



TIP – As you consider moving to the United Kingdom, I would advise you to develop a genuine interest in understanding how the field of social work operates. This is different from simply aiming to pass your interview.

As someone who has sat on interview panels, I can assure you that interviewers can easily distinguish between someone who is passionate about social work as a career and someone who is simply looking for a job. So, approach it with the mindset of someone who truly values social work and wants to understand how the UK system functions.

PERSON CENTRED APPROACH

When you start practicing in the UK later, you'll quickly realise that one of the most talked-about terms is *person-centred*. Your manager will ask if your assessment is person-centred, and auditors will check whether you took a person-centred approach when assessing people's care and support needs and putting together care plans (basically, solutions to the needs you found).

So, it's super important that you're familiar with this approach — and that you mention it in your cover letter or bring it up during your interview. If you talk about doing an assessment but don't mention the person-centred approach, it's like losing five marks right off the bat. Seriously, it's a big deal.

WHAT IS IT THEN?

There's a story about an organisation from Europe that visited a community in Africa, aiming to help. They arrived as "experts," observed the area, and noticed that women were walking about two kilometres to fetch water from a borehole. They figured the obvious solution was to bring the water source closer to the homes — problem solved, right?

So, without asking anyone in the community, they went ahead and drilled a new borehole nearby. But to their surprise, hardly anyone used it. Confused and a bit frustrated, they asked the villagers why they weren't using the closer water source.

The women explained that the walk to the borehole wasn't just about water — it was their time to talk, share their struggles and dreams, and connect with one another. It was like a form of group therapy. By putting the water source too close, that valuable social time was taken away.

Had the organisation simply asked what the community really needed, the women said they would've suggested using the funds to start a local business instead.

The lesson? They forgot to be **person centred**.

Always remember — people are the experts in their own lives. Our role is to support them *after* we've understood what they actually want, as long as it's within what we're able and allowed to do.

LET US BRING IT TO THE UK

When you do your assessments, whether you are working in a Mental Health Team, Learning Disabilities Team or Older Persons Team, always remember that you are not the expert of your clients lives. To implement a person-centered approach, do the following.

- Ask them questions that get them talking about their life — their interests, what makes them sad, the resources they rely on, and the strengths they have.
- Ask them what they want to achieve in their lives and what barriers they feel are standing in the way.
- ...I'm sure you get my point — it's about *their* perspective, not just what you think. That doesn't mean you leave out your own professional opinion;

it's important too. Just make sure it doesn't overshadow the **voice of the client**.

- Don't forget to actively listen. I mean, why ask questions if you're not going to listen to the answers, right?

INTERVIEW APPLICATION

In an interview, you might be asked one of the following questions, though they might not be worded exactly that way — but you're smart enough to understand. These are the types of questions where you'll talk about how you've used a person-centred approach before or how you would use it in a future case.

1. Can you tell us about a time when you completed an assessment?
2. How would you conduct an assessment, and what are the key things you would consider?

TIP - Remember to always use the STAR approach in giving your responses.

S – Describe the Situation.

T – Outline the Task.

A – Explain the Action you took (or would take).

R – Share the Result of your action.

We can't always give clients everything they ask for — but we *can* listen to them. There are limits to what we can provide because we work within financial constraints and legal boundaries. For example, if a mental health client says that going on a safari in Africa would help improve their wellbeing, that's important to acknowledge — it matters to *them*. But that doesn't mean, as a social worker, you can offer that directly. You might explore whether any charity organisations could support such a goal, but it won't come from a government-funded budget. So let people speak, record what they share, and do your best to meet the needs that fall within what the law and resources allow. That is what person-centred approach is about - Zivo