

COERCIVE CONTROL CASE STUDY

"Martha"

"Martha self-referred to our service, initially for emotional support. She was a professional independent woman in full time employment and access to our services was extremely limited as her control and surveillance by her partner was 24/7, but she knew she needed to understand what was happening and to escape.

The relationship began like a 'fairytale', very intense, lots of gifts and romantic gestures. Six months in, following the first violent incident in a crowded street in front of witnesses, she realised just how frightened she was of him. This incident was a shock and she was full of disbelief. We recognised this as text book 'minimalisation' and 'trivialisation' of his behaviour that had become her normal life.

Encouragement to stay home with him and miss visits with friends and family, texts and calls to find out her whereabouts, how she was getting on at work, checking her phone and 'valid' reasons for her not using social media, soon became checking the mileage on the car, contents of the dishwasher, car seat positions, dirty clothes in the washing, the bedding, dirt on the doormat, money spent, who she spoke to etc, along with constant calls to work and control of finances, debit and credit cards, her body and her looks.

The violence increased including the use of knives, baseball bat, strangulation, stamping, tied-up and locked in the bathroom, dragged by her hair, beatings, black eyes, throwing and smashing things, constant threats to kill her and her pet dog and how he would do it, etc; the threat of violence is very often worse than the actual violence, and this behaviour became regular daily life and was always unprovoked. She could see no way out and attempted suicide believing there was no other way to get away from this life.

We were able to support Martha in a safe place for her, away from the surveillance and helped her work through the conflicting feelings of love and confusion and made her understand that it was not her fault. We assisted with Legal Clinic appointments with our solicitors who offer their advice for free, and we supported her with the police process, through to court proceedings which resulted in a prison sentence.

During the court process, along with the flurry of bail hearings, Martha experienced similar abuse from his family; intimidation in all forms, sitting outside her house, filming her, online abuse, accusations of fraud, attempts to affect her employment, deformation of character by various methods, silent calls to Martha and her family.

We ensured that all events and incidents were captured to assist with police and court paperwork but most of all we supported Martha to understand the effects of coercive control; to recognise that the **grooming** process during those first 6 months was part of the abuse, even though it was not physically violent during that stage.

Martha genuinely believed she was about to be killed by her partner on various occasions and he went to great lengths to take her to places where no-one else or herself knew where she was and "truly believes that if it wasn't for the strength I found from Coventry Haven, he would have killed me or I would have killed myself; it was just a matter of time".

Martha has since found the strength to firstly volunteer and then return to full time employment."