




LONDON MET'S SOCIAL WORK STUDENT NEWSLETTER

THE SOCIAL WORK NEWSLETTER #8 ● MARCH 2024

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Welcome

Welcome to the 8th edition of the , the iconic publication co-produced with social work students. The Loop is a termly vehicle for students to use to share their views, not just of the social work course, but other issues of interest both within and without of the university. The Loop will be a platform to share news and events from The North East London Teaching Partnership, and the teaching, learning and research interests and activities of the academic team and wider colleagues.

The Editorial Team would encourage and welcome contributions from students and staff for the next edition. Please be a part of this exciting initiative.

Your newsletter. Your voice.

Editorial Team

Kabir Bakare
(MSc 7.1)

Maria Dominguez
(MSc 7.1)

Cindy Martin
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Melissa Namwanje
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Donna Jones
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Know your Social Work student reps

BSc

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Aida Isufi

Level 5
Chinwe Nwosu
Taqiu Imoro

Level 6
Samantha Halil
Emma Birbeck

MSc

Level 7.1 (1st year)
Anna-Rose Zammit
Kabir Bakare

Level 7.2 (2nd year)
Cindy Martin
Melissa Namwanje

Your student reps are here to represent your cohort's views at formal meetings like the Course Committee Meetings that happen once a term or informally via the Open Door! that has been set up for each cohort. They will highlight any concerns to the Course Leads and also share with the academic team when things are going well. They are in regular contact with the Course Leads, so do please let them know if there are things you feel we need to know!

BSc Course Lead

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course leads

4TH ANNUAL SOCIAL WORK EMPLOYABILITY CONFERENCE A SUCCESS!

Held in The Great Hall, final year students were well looked after with breakfast refreshments and lunch at one of the highlights of the academic year.

First started by the Head of Subject Donna Jones in direct response to student feedback wanting more information about the Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), the February event has gone from strength to strength and is well supported by Employer Partner organisations London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Havering as well as British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and Social Work England (SWE) who have attended and spoken for the third year running.

Students were able to hear about the purpose of the ASYE, ASYE processes and Employer expectations of applications – i.e. what they are looking for in applications as they receive so many. London Met's Career Service also contributed with a session on CV and Job Application hints and tips. Valuable stuff!

There were a LOT of questions from eager students who made the most of having a range of experienced colleagues and expertise in front of them.

Students felt much better prepared for entering the world of professional social work at the end of the conference.



'It was brilliant being able to talk to employer agencies about opportunities and who were all so friendly and informative!'
BSc student

'I feel overwhelmed at the amount of information, but now I know what to expect when applying for ASYE positions – and I'm ready to get on with it!'

MSc student

'Thanks for letting us take the biscuits!'
Students generally...!





ADEBAYO OSIBOTE

Ade, a Senior Social Work Lecturer is a dedicated social worker and educator with over 10 years of experience in fostering positive change in individuals and communities. Ade combines his social work experience with a passion for education to empower others, promote social justice, and create inclusive learning environments. Ade's mission is to inspire, educate, and advocate for those in need, empowering others to reach their full potential.



'World Social Work Day is an opportunity to shine a light on our collective achievements, reflect on shared global values and champion the extraordinary work of our profession.'

BASW UK CEO, Dr Ruth Allen



PATRICIA ALEXANDER

Hello All

My name is Patricia Alexander

My pronouns are (WE/US)

I recently joined London Metropolitan University as a full-time Senior Lecturer in social work and the Course Leader for the Step Up to Social Work Graduate Diploma Programme. Before that I worked as a visiting lecturer on a variety of social work programs at several London Universities. My journey to gaining a social work qualification and my first degree started a loooong time ago at the Polytechnic of North London, now called London Metropolitan University. Whilst studying there I obtained a BSC and a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work. Not long after gaining my qualification I obtained a level 2 Award in Practice Teaching. Then I went on to study for a MA which I gained at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust; I am also a registered social worker with Social Work England. In terms of Social Work practice the main thrust of my post qualifying experience has been obtained working directly with children and families from various racial and cultural backgrounds in several London Boroughs. I have also held management roles in the voluntary sector.

My teaching interests are Anti-racist Practice, Social Justice, Reflective practice, creative methods in social work practice and Practice Education.

Hobbies -Visting other countries, keeping fit, African dance, Holistic therapies and reading.

I also like to refer to inspirational quotes when working with and teaching social work students and below is one of my favourite quotes.

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

—
AUDRE LORDE

BE IN THE LOOP...

The Loop is about touching base with students and letting them have their SAY. I captured some of the voices of undergraduate and postgraduate social work students giving useful feedback:

MSc students:

1. I have enjoyed learning about assessing a child's needs. This kind of knowledge is also widely applicable and I know I can utilise it in many different ways, not just assessments.
2. Some of the lecturers are very supportive and empathetic, always encouraging me to do well in the course.
3. This course has challenged my way of thinking. I now think outside the box and do not confine my ideas.
4. Our study of human rights laws and conventions has been a very uplifting and useful experience. It will be very relevant in our role as advocates for service users.
5. The most wonderful thing about this course has been the fact that I am surrounded by like-minded individuals who also want to help their fellow human beings and enact positive change.
6. This course has helped me with my time management skills. Studying multiple intense modules simultaneously and having to work has been time-demanding, so I'm slowly becoming better at using my time effectively.
7. There are certain concepts and case scenarios which are crucial to our learning outcomes but which might be upsetting and do bring up negative emotions. I am still struggling to find the balance between empathy and resilience.
8. This course has aided me in connecting with people I'll forever cherish and appreciate in life far beyond this course.
9. It is sometimes difficult to understand policies / political decisions that ends up being detrimental to vulnerable service users. This is often out of our control as social workers and it is an obstacle I will have to learn to overcome.

...HAVE YOUR SAY.

BSc students:

1. I have enjoyed the guest lectures that have been presented within lectures which has meant we have had lots of real-life scenarios for us to link our learning to.
2. It has been very encouraging to see that our teaching team continually seek out and act on feedback to establish areas of improvement, to enhance our experience and quality of learning. This a great example of reflective practice, that we all need to adopt as social work students.
3. I have also found the breakdown of the reading list helpful to make it not feel as overwhelming.
4. What would strengthen learning is highlighting links between the modules as initially we are so overwhelmed with information. It can be difficult or take significantly longer to make those links if module learning is presented in a silo manner.



By Kabir Bakare

SCOOP OF THE LOOP: PART 1

Kelly Cooper, Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Social Professions, by Kabir Bakare, Co-Editor

Co-editor of the LOOP, Kabir Bakare, sat down (virtually) with Kelly Cooper to discuss her journey into academia from a non-traditional background. She spoke about her role as the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Professions.

Kabir: For people who might not know what you do, kindly explain your role as the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Professions (SSSP)?



Kelly: My role is to ensure that the quality of education that our students receive is of the absolute best that it can be, and so I have the responsibility for all of the staff and the students in The School. I have financial responsibility, looking after the budget of The School. I look after the staffing levels in each area of study and I am responsible for our professional body regulations. I have to ensure that we meet all of our legal requirements, and students' requirements and that we are creating a vibrant learning community for our students. And I do lots of meetings and lots of emails!

I have a broader view of what's going on across the school. We've got over 3000 students in The School so my work is more of overview and ensuring quality. I do lots of reviewing and analyzing data, looking at trends in terms of how our students are achieving, ensuring that the

curriculum is of a high quality and relevance, looking at assessment practices, saying to people, I've noticed a trend here, I need you to look at assessment in your area in more detail. It doesn't mean that I do all of this myself, but the buck ultimately stops at my desk.

Kabir: You spoke about quality of education, so what measures/safeguards are in place at the School of Social Sciences and Professions to ensure academic integrity?

K: There's lots of things, it starts with the curriculum design. How well-designed is the curriculum? What's the purpose of the curriculum? What is it we want the students to learn and why are we assessing them on these particular things? Are we doing it because there's a particular professional body requirement, such as with Social Work England for example?

Is it because the skill and knowledge are vital to the future careers that students are going into? Is it relevant, is it contemporary?

Is the curriculum going to help students move into future graduate careers? So it starts with the curriculum design and we use lots of internal and external benchmarks for that. We use things such as the QAA benchmarking statements, but we also have a lot of internal quality processes from our academic quality department that we go through.

And then in the classroom, how well are we teaching? How well do we know our students? How are we ensuring assessing and checking that our students are engaged in the learning, that they're understanding why they're learning, and not say 'I have no idea why I'm learning



this'. How does it link to all of the other learning that you're doing?

How is it going to be applicable later in your career and how well do you feel supported, known and seen by your tutors? So it's important for me that you know that there are tutors who know, see and

notice if you are not engaging.

We also do things like peer observations of teaching where tutors observe each other and give feedback. That's why we have the course committee which you chaired so beautifully the other day, an immensely proud moment for me. That gives us a bit of an insight into how students are receiving the learning and provide feedback on how it can be even better. For me, student voice is really a key way of assessing the kind of standard and quality of what's going on.

We then have other mechanisms such as marking, we have first markers, second markers, and then we have external markers to review each of our modules. We also have the student surveys that give us feedback on individual module and we respond to those feedbacks accordingly. We also look at data of modules across a course and we'll have a look to find out what's going on in those modules - is the assessment appropriate? Is something going on with the teaching that we need to look at?

Kabir: What initiatives have you introduced to promote diversity and inclusion among staff and students of SSSP?

K: That's an important part of my job and one of the reasons I love London Met is because of how diverse our student population is. I could go and do a similar job in any university,

but I wouldn't get as much job satisfaction. We've worked really hard at how well we are representing the student diversity in the staff population. We've done lots of work trying to attract more diverse staff, and had some real successes, particularly in social work. However, it is more difficult to achieve diverse staffing in some areas of study because the pool of applicants tends to come from a smaller body of people. It doesn't mean we won't keep trying, and we will eventually attract diverse applicants to those areas.

For our students, I think we've done a lot of analysis of data over the years and we've worked hard at something called the degree awarding gap. This is the percentage of racially diverse students to white students who achieve higher grades. We found many years ago that our white students, although they were a smaller number of them in many of our courses, they were achieving higher grades than other students. And there are lots of reasons why that happened. It has nothing to do with their race and it's not about them not being able to achieve.

It's about ensuring that we are decolonizing our curriculum. Are we only teaching and assessing in Eurocentric ways? We did a lot of work looking at our curriculum and our assessments to ensure that what we're teaching is fit for all our students and not just a specific niche.

Particularly in assessment, we were looking at what we're requiring, for many of our students, English is a second, third or fourth language, and so we were looking at how much emphasis we place on written English, on the substance of the language rather than the eloquence. There is lots of work around decolonizing the curriculum and ensuring that students feel represented in the learning materials and case studies.

We have done a lot of work on inclusive behaviours training. All of our staff have

undertaken training around inclusive behaviours that looks at issues of race and racism in detail. It also looks at 'whiteness' and thinking about the impact of that.

It looks at things like microaggressions and also looks at how you enact your anti-racist commitment. And so we try and have conversations about issues of race and racism and other issues relating to equality and diversity like disability, sexuality and so on.

It is a positive development for us to have these conversations in a non-defensive way as it encourages continual reflection on our practice and impact on decisions that we make. One of the things that keeps me at London Met is that commitment to diversity to our students, our colleagues and our university. I will always talk about these issues and until they are no longer issues but I suspect I will not stop those conversations, ever.

Kabir: From my experience as a student rep and student union council member, a lot of students have expressed how much they would value free photocopies to help with their studies. How do you react to that?

K: Ultimately we have to balance our books, we need to make sure we have enough income and we're not spending too much money so that we remain financially sustainable. As I explained earlier, my role is to make sure that the school is healthy in lots of ways, including financially. However, I think students are more than entitled to ask for things that they think should be provided, and I would always encourage them to speak with the student union about potential campaigns or initiatives that they want to bring. My experience is that if we want to bring about something that is for all students, the student union is the best place to start. The student union has representation on some of the biggest committees in the university, our academic board and even the learning, teaching and quality

committee. So I would always encourage our students to raise issues but sometimes SSSP can't help because it's financially not possible for us. But I think there is something in using your voice in professionally presenting an idea, justifying why you think that that idea is useful and would be beneficial to the students.

I'm always open to students' feedback and we've done lots of things in response to student's feedback and I'm really proud of that. So the student union is the best place to start the issue of students' access to free photocopies.

Kabir: Lastly, what is your vision for the School of Social Sciences and Professions in the next 10 years?

K: This is a big one! I have incredibly high expectations for us as a university, for us as a school, for us as colleagues, and *I have high expectations for our students. I want them to have the highest view of themselves and to see that the world is potentially there for them to conquer. In that sense, I will never be satisfied, I will never get to the point where I say, 'okay we're done'. There's always more room for improvement and so for me, it will be continual.*

One of the biggest things I hope to achieve is for our students to go out into the world, achieve high-paying, highly esteemed jobs and go on to be the next leaders in their fields. I want to walk into every service in the UK and say, that chief over there is one of our graduates, that director is one of my students, that teacher is one of my students. And so for me, that is the vision and that's big because it has a societal impact.

The vision I have for our students is that they are the next group of diverse leaders, they're the next change agents, they're the next group of disruptors to the status quo, who are going to go in and dismantle some of the thinking and working ways that aren't fit for purpose

anymore. That for me is the bigger vision.

Kabir: Thank you so much for your time. I think you should be proud of what you've been able to achieve in the school. I'm a testament to what your great team is doing. I've been so impacted and empowered within a short time. I was given the opportunity to co-chair the course committee meeting, serve my peers as their rep and become a member of the student union council. Now I have the privilege of interviewing you as the Dean of my school. So students within the school are being given a chance to thrive and you should be proud of yourself and your team especially those in social work.

K: Thank you, Kabir. I am very proud and for me, these are things that are the non-curriculum based achievements. You know, these aren't about learning outcomes and assessments and so on. These are about empowering you when you go out into the world of work. Now you've had the experience of chairing a senior meeting. You've had the experience of interviewing somebody in a senior position. You've had the experience of advocating for others without a personal agenda, and you know these are really important things. And I think social work area does this particularly well. They have a real sense of how we can empower the students even more. It's a real core of who they are as a group of staff and I'm very proud of them.

"The vision I have for our students is that they are the next group of diverse leaders"

"One of the things that keeps me at London Met is that commitment to diversity to our students, our colleagues and our university. I will always talk about these issues and until they are no longer issues but I suspect I will not stop those conversations, ever."

"I love London Met because of how diverse our student group is."

“NO FIXED ABODE”

Student Housing & Homelessness Survey

IS YOUR HOUSING A PROBLEM?

Are you student from the School of Social Sciences and Professions (SSSP)?

At London Met, we understand students can face a variety of problems outside university. Your housing might be one of them. High rents, overcrowding, damp and the threat of eviction are growing concerns for many people, including students. If you're experiencing these issues, it might impact on your ability to study and enjoy university life to the full.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The research project “**No Fixed Abode**” is launching a survey of **SSSP students**, asking about your housing and how it affects your day-to-day life. We will use this information to better understand your experiences and speak to the senior leadership team to help shape advice services at LMU.

The closing date is
29th March.

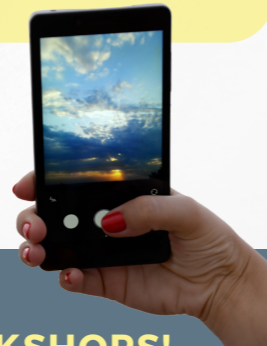
If you have any questions,
please contact Glyn Robbins
g.robbins@londonmet.ac.uk

Please scan the QR code to complete the survey:



JOIN PHOTOVOICE WORKSHOPS!

We are also inviting you to participate in the creative part of the project where you will have an opportunity to share more of your experiences, while learning about using photography as a form of expression. **You can express your interest in taking part in the 3 PhotoVoice workshops when you complete the survey.**



Social Work England

SOCIAL WORK ENGLAND

A specialist regulator focused on enabling positive change in social work

Every day, social workers support millions of people to improve their chances in life. We are taking a new approach to regulating social workers in their vital roles.

We believe in the power of collaboration and share a common goal with those we regulate—to protect the public, enable positive change and ultimately improve people's lives.

SESSIONS DELIVERED BY SOCIAL WORK ENGLAND

Now in its fourth year, the programme boasts the strongest line-up to date with over 20 free sessions. These sessions are co-produced by Social Work England with those working across the sector and those with lived and learned experience.

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/social-work-week/>

THE SOCIAL WORKER AND THE MENTOR LIVE AT THE LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY



In the Autumn of 2022 my fellow students and I, went to London South Bank University to watch the Social Worker and the Mentor live. While we sat there and watched, our brains all started to work overtime and we thought we should bring this podcast to London Metropolitan but on a bigger scale. We decided to take our ideas to the Dean, to see if she could see what we envisioned and fingers crossed get a yes to begin organising the first student-led event by students in the Social Work courses. After a very detailed meeting. Discussing why we need this event and how other students not only Social Worker students can find this useful, we got the yes we needed. What we wanted to achieve for our event, was to showcase the

realities of working frontline as a Social Worker and the relationships between multi-agencies. We believe as students academically we are all very confident in our practice, but once we entered placement what we learnt was not what we were putting into practice. Many students in placement suffer from burnout, have broken down relationships with their Supervisors/ Practice educators or are just overwhelmed with the workload. We wanted this event to give guidance on these greys and better prepare students, who are now making their way into placement or new employment.

The idea started to take shape with the special help of Anna Jakobczak, the talented research assistant of Donna Jones and now our very

own helper who started to connect us to technicians and people in the university that are responsible for events. Every fortnight we held Teams meetings to discuss updates, overview of how we would want the night and topics of discussion for the night. Seeing how London South Bank held their podcast, we did want to do it slightly differently and wanted to provide a more chilled vibe for the evening. Involving Robert (The mentor) and Nana (The Social Worker), from the beginning allowed us to work collaboratively and design an event that was what we all wanted but also deliver something we were all proud of.

The night came, over 100 people attended and we were already delighted with the turnout as it was a cold Friday in November. The event ran so smoothly, the music was flowing nicely, the attendees were relaxed with the drinks that were being served and most importantly everyone was excited for the main event our podcast.

Not only did we have a discussion held by Robert and Nana, but we also had a live Q&A section for all those who wanted clarification on any burning questions they may have. This section of the event was really popular amongst all attendees,

questions ranged from how to deal with difficult Practice Educators and protecting your mental health. Some attendees felt more comfortable speaking after the Q&A and that was fine as we had a networking session too. The networking went amazing, speaking to Social Workers who have been in the profession for 10+ years and receiving advice in different sectors. Amongst those who attended were other Social Workers, who are very influential on Instagram too and they too were speaking to those who were unsure what to expect in the profession.

Overall, it was a spectacular event that was powered by hard work and determination. But, more importantly, this event was led by three powerful black women who are paving their way in the Social Work world and ultimately have opened the door for other student Social Workers at London Metropolitan to bring their ideas to life.

"It was really good, and can resonate with what was said. Could draw pieces from the podcast, for my practice in child psychology."



Gloria Mputu, Cindy-Louise Martin, Melissa Namwanje



L-R Nana Yabbey-Hagan and Anna Jakobczak.

“It was really informative, especially about self-care.”

“The podcast was so realistic, there was no holding back and I feel more prepared for becoming a Social Worker.”

“I understand what Social Work is now and being a first-year student it has made me more knowledgeable. Also, it has been very helpful, to be able to network too.”

“Very insightful and made me aware of how important mental health and self-care is.”



L-R Nana Yabbey-Hagan, Gloria Mputu, Cindy-Louise Martin, Melissa Namwanje and Robert Dyer.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AT THE 2023 COMMUNITY CARE LIVE EVENT

Our journey into social work practice was still in its infancy, and we still had difficulty navigating the demanding coursework and abundant reading materials. We were still attempting to learn how to become emotionally resilient and deal with real-life situations that will surely confront us as practitioners in the near future. All these are constant realities we battle within the first few weeks of the academic year.

At the very least, we needed a break from the four walls of the classroom, not a vacation from studying, but a change of the learning environment. It therefore came as a much-needed relief, to receive an invitation to attend the 2023 community care live event at BCD, London. The conference brought together practitioners in the field of social work from around the country.

According to the organizers, the goals of the event were to foster learning, promote ideas, and enable participants to explore opportunities available in social work practice. I will therefore evaluate how I personally felt about the event in light of these three objectives.

Firstly, the ushers were very polite and welcoming, and the registration process went without a hitch. The exhibitors: participating councils, recruiters, and other pertinent social work organisations, were amiable, and enthusiastic, clearly outlining the social services they provide and enticing visitors to take advantage of the opportunities on offer.

The event featured free seminars on a range of topics that are relevant to social work practice. There were more than 30 seminars covering a

variety of subjects, including Dementia Care: latest insight from research; Autism and anxiety: a neurodiversity approach; Social worker self-care – more than a personal responsibility; Menopause in the social care workplace; Understanding hoarding: a trauma-informed approach; Building confidence in the social work profession through regulation; Crisis social work: supporting vulnerable individuals around the world; Anti-racist practice: how to showcase and share best practice nationally and Working with adults diagnosed with a personality disorder to mention a few.

These sessions were handled by specialists in the relevant field who gave compelling insight into each of the subject. I went to a few of the seminars and learned useful tips from the wealth of knowledge of the professionals who anchored the lectures. My understanding of some social work concepts and the practical applications of various intervention approaches was greatly improved by this learning experience. My colleagues that went to attend other seminars during the conference gave favourable feedbacks.

I visited some exhibitors throughout the course of the event, such as Liquid Personnel (a social worker recruitment agency), Essex County Council, Sutton Council, and Thurrock Council, to name a few. Since each of them has a different set of ideas to share and opportunities to offer, my experiences at each stall were unique and rewarding. I was also thrilled to have the chance to speak with some local council officials about the possibility of having my 70-day placement, and they gladly urged me to apply through the

university placement team.

On a lighter note, I found the participant-led chair yoga, meditation, and relaxation sessions incredibly soothing. This demonstrates that the event planners place a high value on the participants' health and well-being.

Overall, the event was well-planned and had a beautiful atmosphere. The turnout was good, and I agree that the organizers' intended objectives had been accomplished. The event has foster learning, promote ideas, and enable participants explore opportunities. The experience was extremely beneficial to my personal growth as a social work student and my readiness to practice in a professional setting. Without hesitation, I will encourage other students and professionals to attend the event next year.

By Kabir Bakare



Photo from <https://www.communitycarelive.co.uk/>

CRIME OF THE CENTURY

Brought to SSSP by Donna Jones, Head of Subject. 11th March (10am and 2pm Performances). Not to be missed! Afternoon show SOLD OUT! Limited tickets available for Morning show. please visit the Eventbrite page at <https://crime-of-the-century-londonmet.eventbrite.co.uk>

Following three tragic deaths of teenagers associated with Chickenshed, the company embarked on producing a piece of theatre that could be used as a positive tool in the fight against the savagery of knife crime and gang violence. One of the teenagers was Shaquille Smith who at 14 years of age was the youngest child to die as a result of knife crime in the UK in 2008. Both Shaquille's cousins, Daniel Banton and Jojo Morrall, became personally involved in the performance of the piece.



The resulting show, **Crime of the Century**, completed a successful run at the Edinburgh Fringe festival to rave reviews from the arts press and since 2008 it has continued to tour to schools, colleges, universities, community centres, pupil referral units and prisons.

"...if the twenty first century will be remembered as the time we let our children kill each other, Chickenshed will be remembered as the theatre company who had the guts to ask how and why."

Time Out ****

Crime of the Century has garnered rave reviews from educationalists and workers at the front line of dealing with young people. Many would like to see the production in their areas and schools as an essential tool to help create community change.

"The performance at the Fringe was absolutely amazing. When are you coming to the North East and would you be prepared to put on a performance at my school, Academy 360? I think the message would also be really important for our young people in Sunderland"

Gerry O 'Hanlon, Director of Learning, Global Dimension. Academy360 Pennywell, Sunderland

Chickenshed has used this project to work with victims of violence and their families, perpetrators, the police, local authorities and community outreach centres. It is a potent tool for social change. The workshops, along with the performance develop a positive understanding of the conditions which lead to youth alienation and knife crime. Workshops are designed to encourage young people to discuss their fears and concerns, alongside hopes and aspirations for the future. We ensure that individuals are heard, their issues explored as we develop an empowered sense of how to effect change.

"It would be senseless for this production not to tour every senior school in Britain. The poignancy and power of Chickenshed's piece earns it the right to be noticed and commended; not only by theatre critics but by politicians."

What's on Stage *****

CHICKENSHED
THEATRE CHANGING LIVES

MUMS AND SUPERSTUDENTS!

Thinking about starting your journey at LondonMet, but you are not sure due to your parental responsibilities?

Thula, Michelle and D. (from Dad) are our parents who are doing very well in their second year of MSc Social Work at London Metropolitan University. They are very happy to share their experience balancing parenting and studying.

Q: Who are you?

D: I am a Dad in Year 2 MSc Social Work.

M: I am Michelle, I am in my second year of my master's in Social work, and I am a mum of two children; however, they are both 16 and 13, so I've not really had to juggle childcare so much.

T: Hello, Maria. Thank you for this lovely interview. My name is Thula Milambo, and I'm an MSC Social work student; this is my final year, so I'm in year two, hoping to complete this by the summer. Yes, I have one child in year six in primary school.

Q: How has your experience been so far?

D: It has been a good learning experience and challenging both mentally, emotionally and physically too. It has not been easy having to juggle work, placements, family commitments and school at the same time. Sacrifices have had to be made but I believe it will be worth it in the end.

M: I am in my second year of my master's in social work; my experience has been positive. I have been really lucky to have a really supportive cohort and have made some close friends.

T: I studied for my undergraduate degree at London Metropolitan a couple of years ago and I was I was also a mum, but what's different as an undergraduate, I had a small toddler and, compared to now, a child that's going off to secondary school.

Q: Just going into a little more of your

experience, could you tell me more about your experience studying at the university while having a child?

D: Childcare is very expensive. Finding parents or friends to help with the school runs or child care while on placement was and continues to be challenging. But I have a good support network that has stepped in to help.

In addition, I have had to compromise on quality time with the children. I have had to explain that I will need to concentrate on my school work sometimes and I may be unavailable to take them to play, church or visit their friends. They have not liked this on several occasions but have understood.

M: I find the lectures very helpful and have found the subject content interesting most of the time. (maybe not law)

T: Depending on the age of your children, the challenges are very different, so I've had both very interesting experiences. Toddlers are more demanding than my child, who can do more things independently. I have a strong community around me. It takes a whole village to raise a child, and when they are toddlers, it is very important to have that support if you are doing a course at the university. Now, my routines have to be very strict to cope with everything.

Q: What are some positives of having a child while you are at the university?

D: It keeps you focused on completing the course and providing them with a better quality of life

T: My child sees how much effort I am putting into my studies and the discipline I need to have; he is learning from me. I am his example, and I think that is very important.

Q: There would also be some negatives;

could you tell me more about your struggles?

D: Childcare is very expensive. Finding parents or friends to help with the school runs or childcare while on placement was and continues to be challenging. But I have a good support network that has stepped in to help.

In addition, I have had to compromise on quality time with the children. I have had to explain that I will need to concentrate on my schoolwork sometimes, and I may be unavailable to take them to play, church or visit their friends. They have not liked this on several occasions but have understood.

M: I live far away, so my placements have been between an hour and a half to 2 hours travel each way. So, this has been tiring and expensive. However, saying that both my placements have been statutory, and I have gained some really good experience.

T: It is difficult financially, that would be the other side of the coin, the difficult one, make sure you have everything under control financially so you can focus on your studies and your family. Things will be a bit more tight than when we are at work but it is worth it once we finished.

Q: Do you have any support from the university?

D: Some lectures would be online to accommodate teachers' strikes. Lecturers were also understanding whenever we were late due to various reasons and were available for consultations and feedback.

M: My husband is fab and basically lets me get on with work as much as possible at the weekend.

T: We don't have lessons or placement during schools holidays and that makes things much more easier. If you can't attend to some lessons you can always let your teacher know and they understand it, most of the lessons are also recorded which also helps if you miss some or need to going through them again.

Q: If you go back to the first week of your course, back then, what advice would you give to yourself from now to then?

D: Commit fully to the course. Prepare for the week by reading and understanding the week's work. Take care of self.

M: My advice would be to not put so much pressure on yourself and have more confidence in your ability.

T: Seek support if you need it; there is nothing wrong with asking for help when you need it.

Q: The last question, would you have any advice for those students who are going back to university and either going to have a baby or already have children?

D: Have a good family support network and friends, if possible. You will need them to get through the course. Sacrifices and compromises have to be made and do not feel guilty when you can't spend time with the family. It will be well worth it in the end.

M: Make sure you are financially stable as its expensive, especially if you are doing the master course. Ensure you have people around that can help particularly with childcare. Placement is hard and you will be away from your children a lot which will be difficult. You need to put the work in and keep on top of things - which can be difficult without children but a lot more challenging with them. It is possible and the time does go by quickly and it will be worth it. Go for it!!

T: Organization, deadlines, routines with your kids and build new relationships at placement and university.

"It is possible, and the time does go by quickly, and it will be worth it. Go for it."

Here you have three different parents with three different experiences, parenting is just an opportunity to show your children how to achieve goals in life, as our student Thula said, being their examples is the best advice we can give to them, if your education is important for you and achieving your life aspirations, show your children that everything is possible with effort and consistency.

BY MARIA ASUNCION MUNOZ DOMINGUEZ- ALSO A MOTHER OF A TEENAGER 😊

WHAT IS IT LIKE BEING A BLACK MAN PRACTISING SOCIAL WORK IN NORTH YORKSHIRE?

*This issue features an interview with **Issac Mulondo**, a London black social worker who works in North Yorkshire. **Melissa Namwanje** conducted the interview. The purpose of this interview is for Isaac to talk about some of the difficulties, biases, and positives he has encountered throughout his professional career in social work.*

This issue features an interview with *Issac Mulondo*, a London black social worker who works in North Yorkshire. *Melissa Namwanje* conducted the interview. The purpose of this interview is for Isaac to talk about some of the difficulties, biases, and positives he has encountered throughout his professional career in social work.

M: Firstly, thank you for participating in this issue of the Loop, Issac. Can you please tell me a bit about yourself?

I: My name is Isaac. I am from East London (Newham). I am 34 years old, married, with four children (10,8,5 &2). I have been a qualified social worker for four years. When I am not socially working, I am a professional musician who gets to travel and wind down from the job doing this as a paid hobby. I currently work as a children's and families social worker on a locality team.

M: What has been your experience with social work?

I: I currently work in the North of England. That is where my social work journey started post-graduation. My experience so far has been positive overall. Working up north has definitely

given me numerous opportunities to learn and work with people from different social classes, ethnicities and cultures.

M: What led you to choose social work as a career path?

I: My first degree is in music, but I couldn't distance myself from doing life with people and being part of people's stories, especially towards the betterment of their circumstances. Social work of some sort has always been in my blood, whether that would be from travelling and volunteering in Africa, South America, or the communities of London; it's something I've always loved to do.

M: How has your experience as a black man been doing social work in the North of England?

I: My experience as a social worker has been negative and positive, but mostly positive, and where I have worked has helped a lot. When I first came to the north, it was very typical to be stereotyped as the social worker who was the 'gangster' and knew everything about gangs, so I was named a champion (expert) in CSE (Child sexual exploitation) and CCE (Child criminal exploitation). Yes, although where I am from



Melissa Namwanje
Co-Editor



Issac Mulondo
Social Worker

was not the best of areas, as many other parts of the city, it does not mean I am a 'gangster' or 'hood'. I have found myself in a situation where a manager had to check that she was not being unconsciously biased against me on an occasion. I respect that this was considered, but it did not change how I was treated after that. Being black and male in the north has some positives, such as engaging young people much more easily.

M: Do you believe there's a difference between black social workers working in London and working outside of London?

I: The black experience is shared nationwide, especially in social work. You are dealing with the same issues in a different context. I will take away that where there is less of a BAME population, stereotyping is highlighted more, as you stick out like a 'sore thumb'.

M: Do you think social work professionals have an unconscious bias when it comes to black men in social work?

I: Yes! We are guilty of practising unconscious bias in our everyday lives, but from the experience of others, I understand that within the profession, this has affected BAME social workers to progress to higher roles than our non-BAME counterparts.

M: What Advice would you give to other black men who want to get into social work?

I: First, I would point out a lack of black social workers in the profession. Not only black but male black social workers. In my view, London is fortunate to have a pool of skilled BAME social workers. However, there is a need for BAME workers outside of London and in the rural areas of the country. We want awareness to go beyond the borders of the city. People in rural areas can be very ignorant of Ethnic minority's lived experiences in the UK, partly due to being so far removed from the rest of the country. Black social workers make an invaluable contribution to social work in London and the UK. So, if they are considering this, unapologetically be YOU! It has helped me.

MY SELECTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS' INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS TO GET YOU THROUGH YOUR SOCIAL WORK WORLD



BASW official Instagram account. Hey guys!! Let's start from the beginning [@basw_uk](#)

If you want to keep yourself updated, this one is a MUST; the most recent news, relevant organisations or Social Workers, advice or links to resources, you will find it all here.



The socialworkerandthementor

Don't you know Nana and Robbie's Instagram account??? If that is the case, run to your account and click on follow, as this social worker and school mentor are on fire! All eyes on them! Not only will you benefit from a good learning experience, but you will also witness a wonderful activist for social workers' rights [@thesocialworkerandthementor](#).

YOUR FAVOURITE
LOCAL AUTHORITY OR
ORGANISATION

Do you have a favourite Local Authority or Organisation you would like to know more about, or are you considering applying for a job with them, maybe your ASYE? Check their social media accounts and keep you informed about what is going on with them.



My Social Work News, for social workers and by social workers, [@myswnews](#)

Do you want to share an experience? This is your place.

Do you want to know about what other social workers are experiencing? This is your place.

Do you want to read about the reality of social work? This is your place.



New Generation Social Work
[@newgeneration_socialwork](#)

Hey, Hey, Hey, THIS COULD BE YOU!!! **London Met MSc Ex-Student Ash's** Instagram account, you can discover more about his project about how to develop the quality of your practice and skills underpinned by our values as professionals. Congratulations to Ash, London Met. Uni is proud of you and your project!



Dear Social Worker Podcast, Le'Siran is an award-winning Leadership Coach based in the UK with over a decade of experience in Children's Social Work. Le'Siran's Instagram account is full of resources and advice. Also, she has amazing podcasts to help professional growth. These are just some of the many things you will find in her account. Le'Siran is passionate about empowering Social Workers, and you will feel it once you pop into her account [@dearsocialworkerpodcast](#)

By Maria Munoz-Dominguez

INTERVIEW WITH THE AFRICA ADVOCACY FOUNDATION (AAF)



I stumbled on the Africa Advocacy Foundation while searching for resource to support a person of African heritage who is living with HIV and identifies as LGBTQ+. I find it fascinating that an organisation is committed to supporting demographically disadvantaged groups and relishes the prospect of learning more about their services. It was therefore an absolute pleasure for me to sit down (virtually) with Sherenne Collins (Violence Against Women and Girl's Service Manager) and Aisha Morgan (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) of Africa Advocacy Foundation. They both shared insight into the foundation's support for diaspora communities and marginalised people, particularly people from minority communities. They also spoke on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), domestic abuse and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Kindly indulge.....

Kabir: Please tell us about the Africa Advocacy Foundation and explain the type of social services, and support you provide.

AAF: Our foundation is based in Catford, South London, and we cover the whole of South London. We are a community-led initiative that aims to equip diaspora communities and marginalised people with the tools they need to find better health, safety, prosperity and opportunity to lead fulfilling and happy lives.

Africa Advocacy Foundation (AAF) supports and empowers vulnerable and disadvantaged people, facing violence, living in poverty and poor health particularly within black migrant

communities primarily in the UK. We work with communities that are affected by a range of issues such as sexual and reproductive health, violence against women and girls including Female genital mutilation (FGM) and mental health issues.

We do support LGBTQ+ people of African heritage who are living with HIV. We provide grants for our clients as well because we're aware of the financial hardship everyone is experiencing in terms of being on a low income and lots of cuts here and there. So we have allocated funds to support them because economic and financial pressure also causes an increase in domestic violence and abuse. We also have a community centre where everyone comes together and socialise. We have cultural food prepared for them for free. We also have a gardening plot where people grow their vegetables, which we tend to then use to do the cooking. We have workshops where we run yoga, do paintings, and do lots of creative work to reduce isolation and enhance mental well-being. We have a radio station, where we do podcasts and talk about local things that are going on in the community.

Kabir: Can you tell us about some of the legal frameworks, principles and policies, that underpin your work at Africa Advocacy Foundation?

AAF: We have safeguarding policies which highlight our role in regard and we make necessary referrals to social services as and when required. We have a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination and oppression both for our



Sherenne Collins



Aisha Morgan



Kabir Bakare, Co-Editor

staff and service users which also includes LGBTQ+. We've also been working with a new LGBTQ+ organisation who had supported us around our policies and making sure that they're LGBTQ+ friendly. We have a domestic abuse policy in place and this also applies to both staff and persons with lived experience (PwLE). If any of our staff members are experiencing domestic abuse, we as an organisation and as managers would support and safeguard them. We have HIV and disclosure/confidentiality policy. We also have our health & safety policy and volunteer policy. We have more volunteers than actual staff because our ideals and work ethic resonate with a lot of people. So there are different policies for all the different areas of our practice.

Kabir: You mentioned that your work is primarily centred on the African community in the UK, can you therefore tell us some of the challenges faced by a black migrant who identifies as LGBTQ+?

AAF: Our organisation observes that there was a large stigma within the black community surrounding the contraction of HIV. Especially for gay men, they face a lot of the stigmas like, oh, they contracted HIV through having sex with other men and they are therefore seen as immoral and weird within their community.

But then when they disclose to others that they contracted it through birth, the stigma is often replaced with pity but it does not change the homophobic treatment they have to endure from others. It is sometimes very difficult for them to even separate from that narrative. There are also cultural challenges because minority communities often have deep-rooted beliefs which do not accommodate non-traditional or same-sex relationships. Consequently, some of the victims do not have adequate coping mechanisms, they internalise the stigma and become depressed. We recently had a programme led by the nature of the faith project, whereas if you identify as LGBTQ+, but you also identify as Christian or Muslim, the intersectionality of whether you've had HIV or you're affected by HIV, could cause problems. Not just within the black community itself, but as you further explore your identity, it becomes more difficult to attend church or mosque. It then leads to withdrawal from faith and the faith-based community that you probably built up since you were a kid growing up in a family and ultimately leads to an increased level of isolation. And so that in itself causes a lot of mental health problems, because regardless of the social networks and the social narratives that are at play, it all feeds back to how the individual processes the challenge and how they cope with it.

Kabir: As advocates against GBV and other abuse, can you tell us some of the challenges faced by victims of GBV and harmful traditional/cultural practices in black communities?

AAF: Firstly, there's a lot of stigma around domestic abuse and HIV in the black community. And even though domestic abuse is everyone's business, we are aware that there's still a lot of stigma and myth around it being like a family business, like an in-house business, and like people outside aren't supposed to get involved. Within the minority community, we know there is a culture of silence and a lot of challenges to anyone coming forward and speaking about their story and getting support. We've been at it for a very long time and have an understanding of all the different kinds of contexts. So sometimes when we get referrals, they haven't asked the questions that could indicate deeper problems such as asking if the woman has undergone FGM. Sometimes people are just referred just because they are black basically. We have to explain to other professionals and challenge them on how important those questions are because it has long-term health effects on women.

Some women aren't even aware of what FGM is because it's a culturally normalised practice in their communities. Another issue has to do with the potential backlash experienced by survivors of domestic violence if they present themselves for support. Also, we work with undocumented women as well and women who have come from overseas. Many of those in this category have language barriers and we ensure they have access to an interpreter. These women also do not understand that their rights in the UK are very different to those overseas in terms of laws and eligibility for things. So we do a lot of work around educating them, especially concerning domestic abuse. Like in the UK, we've got really good laws, Acts and legislations in place to support survivors. So there is a lot of problem around people not knowing what services are available and accessible due to language and cultural barriers. At AAF, it's about understanding the trauma and the effects that it

has on those individuals. And there's no perfect survivor or perfect victim. Everybody is treated as an individual as they have gone through their experiences and it impacts them differently. It's also about understanding and taking it on board that the support relevant for one person is not necessarily going to be relevant or work for another person.

Kabir: You've been able to identify some of the challenges; now how do you support a black LGBTQ person living with HIV or a victim of domestic abuse?

AAF: We have so many different services under our foundation. So for instance, if we get a referral, we will determine which service best fits depending on the person's circumstance and peculiar needs. For example, if it is a person living with HIV, they'd be referred to the HIV services. For VAWG-related cases, it will come to us and so on. An individual can also present multiple challenges and different services within our organisation will interface to support them. This is because we know that those who are from marginalised communities that identify as LGBTQ, do present extra risk factors. One of the good things about AAF is there's seamless communication between services on cases, and the clients we are supporting can access so many different services under one roof.

We have community groups specifically for black men living with HIV, who identify as LGBTQ+. We've also tried very hard to upscale our organisation in terms of the language, for example in the VAWG sector, instead of saying women and girls, we will say femme in identifying women and girls. So that's a language change that has been targeted to make sure that those who identify as a woman and not naturally born women felt included in that group. This is because you also have those that are LGBTQ+, who may have been born without a womb, but do have a vagina. Those who have a vagina and a wound, but also have testes and our cultural narrative within our organisation is to make sure that we're going forward and making sure that everybody who is experiencing some form of

intersectionality within a migrant and diaspora community is included within our projects and feel safe within our projects regardless of how they identify.

Kabir: There's a report by Stonewall that 51% of LGBTQ+ people from the minority community, face discrimination in the larger LGBTQ+ community. How do you respond to that?

AAF: This is particularly felt within our youth groups; we have a lot of individuals who identify as bisexual or lesbian or even gay and being from a migrant community adds an additional layer of susceptibility to discrimination from their peers who are from the majority race. On top of this, they're still trying to figure out and navigate their life and they probably haven't disclosed it to their parents yet. I think this can have a large impact in terms of, I can't necessarily identify with the experiences of my counterparts like a white or Caucasian LGBTQ+, because the layers to surmount are different. They often find it difficult to disclose their sexuality and freely express themselves like others. The anxiety and the mental health challenges that came with that kind of expectation and pressure could be overwhelming.

Kabir: How receptive are black LGBT people living with HIV, to therapeutic approaches?

AAF: I think the receptive level is hard to assess, and there's a difference between having somebody being referred in after having been with another service and then somebody who we had direct contact with. Their journeys look different because if somebody's referred in, it can hint towards a history of already being engaged and therapeutic and other support being started. Then being a specialist service, we can step in and add to that as opposed to what is determinism triage. But if a service user comes to us directly and they haven't had any other support before, that journey is different because a lot of the work is put into supporting them. It can be quite confusing and complex,

not to say that other situations aren't complex, but I think there are a lot of different complexities and experiences that inform whether someone is willing or able to engage with the service. As I mentioned earlier it could be greatly influenced by identity challenges, ostracisation, trauma, shame, backlash, and fear. If they access a different service before they come to AAF it also depends on what the experience was like. Because we know that a lot of people who are seeking support go to multiple services and may have negative experiences and then they're labelled as non-engagers. And for us, at AAF we try to build up that consistency, even if they're not engaging we show up, and it helps to break down that barrier. So it's about just educating and having discussions around what the counselling and therapeutic services can do, and supporting those in the community to build up their support network. We do a lot of empowerment, engagement and encouragement using positive interviewing skills and coaching to try to break down those barriers. We also do a lot of confidence-building workshops, lifestyle adjustment workshops and coming to terms with your diagnosis workshops. And then like signposting them to other organisations that can help with that adjustment to day-to-day life while living with HIV.

Kabir: How does Africa Advocacy ensure anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice?

AAF: As mentioned earlier, we have zero tolerance for oppressive and discriminatory behaviour within our organisation. We've been trained to sustain such ethical values within and outside our organisation. It also reflects in the way we engage with our service users and we ensure that everything we do across all of our services is extremely client-centred. However, our service users sometimes experience oppression and discrimination in their daily lives and they feel unable to speak up against it. Sometimes these things come in the form of unconscious biases and they influence the extent to which a black person is treated within some settings. As their community and as their

home, AAF provides a safe place for escalation if somebody has experienced oppression and discrimination elsewhere. So for example, if a nurse said something discriminatory or oppressive concerning a client's FGM, we would ask the service user, do you want to report that, is that something that you're comfortable with reporting, is that what you want to do even if you're not confident in doing it yourself. We're often the people who will do the emails and fill out the forms with the service user. We will, if need be, refer them to the in-house counsellor and things like that.

At health forums with GPs and nurses, we always have discussions and feedback on any negative experiences our service users had around race or oppression. For instance, it is important within the black community, in terms of childbirth, to ensure disclosure about FGM. We have had a referral for a client and it said FGM is not applicable. And I was like it's always applicable to ask, especially because she's from a practising country and she might be having underlying health issues. More importantly, all women should be asked about this because we should just make it a standard norm in terms of being very transparent and even just in terms of educating. So, if I had somebody who's not from a practising country, I would say, do you know what FGM is? Have you undergone FGM? Do you know anyone who's undergone FGM? And then that's how we can start breaking down those barriers. So we always ask if they've undergone FGM and about HIV and sexual orientation because these are things that have a huge impact on their health and emotional well-being. If those questions are not being asked, then you are being oppressive. As an organisation, we've all got our own personal lived experiences of racism and oppression. So maybe that's why within the black community, people are more comfortable with having those conversations with us because they know that we've also had those kinds of experiences. And it comes from a place of compassion and care and as professionals we have to call out those behaviours.

Kabir: Which organisations normally send referrals to AAF?

AAF: So we get referrals from NHS Health Professionals, from Substance misuse support, from Citizens Advice, and the council. We also get referrals from other charity organisations, from social services, adults and children but we have more as self-referrals because our clients can self-refer themselves. South London communities have got really good word of mouth and people who access our services and had good experiences can easily tell others. For example, as an African organisation, we are automatically given just any person who is African, whether we support anything that they're experiencing or not. Somebody experiencing addiction will be sent to us because they are black, even though our services aren't necessarily catered towards addiction. Then we'll go back to them and be like, listen, we can refer you to another agency because we're not specifically dealing with addiction unless it correlates with HIV or whether it correlates with VAWG.

Kabir: How does your organization support the development of social work students?

AAF: So in terms of placement, we take students on for placements. I think it's good because even for me, I've worked alongside social workers for a long time as a family support worker, for like 19 years. I think it's important that social workers come and do their placements here because it gives them insight into how voluntary organisations are run, in terms of what domestic abuse looks like, in terms of what someone living with HIV looks like. They get to have that experience and it breaks down those barriers in terms of people being more open-minded and having more understanding and knowledge around those issues. Social workers are very important people, so it helps the students to have more understanding and knowledge about services, and how they impact service users. So yes, we've got students and we had one from the States and she was doing her Master's

around health within the black community. She wrote a huge piece about the impact on domestic abuse and those living with HIV. And we have lots of volunteers as well like there are more volunteers than there are staff in our organisation. We also have students and we have some people come from overseas who come on a student voluntary visa and they stay for maybe a year and volunteer with us. So we have people from the states, from Africa, and the EU.

Kabir: Is your organization open to partnership with London Metropolitan University in terms of social work student placement?

AAF: I've had student social workers on placement in my previous place of employment. I worked for a different organisation in domestic abuse and we're like on-site supervisors. So I know how that works in terms of supporting students and making sure they have supervision and then writing portfolios about the work they delivered. So for me, one extra pair of hands and somebody who's also learning is a welcome idea. More so, they know a bit about social services, VAWG sectors, LGBTQ, HIV, substance misuse and other relevant things. So I can definitely go back to my CEO and discuss the prospect of collaboration with the university. And that would be something she would have to decide. I'm open to it because I think any opportunity, learning opportunity is great. And also we can learn from other people as well, it's always a give and take.



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RAINBOW ROOM
(T1-01)



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