorna, just just that bit of where you said about Co locating social workers and teachers. Is that did you say that's a model that has been tried and tested?

When we started that project quite a few years ago now, a lot of people said, well, this is what used to happen anyway. You know, you used to have social workers that were more based within communities and localities, and they weren't kind of in a separate office away from everywhere. And you would have a social worker who would be the regular part like social worker, who would go to that school. I would say it's not a new, it's not a new model. But yes, we did. We did an evaluation. Which is the. The report is freely available on the Cascade website, looking at just what difference that made in terms of that kind of shared professional working as well. So it was. About, you know whether or not this reduced the number of children who came in to care or anything like that, necessarily, it was more also just about how being together to kind of help both people in those professions, teachers and social workers, kind of work together in a kind of smoother way. So part of that is about addressing. Issues that come up in families where children aren't in care, so actually social

workers being able to be responsive to needs. Kind of quickly. Rather than, you know, Sylvia mentioned before, teachers are under a lot of pressure and they're not social workers, but. Quite often they are. The the frontline with families, they're the ones that are responding. To you know, quite often, you know, safeguarding concerns or or just kind of problems within families. So having a social worker there that could, you know, quickly respond to those needs. Yeah. Was found to be really helpful.

It's now time for a quick break. Sign up to receive our regular news lessons and keep up to date with the latest news, publications, training events and job vacancies. Visit corrinbath.org.uk/stay, informed for more. Now back to the episode. Do you have any stories off the back of that evaluation? Or maybe any stories from you know, your time as teaching or researching that give examples of that good collaboration, that good teamwork between social workers and teachers, and how that's made?

A difference I would say that there are a couple of examples. So the Timpson programme, which was run by Oxford University that included 305 primary schools. Centred on a multi agency approach that involved teachers being trained on how to support children in care, who were experiencing emotional distress, we recognised our limitations and called on the knowledge of those who had my expertise than us and I think just anecdotally, it seems to have gone well and I've. Observed some of the schools have really embraced a trauma informed approach as a consequence as an ethos, just as part of their culture. They think nothing about it. It wasn't just a project. That's who they are now. That's the approach they adopt and they are very considerate of the children's trauma. And also of the success that they're having in the excellent things that children are doing. So I think that that is a good example. I would also say in terms of my work, I did engage in an international fellowship in 2019 looking at effective literacy strategies for children in care and on my return to England, I shared the child welfare. Experts, some of them who have worked in social work, their views with teachers, for example, they're concerned about teachers, either over diagnosing children in care with a special education. Need not recognising that the behaviour was due to them trying to process the trauma that they've experienced and miscategorizing that as a special educational need, and also the concern around and under diagnosis whereby the children has have been neglected and the needs that they have haven't been pushed by their biological parents. And it then went on throughout their time in school, undiagnosed. And that had affected them significantly. So both issues there, there's tension there and I know that when I presented those issues to teachers in my CPD sessions, they found it to be quite enlightening. And I found that most of them committed to taking practical action afterwards to better support the children in their schools.

We think we could talk about just your research. For a long time, Sylvia.

Say about the social workers in school project that we worked on in Cascade. So it wasn't just about so that one wasn't just about children and care, but actually a big part of it was about changing perceptions of social work. So I think there can be quite negative perceptions of social work, particularly in the media and families. See schools, you know, children and families see schools quite often as a safe place where they can speak for advice. Part of it was about, you know, whether or not social workers could benefit from being in that environment, where families then could get used to a social worker. Kind of proactively say where they did. Of where they were struggling and get that kind of support rather than teachers, you know, having to take on that role of almost gatekeeper and making referrals. And the evaluation did find that schools that had a social worker based there found like fewer, you know, referrals coming through to children's services. Because issues were able to be dealt. With and within that kind of safer environment, families like within schools, and it could be kind. Of held at a. Much earlier kind of level. So I think there is something about. The role of schools within communities and how how families perceive schools differently to how they might perceive children, services and social workers. I think that's that's so valuable and something that I think schools, yeah, schools really benefit from kind of that kind of positive perception.

That's so interesting, I feel like. It's delve deeper into everything that you've said, all the research, the evaluations, all the work that is being done, but we can link those in the resources. So if anyone is interested, you can dive deeper there. But I do find that really interesting how bias and perception comes into things and when you break that down and you encourage sort of. Communication and collaboration. You know, just do see the results that that come through there. So what I am really hearing from everything that you're saying so far is it is really it is that communication we need that communication between teachers and social workers and the sort of collaborative work between them. The carers, the children, you know, we need this, this multi agency approach that we keep referring back to, I'm wondering about your opinion on policies and social work policies and if you think there's a need for change to help teachers and social workers work together.

Better I would say that there is an A need. And that's partly why I think there is some potential. I know it's there is still a lot of discussion around the move to make care experience a protected characteristic. But when I think of even things that Lorna touched on earlier, the instability that the children often experience and how that can be compounded, especially if they are, they are in an underperforming school with a situation in which they are in a class in which there's a revolving door of supply teachers and the

impact of that and the acute impact on that on children. Who aren't dealing with extreme instability in their person. Lives isn't being fully taken into consideration by the schools. I do think that this is where policy wider policy is needed, and I think, for example, if we were to look at what this experience as a protected characteristic mean in terms of reasonable adjustments, how are we dealing with issues around the the staffing of the classes that these children? Have and other things. Just a practical element. I would say that we would probably get more teachers at the table and senior leaders if this is something that is escalated at policy level and school wide and local authority wide as the move to make care experience to protected characteristic is something that many local authorities have made widespread within the local authority. That haven't quite ironed out in terms of what it means within their schools.

Yeah, I think to add to that like actually we have some fantastic policies that exist already in some wonderful legislation. But what we don't always have is the resources to make that a reality. Thinking about what Sylvia just said, I think the idea of making care experience protected characteristic sounds great. I don't see that it's a negative. But I also think part of it is actually saying, well, OK, if we want. Kind of no. Detriment or discrimination towards children who are looked after within education? That's really good, but that involves putting more resources into schools to make sure they can really meet those needs, so they just mentioned like classroom sizes and you know, having, you know, the right teaching assistants and things. That, you know, we we know there's not enough schools for all of the children we've got, you know, increasing pressures on resources. So it partially is about change in policies, but partially it's about just giving schools and social workers the resources that they need to actually fulfil the policies that already exist.

I absolutely echo what Lunar has said, and I think as a teacher, a really practical example is the fact that we have disability as a protected characteristic. In theory, according to the law. However, in practise teachers are often not making those reasonable adjustments, and sometimes it's because they have such a large amount of students in a certain class or in certain schools, and we find due to the targets when it comes to league tables, some schools avoid taking on certain students, so then other schools oversubscribed, they may have, let's say I've. Talked before where I had around 20 students in the class in the year 7 class that had a disability that related to their special educational. And then the teacher and there may be different needs which require different changes and and tailoring a tailored approach to teaching. But the teachers also practically do not even physically have the time or have adequate support in terms of the teaching assistance. That element in terms of not just new policy. But what is the stumbling block when it comes to the existing policy? And I think that does go back to us as researchers as well, but in our. That it is important that beyond looking for new things, we also evaluate why what exists at the

moment hasn't worked and what can be done within the remit of what does exist at the moment. Absolutely. Lorna, I completely agree.

With that point. Yeah. And I would say sort of theoretically children who are looked after. Should have a lot of extra resources in school, a lot of extra focus on them, but we know that you know children. Are still falling behind. Looked after children that the school outcomes are still below their peers, and I would say everyone agrees that that shouldn't happen. You know, there's actually quite a lot of agreement around how to make sure that doesn't happen, but again, it is about resources. And when you've got overstretched public systems, these children are the ones that fall between the gaps and quite often. I guess my experience like I was a relatively higher achiever at school and you know, I did pretty well. So I no one needed to do anything extra to make sure I was kind of, you know doing what I could. But then you know, you've got other children. To you know, we're at a similar level of ability to me with their families who would have been getting a lot of extra tuition and support to push them. But I think children who are looked after, who are doing OK, you know, or even, you know, doing pretty well are the ones quite often that get missed because the resources aren't there to say, OK, well, what will help this child, you know, really. Succeed and thrive. So you do get a focus on, you know, looked after children where there are issues where there is, you know, behavioural issues, where there's disruption because teachers, you know, have to respond. To those children in the classroom. But then there's this whole other group of looked after children and I would say also children in kinship care and children with special guardianship orders, that it's not about, you know, behavioural issues or things like that. It's actually about what might help them do even better than they're already doing.

I absolutely echo what Lauren said. Like Lorna I had. I experienced an adverse childhood experience. But I was a natural high achiever. And my teachers didn't need to do anything extra. But again, I ended up going to an underperforming school, and I fell beneath the the gaps there where they were trying to support the students who needed more support. And I think there is that danger that if the conversation is always centred around that, it means that the we end up with a deficit model. The conversation is always around the problems. And we are not learning from the excellence and the good progress that is being made by the children with. The schools, so I do echo Lorna's sentiments there.

Definitely. I mean. It is worth thinking about the individual child. You know what opportunities can be given to them. You know each individual child. What do they need to make the most progress that they can? And like you said, the impact of teachers thinking about how that affects when children haven't had. The most stability in their, you know, in their personal lives when they have instability at school, when they have instability through

their social workers, you know whether that's retention of social workers and teachers. Is, you know, everything can affect the progress that children can make at school, and it's a really, really valid points. That you've shared there.

Just to add. As well, I think when a child's taken into care, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, that was a statement from the state that says. We think we can parent this child better than they have been parented at home. I would push people to think, OK, well, if you are employed by the state like teachers are and social workers are, you know you've taken over responsibility for this child. So what is it that a parent would be doing? You know, while a child's going through school, they would be thinking about, you know, what subjects they like most, like, what kind of tuition they might need or how to push them to get the best exam results. It's not just about responding where there's a problem, like if you're a parent for a child, like you take an. Active interest in their education right in a rounded way. So I say, if you if you're stepping in, you know as a parent in that way that should be.

Be as engaged as as any parent would be. I really value that perspective because it is, you know, it's it's like you said, it's not about just exam results. It's their development as a person, like every child. Like what skills are they gonna develop throughout school that they're gonna carry on through their life? It's not just what grade they get at the end of the day, it's everything that they learn. Throughout that sort of adolescence that then they can take on into adulthood, which obviously teachers, social workers, you know, everyone in their surroundings can influence that, and it's how can we help them maximise their potential? Essentially. Sylvia, you've mentioned before. More about your work abroad and your research. Are there any examples from other countries that we can learn from that we can bring back to the UK? Is there anything that's implemented at the moment you know on an international approach a global approach? Is there any other examples of systems or models that work that we can be taking note from?

I would say that in Washington, DC, the USA Legal Centre for foster care and Education had a focus group with. They influence government policy across the whole of the United States of America and have stakeholders in different states. And they said the feedback they received was that the designated teacher programme, in which a teacher took responsibility to actually spend time with a child who was in care every day when they were in school, was making a difference and the children. Giving them some positive feedback. I think which goes back to what Lorne is saying about back to basics with actually relationship building good and rich relationship building. However, I would say that in terms of the research in England, as I mentioned, the children don't like that teacher to be the teacher of the subject that they hate. So I think if anybody was to take that. Idea

forward. I would encourage you to give the children any schools that are interested in. To give the children my agency in terms of choosing the teacher that works with them, and then also having a training programme for other teachers, so they're not restricted to the safeguarding lead, that's one example that I would say they've received really positive feedback on.

I suppose we could think about that as again going to the individual needs of the child and matching them with the teacher that can support them. In that way.

Absolutely it is that tailored approach and I think in anything that is being done, if anybody is developing an initiative now. You are going back to a tailored approach and what are the needs of that specific child and that's why going with us as researchers, we have to move away from a monolithic approach, recognising the nuances in the experience that different schools are having the working cultures within different schools. So I think that's why that is always the challenge. Master scholar. Is to always remember that everybody's different. Every situation is different, and you're starting from basics and we are learning. We are the student in the situation.

I wonder if there's something there as well to that can be applied to social work. You know, if you're thinking about the individual needs of the child and you're, you're essentially matching the teacher in that way, that that could also essentially be applied. To social workers and their social work support.

Yeah, definitely. And I think once a child is in care, social workers don't see them that often. And I do think obviously, social workers suddenly to be very aware of what's going on for the child. But, you know, there are a whole host of people who are really, really important to children when they're in care, including their foster carers. Which we've not really talked about, but actually how foster carers and teachers work together is a really important question as well. So I think that idea of not necessarily worrying about who the professional is that's involved or who the person is, who's involved for the child. But who the most important people to that child. And like, how do we make sure they are engaged and kind of? You know, focused on, you know the. Needs of that child.

I'd like to echo that the reality social workers are under a lot of pressure and their access to their children is often limited. And it was of note to me recently with some work I did at in a continuous professional development with professionals at Oxfordshire County Council, when another department on their youth board who works regularly with the children in care and the children that are 13 years old, 14 years old, who said, you know. Sylvia, the points you've made about the adult education of black girls in care is. Important we recognise our colleagues in the social work team do not have as much contact with these

children, but we do and we are actually going to take this up. So again, that holistic approach, the conversation we're having now about not centering everything around 1 profession or one individual in an organisation that needs to be followed through. I think across local authorities.

Definitely. It's got that network that can help support us. Well, you very nicely led on to our last question. So like you said, we've we've spoken about social workers and we've spoken about teachers, but not necessarily about carers, about families, about community. These so do we just want to touch on how can we work with families and communities to?

Support the children. One thing that's important. Quite often, social workers can be positioned as the bad guys, you know by the media, but also like quite often by other professionals. So I think there is something about work and with your families, foster carers, children themselves, to understand that actually there's no one like bad guy profession. But actually this is about meeting children's needs and safeguarding children and making sure that they can thrive. So I think there is something about just that wider understanding of the social work role and safeguarding. That I think. Is really important not to lose a focus on, because quite often social workers can be kind of positioned as the ones who have that. Specific kind of statutory legal responsibility to, you know, protect children from and and teachers, you know, get to do the nice, you know, work of education or family support work, as you know, the kind of more support of early intervention work. But I actually think it. It's about working with communities to to build that understanding that everyone's working towards the same goal, which is kind of helping children thrive.

I think building trust is essential to get the engagement from families and communities, and I would say that example that Lorena mentioned of preventative action, preventative work, good engagement that was done, that meant that situations didn't escalate, would be good examples to make parents and families more. Aware of to. Enhance their understanding that it it's not necessarily a negative outcome long term. Outcome. If we do now have a social worker involved in the conversation.

And it goes back to. What you said earlier, we. Can have those sort of Co facilitative sessions for teachers and social workers. You know, they're learning together. They have those touch points, they have communication relationships already built up. That's where the trust can come in. And it is really about destigmatizing. So the social work role and you know social care as a. Whole, I suppose and. It it's sort of reframing it and I suppose. Getting clarity on on what. A social worker does, and whether that's for the. For children or. For professionals, I suppose there's a bit of work that can be done there, so I just want to say thank you for meeting with me today. It's been a really interesting conversation, especially from my perspective. And do you have? Any closing comments? That you'd like?

To share anything that we've touched on that you'd like to elaborate a bit more or any messages for our Members going forward?

I would say I'm going to let Lorna have the last word, but I resend my sessions with teachers and so. To workers by recognising my positionality as a teacher and as an academic. If I have my academic hat on, it's not the critic that counts. It's the man in the arena. Most of you are dedicated. This is a labour of love for you. And so if somebody like me comes in and say you've missed that part, you know you could do this better. You could be that that's not what matters is your dedication to the children. And the fact that you're open to learning if there is room for improvement, so just. Keep that in mind.

Thank you for giving me the last word. I'm not sure I deserve it. I guess all I would say is that teachers are so important and schools are so important to children in care, particularly amongst all of the chaos. But also teachers are an opportunity to open up doors for looked after children, young people who are care experienced. It's not always doom and gloom. Like we can go on, to thrive and to great things. But what we need. Is people to really take that interest and take that time? It doesn't have to be, you know, a huge, arduous task. It can be as simple as, you know, recognising that child who you know never has a pen with them because so much else is going on in their life that they never remember a pack, a pen and instead of punishing them for that, making sure you've got a stash of pens. Make sure that you know that child you know. Always come in and have a pen and be able to engage with the work. It can be really little changes, but it difference to children in care.

Thank you very much. I think that's a really nice way to end putting that message out there that it's a positive approach that we need and to continue in that in that way. Thank you very.

Much. Ohh, thank you.

Oh, thanks. Thank you for listening to this episode of CoramBAAF Conversations you'd like to know more or listen to earlier episodes. Visit corambaaf.org.uk.