



SARA: MY STORY

I was a young woman from an Asian country who had a successful career, close friendships and basically no worries in the world but something was missing, I yearned for excitement and the opportunity to challenge myself. Travelling to Australia seemed so exciting, and it became extra special because I had fallen in love with an Australian man. It was challenging to leave my family and friends, but I also felt that I was ready to get married and gain even more independence and learn more about the Australian way of life which I liked. I thought that the biggest challenge would be learning all the Aussie slang, I had no idea that it would be trying to survive Domestic Violence.

Not long after we got married my relationship with my husband started to become very difficult and I started to feel scared but I couldn't talk to anyone because in our culture the wife is suppose to be submissive to the husband. I was experiencing all forms of abusive and controlling behaviour from my husband, including not having any control of my finances, but it wasn't until I was walking along with our new baby at a train station which had an advertisement about domestic violence, that I realised that domestic violence was not just physical and that I was experiencing domestic violence.

I had wanted to leave the relationship, but I was told by people that if I told services about the violence that I was experiencing that they would tell Child Protection and that I would lose my child. The thought of this was unbearable and on one occasion at the hospital I was too scared to talk to the social worker because I feared Child Protection. I had no idea what my rights were or what I could do to help my situation. I wanted to call Centrelink to find out about any income support that I might be eligible for, but the problem is that you have to wait on the line for a very long time, and I couldn't do this because I didn't have enough phone credit on my mobile phone. I had to go to local libraries and use their internet, but I was nervous about looking up domestic violence as I was worried about what others might think.

The violence that I was experiencing escalated to the point that the police came and used capsicum spray on my husband. The most difficult thing was my husband was holding our baby and the capsicum spray got our baby as well. After this event I made contact with a domestic violence service in Melbourne. We did some safety planning which meant that I could go live with my cousin in Brisbane. It was really great that I was able to go and stay at my cousin's house. However it was difficult because my husband had turned up to my cousin's house four times during our stay, and it made me worry a lot for my cousin's family and my safety. During this time I made contact with a domestic violence service through my support worker at a job assistance program, who offered guidance and support in relation to domestic violence.

(Continued on page 2)

Unfortunately my ex husband found my son and I and this was when the domestic violence service suggested that I go into refuge. I was really scared about going to a refuge as I imagined that I would be staying in a big shed with lots of people around me, and no personal space. On the day that I went to the refuge, the taxi had turned up to collect my baby and I, and it was at this time that my husband turned up. I managed to call the police but they did not arrive until after I somehow managed to get my suitcase and my baby in the taxi without my husband getting us.

I will never forget what seemed to be the longest journey out to the refuge. I was in a foreign country and my life was packed into a suitcase. I was going to a place that I had never been and never heard of. When I arrived at the refuge I couldn't believe how supportive the workers were. They very kindly had food stored in the pantry and fridge and this thoughtful gesture made this journey so much easier. It was such a relief to not only feel safe, but to be in a comfortable space where my baby had the freedom to play, and with our own living space.

Going to the refuge gave me the opportunity to learn about the cycle of domestic violence and gave me access to appropriate legal aid advice which acknowledged that the process of mediation would be unsafe due to the domestic violence I had experienced. Staying at the refuge also gave me a support network of other women which made me realise that I was not alone. The refuge also enabled me to gain independence by gradually moving me to medium term accommodation and finally long term accommodation.

I will never forget what I went through. Due to a parenting agreement I'm unable to leave the country even for a holiday with my baby to see family and friends but I know it's important to move forward. I believe that domestic violence education is so important and I hope that sharing my story encourages women who are experiencing domestic violence to access support services, because nobody should have to lose their sense of freedom to the experience of domestic violence.