

The insight component of [Insight Exchange](#) shares a person's **lived experience** of violence and **abuse**, highlighting a person's responses and resistance to violence and where **'social responses'** were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. This reveals the roles that individuals, organisations and communities play in people's experience of violence.

The Insight Exchange team have inserted content from the Follow My Lead resource as headings to help orientate the reader and to build understanding of the lived experience of violence. The following insights are from a person with lived experience of domestic and family violence.

Rose

In the first few weeks we had become friends, Dean called me and he said, "I've got a really big problem." And I said, "okay". And he said, "come over." So I went over to his house and then he said, "I'm holding some drugs for a friend. And I was like, "okay, why are you telling me?" And he was like, "it's quite a lot." He told me that he kept it in his freezer. And I was like, "whatever." I felt uncomfortable that he had shared that information with me. I'd lived a very sheltered life at that point, and knew nothing about drugs, or even knew people who did drugs regularly.

Anyway, then two days later he rings me, and he was screaming, "you stole that shit from my house." I was like, "whoa, whoa, whoa," and apparently it was like tens of thousands of dollars' worth of stuff. And I said, "what are you talking about?" And he said, "you and someone else were the only two people that I told, and someone broke into my house and stole the drugs."

Obviously, I didn't take them. I didn't even see them to know that they were there. What would I even do with that? I didn't know anything, didn't have anyone to sell it to, didn't know how much it was worth. Anyway, so then he asked me if he could borrow \$1,000. And so I gave him \$1,000 in cash. And he told me that the person that owned the drugs wanted \$30,000 from him asap. He was then asking me to pick him up at 3am on random weekday mornings after meetings he was having at a strip club. It was uncomfortable. And he never actually paid me back the \$1,000. He'd give me \$100 here, or \$100 there, but never paid me back.

I feel like there's an agenda behind everything he does.

Every time we would have a fight in our relationship, he would always go back to that; "you stole my drugs that time." I think he made it up because he needed money quickly, because he's got problems. But honestly, I really

don't know. I feel like there's an agenda behind everything that he does.

When I had my daughter, some years later, I was petrified because he'd always go back to that drug theft. I wouldn't drive anywhere, because I was convinced that somehow he was going to put drugs in my car, or something. I don't know why he'd always go back to that.

When we started living together we moved to a new rental property. Dean is much older than me and he was paying the rent and working and I was at Uni. Maybe three months after being there, he left his job in the family business and wasn't working for a period of about nine months. After about two or three weeks I said to him, "how are we paying rent? How are we paying for food?" He told me it was from his savings and because he was so much older, I didn't really know much and just thought "that's a lot of money to be spending from your savings." Anyway, I didn't think anything further of it.

I started working and one day, I was talking with his Mum about him not working and I happened to mention "I can't believe that he's wasting so much of his savings on paying for everything." She started to laugh and she said, "is that what he told you?" And I said, "yes", and she said, "No, no. I've been paying the rent."

Now that's a big lie; for him to insinuate that he had a lot of savings when clearly, he didn't. But I didn't raise it with him because that would probably make him angry and then I thought that if he gets angry, then he'll tell his mum not to say anything to me. I just thought it's better to keep the lines of communication open, so to speak.

He's very, very volatile. If he perceived someone to think that he was doing something wrong or to insinuate that something wasn't done that was 100 per cent above board, his automatic reaction is to attack. You could tell when he walked in the door. I could tell firstly, by the way he looked at me. So, when he was angry it was very clear – like you know when you're five and you're out somewhere in public and you do something and your mum looks at you like "you're dead"? So, then I'd try to be normal and nice and pretend I didn't notice it.

I have my own sense of what is important right now and in the longer term.

Follow My Lead

When I was working and at Uni, I didn't make much money but whatever I had, I would pay for my own stuff. I wouldn't use his money to buy clothes or to go out with my friends. I'd always buy my Uni text books. I would be as self-sufficient as I could and he always used to say to me, "don't use your money, use mine that's what it's there for. I want to take care of you."

I don't know why, but I always used to say, "this is what I've earned, I need to live within my budget," even when he was earning a lot. I did feel that genuinely. I didn't want to be like, "now I've got extra money, I'm going to buy all this stuff." I didn't feel right about that.

But he didn't like me working and the job that I had, which I loved, was at a new restaurant. After I'd started working there, they made me the front of house and I loved all the people there and the atmosphere was great. My boss always used to ask me to work really long hours and I did because it got me away from Dean, being in an environment that I loved. I actually took time off Uni because I liked working there so much.

Dean wasn't working at the time and he would be angry that I was spending so much time there. [But] that was my excuse, "I've got to work, I've got to go to work." I wouldn't get home until two o'clock in the morning and that way I didn't have to fight about, "you can't go out." That way, I felt like I was still having a bit of a life.

I was doing well at that job and he always used to say to me, "your boss always tells you what to do. How dare he tell you that you have to be there half an hour early." I would say, "he's my boss, that's my job, that's what they do, they tell you what to do." I think it was that Dean didn't like another man having a say or making me do something that he couldn't. I was that sick of him, I stopped calling him or texting him on my lunch break. When I'd get home he'd say, "why didn't you call me today?" and I'd say, "I didn't have a break."

One day, he came up to my work and it was a full restaurant and he started yelling at my boss and they went outside. This was in front of all these customers and they were nose to nose and I was standing between them trying to push them apart. I was crying and saying "please stop, please stop." It was so embarrassing and then, in the end, my boss said to me "go home or go and do something. If you want to come back tonight, come back for your night shift."

"If you choose to stay with him, I can't have you working here."

I went back that night and he said to me, "look I really want you to stay working here but you have to understand that this is my business and this is my family's livelihood and it's only new and I can't have these sorts of incidents happening. If you want to keep working here, that's fine but if you choose to stay with him, after this then I can't have you working here."

I understood exactly where he was coming from because it did not look good and I was just so embarrassed, as well. I didn't know what to do and so I stayed with my parents for a couple of days immediately after.

I was really in two minds. Especially after that incident, I knew there was something seriously wrong with that relationship. The fact that he knew how much I loved that job and that he would do something like that. Obviously, it was going to put my job in jeopardy and also be incredibly embarrassing... you don't want your dirty laundry aired at your work or in public. It was humiliating.

The violence I experience is an affront to my dignity. *Follow My Lead*

I decided that I would lie to my boss and say that I had broken up with him. I thought that he would just have to deal with that because it's because of him that this happened. It actually started to get really complicated. I'm so glad that my parents lived close by to the work. I was telling my boss that I was staying with Mum and Dad and I actually wasn't.

Sometimes my boss would call me when the restaurant wasn't open on Mondays and he'd be like, "hey Rose, do you want to come down and do the ordering with me. I'll show you how to do it and then we can go and do the wines. You can pick the wines and then I'll pay you extra. I'll be at your parent's house in 10 minutes."

I'd be like, "oh my god!" I'm sitting at home, I'd jump up, grab my make-up, grab clothes and I'd be running to Mum and Dad's and then I'd just sit on the couch, casual like, you know.

I would tell me friends and they would say, "Rose, you need to stop doing this." Now I feel like I'm lying to this person, I'm lying to that person, lying to that person, and that is extremely stressful. It was like having three lives and then I lost the closeness with my friends at work because I wasn't being open and honest. It sort of isolates you and then you feel like you're the one who's bad and then eventually, as all lies do, it all came out.

Because Dean was so angry, I realised that I had to quit my job. He wasn't going to let me go back.

I felt so bad to quit because I was pretty much their main staff person and they could not really find that many reliable staff. I called up my boss and I didn't tell him why but I just said, "I can't come in, I'm really sorry," and that was it.

I never spoke to anyone from that workplace, again. To this day, I hope I never run in to them because I would be so embarrassed. I don't know, the whole thing was just embarrassing.

By the time I got my next job, I wasn't in touch with my friends and if I did see them, it wasn't as if they knew what was going on in my life. They'd say, "oh wow, we haven't seen you for ages," it was small talk stuff. I was always very conscious of what time it was because I always had to be back before he had come home from work.

The person using violence violates my rights, restricts my choices, and limits my capacity to act and put into force my own decisions. *Follow My Lead*

It used to be okay if I wanted to go out with my friends and stuff on Friday and Saturday night, because he was so much older and he started work at 6 o'clock in the morning, he never wanted to go out or anything like that. I'd go out with my friends and then, when I'd get home at 4 o'clock in the morning he'd be yelling and screaming until 6:00am.

Then I stopped going out on both Friday *and* Saturday night and I'd only go out one night. Then it turned into, that if I didn't tell him beforehand that I was going out, I wasn't allowed to let him assume that I'd be going out. If I didn't tell him beforehand then he'd be angry. Then it turned into, if I didn't tell him during the week that I was going out, then he'd be angry, and "where was I going?" No one makes plans during the week; I didn't say this to him, you're young you don't think, you don't plan it a lot, you just do it.

Then it turned into, "you think your friends care about you but they don't care." By this stage, when I got the new job, I was basically not allowed to see my friends anymore and if I did, there would be a huge fight. Sometimes, if I'd planned to go out and he knew that, then when he got home from work he'd have some reason to yell and scream at me so much, that I would be such a mess that I couldn't go out. I would be hyperventilating, crying and sitting on the bed and he would say, "no, go" but of course I didn't feel like going out then.

That was so premeditated, I actually even said to him, "have you noticed that every time I used to go out, you used to wait until I get home and then you'd be really angry at me and now it's before I go out." I look at it now as like training someone. If you do this, then this is going to happen, so then that made me stop doing that.

He talked in circles when he was angry; firstly accusing me of something ridiculous like, "you weren't home today, where did you go? I know that you're lying to me" and then I'd try to defend myself. "No, I wasn't, I was here," and then it would turn into, "you always lie," blah, blah, blah, blah. Even to this day it's just insults. Constant insults.

It would go for hours and hours and it got to the point where when things would get a little bit bad and I felt that he had been yelling at me for this amount of time, that's enough. I would go upstairs and I would just lay down in bed and then he'd come into the bedroom and then he'd still keep going. Then I would get a pillow and put it over my head while I was laying down. Then he would get on top of me and he would still be screaming at me and we were like, inches from each other. One time I was sitting against a wall and I put my knees up and I was just sitting there and he literally had one hand either side of me, while he was screaming at me.

Another time I locked myself in the car, just to get away and then he was hitting every window and yelling stuff out, really loudly, that I was a prostitute and all this stuff. I'm thinking that all the neighbours are going to think that I've cheated on him and whatever. It was really loud.

I remember for a little while, we had one of his friends living with us. He was in a bit of a situation where he didn't have anywhere to live. One day he said to me, "you know Rose, no one should talk to you like that" and I said, "yes, but I don't know what to do." And he said, "I'm just saying no one should ever talk to you like that." I knew that!

I locked myself in the car, just to get away.

After church on Sunday at Mum and Dad's, sometimes I'd go over for lunch and we were watching a movie one day and for some reason Dean got home from work at 4:30pm and he called me and he was that angry that I wasn't there. I jumped up and it was half way through the movie and I said, "I've got to go." I was already shaking and Mum and Dad were like, "what's wrong, what's happened?" I was saying, "Dean's home, I wasn't there," and they were looking at me like, are you crazy?

Mum walked me to the door and said, "are you okay?" I said, "I'm really scared, oh my god, I'm going to get in some much trouble when I get back." I didn't realise how ridiculous I sounded. I think

"You think your friends care about you, but they don't."

Mum and Dad were just a bit concerned. I was petrified and when I think back now, it was a stupid reason to be so scared but I didn't realise there was no reason for him to be angry at me for that. I was at my parent's house having lunch, so what if you got home from work? But every time he was angry at me it wasn't, "here we go again". It was, "oh my god, he's angry, I've done something". I always felt guilty. I always felt maybe there was a reason for him to be angry at me, or I didn't do something and that's why he's getting abusive.

My mind and body suffer from the violence and coercion. I can become physically unwell, fearful, desperate, lonely, sad and angry. *Follow My Lead*

I didn't realise what progressively he had done to my psyche. I did not get it; that fear response. I would have physical symptoms. In 2013, I woke up one morning and I went to wash my face and one of my eyebrows was gone. I was looking in the mirror and my eyebrow's gone. You know what I did? I went back to look for it. I went back to my bed to try and look for my eyebrow and it was gone. I was so confused that morning. I had to go to work. I put my make up on and I didn't even draw an eyebrow on and I've got dark eyebrows so it's really obvious.

“Rose, what happened to your face?”

I got into work and my boss asked, “Rose what happened to your face?” I answered, “I lost my eyebrow.” “What do you mean?” “I woke up and it was gone.” I'm thinking, he's thinking she's had a mistake and she's waxed off one of her eyebrows or something. It was really troubling. I went to my parent's house on the weekend and I washed my hair.

I was drying my hair and my little brother said, “Rose, you have a bald patch on your head” and I said, “shut up Alex.” He said, “no, Rose, you've got a bald patch.” I said, “Alex, can you stop?” He said, “if I were you, I would look in the mirror.” I've looked into the mirror and because my hair was wet, right on the top of my head there was a bald patch the size of a five-cent coin, that looked perfectly, perfectly bald.

I thought, what the hell? It gradually progressed to the entire top of my head and I started wearing wigs and I was going to doctors and they told me I had alopecia. I remember during that stage of my life; my body was literally going through the physical response to fear. I noticed that when I went to a big shopping centre, like Westfields, you know downstairs, where the groceries are and stuff. That would be the only place I would shop.

I was 45kgs. I was burning calories because I was always scared. Always.

I would never venture anywhere else and I always just wanted to be invisible. I wanted people to not notice me. Then I would get nervous to do things like going to the checkout

and I'd always drop my card and I had the worst anxiety. I think it took a physical toll on me. I was 45kgs. I could eat a large Big Mac meal and finish everything and then it felt like it was empty. You know that feeling when you haven't eaten for say, half a day and then you go to sleep and you wake up and you feel empty.

I'd wake up in the morning and think, how is this possible? That I feel like I've had no nutrients and at that stage, my boss he would say, “you need a bacon sandwich, get her a bacon sandwich.” It wasn't that I didn't eat, I was burning calories because I was always scared. *Always.*

The decisions I make and if/how I take steps is influenced by my context, situation and the coercive control I am experiencing. *Follow My Lead*

The first time I went to the doctor about the hair thing, and this made me really uncomfortable, his Mum wanted to come. My Mum hadn't been with me to the doctors since I was about 15 or 16 [but] Dean's Mum was like, "no, you need to come to my doctor. My doctor's really good," and I went and the doctor was asking me questions and I was very conscious that she was there because I couldn't say everything I wanted to say. Anyway, she ended up sending me to a specialist and his Mum wanted to come to that too.

She would say, "I'll come with you, we'll book it on this day" and "don't worry, I'll call them. That's of course if that's okay with you?" If I said, no, then it wasn't okay with her. I let her come and I really didn't feel very comfortable at all with any of that.

I was always so anxious that it didn't work well for me to think of things on the spot or to play things off as casual. You know like, "oh no, I can't I've got something else to do" or, "maybe another time." Those things never came out because I was always trying to understand what the hell was going on. They were all so confusing and they were all so manipulative; Dean, his Mum, his Dad. All of them, all three of them.

My safety is compromised. Follow My Lead

When Uni had finished for the year, I left and I went to Sydney. I couldn't stay for a second longer; he was getting more volatile than I'd ever seen him.

He choked me with a scarf one day and I was scared because there were things happening at that point where he was getting really violent and angry. The day he choked me with my scarf – we were in a split-level place - and he ran down the stairs and literally jumped up and head-butted one of the top cupboards; *really* hard. Then he got a knife out and was trying to cut his throat.

It was too much so I called my sister. I said, "Lou, I don't have any money, I've got enough to get up there, but can I come up and stay with you guys for the holidays? I think I'm going to move to Sydney, I can't do this with him anymore."

It wasn't until right before Christmas. December was always a big month for Dean and his family at the business, it was always busy. So that was his one month of every year that he would completely write himself off with drugs because he'd say "I need to stay awake." And also, whenever he did a lot of drugs, he gambled a lot and was always at the pub straight after work. So it was a good time for me to leave because he didn't have as much time as what he normally would to harass me or try and contact me.

So, when I got up there, I said to Lou "I promise you I'm going to get a job straight away." Because they were just young, starting a family; they just had a little girl. I didn't want to be a burden. So within a day and a half, I got a job. I was so ready for a fresh start.

For New Year's, all my family were having this thing at my Aunty's place back in Melbourne. So Lou's like, we'll fly down and while I was there, I went to see Dean. And he was just so nice and he was really, really nice. And he was like, "we can start again. I'm not going to do the drugs and everything can get so much better."

I think it was right before Uni started, in February, that I decided to come back. And I didn't tell Lou straight away. I was scared to tell my sister or my family because when we came down to go to my Aunty's thing, my Dad kept saying to me "oh, you're back." They didn't want me to come back down, even for that time. Mum was apparently calling my sister and saying, "why don't you guys not come? Why don't you guys stay up there?" Because they probably knew that if I came back, there would be the potential that we might get back together. I told my sister I was going back at 11:00 o'clock the night before I was leaving. And she cried.

When I drove back, I remember his Dad calling me on my way back to Melbourne saying, “just keep driving Rose. You can do it.” I thought, “that’s weird. Why is his Dad calling me from work?” He told me to keep driving. I was like, “maybe he cares.”

When I got back, that week, his Mum booked us a trip to the Gold Coast. She was like, “go and stay in a lovely hotel and do lovely things together,” so I thought I will wait until our holiday is over before I look for work. When we were up at Surfers, everything was great. The whole going out for nice dinners and spending the day together. It was like we were friends again. And he wasn’t on drugs or anything while we were there. It was good.

Then right after we got back from the Gold Coast, that’s when Dean decided to book a holiday to Bali in April which was a month away. And so I thought I would wait until I get back from Bali before I started to look for another job. Then, I swear, he purposely got me pregnant on that holiday. It’s not the best method but we usually just ‘pull out’. It had been working for a long time. But he didn’t, and I was like, “oh my god, why did you do that?” He said, “I don’t know, get the morning-after pill.” And I thought “in Bali? Do you want me to die?!” Seriously, as if you would take the morning-after pill in Bali.

“Get the morning-after pill if you want.”

His flippancy! The whole, “get the morning after pill if you want”. We had discussed it and I had always said, I never wanted children. My reason for never wanting children was because parents hurt children. I did not want something that I loved that much to be hurt by me. I do not want that responsibility. That’s too much. That was a big thing for me.

When I found out I was pregnant, I was really, really concerned.

The importance I place on the past, the present, the future and possibly the afterlife, can influence how I see things and make decisions. *Follow My Lead*

I had had an abortion the year before and that was so difficult because I came from a very strong religious background. I’m not overly religious but I wondered if there was now a little person in heaven. I had looked into all of this sort of stuff before I had even thought of having children and I had already made up my decision about how I felt about, not that I ever judge anyone but I always thought that it’s a human life and that means something. So I couldn’t do it [an abortion]. As much as I had reservations and I still hadn’t even finished Uni yet.

I did not tell my parents until I was 20 weeks and the day that we were going over for dinner to tell them, I was crying on the way over there.

It’s not that I thought that they were going to say anything not nice to me but I knew that it would be disappointing for them. Anyway, we had dinner and it was midnight and Mum and Dad said, “we’re going to go to bed but you guys can stay if you like.” Dean was waiting for me to say something and I just couldn’t do it and so he ended up telling Mum and Dad. “We’re really happy, we’re having a baby,” and I was thinking I wasn’t really happy about it.

I was really scared and I didn’t know if I was mature enough or whatever. I remember talking to my best friend about it and saying please don’t tell anyone and I was so unmaternal. You know when people are pregnant and they do all the classes and they go and buy stuff for their baby. I was like, “ugh, there’s something inside of me.” It was alien.

I think that whole situation happened because I left and went all the way to Sydney and I got a job and he got scared and needed to lock me in and that’s what he did.

That really irritated me too, because getting me pregnant at that point, I still had until the end of the year to finish Uni and that was one thing I did. I never asked for extensions or anything. Didn't stop me from doing that and I was happy I did that.

But everything changed then. All of a sudden, he was coming home from work bizarrely late and I would say, "you used to come home at 6:30, 6:45pm. Your work's around the corner. Why are you coming home at 8:30pm?" He would say, "I got so busy, I had to do this order for someone or someone started talking to me," and I started to think, this is annoying. Now I'm fat and pregnant and I'm stuck at home, he's going out and doing whatever he wants. That's what I got the feeling of then. Even things like when I started buying baby clothes or a toy box he was very disinterested; he would look and say, "oh cool". He never went with me to the obstetrician. Never went with me to anything like that.

Something that makes me safer in the short term might make me less safe in the future. *Follow My Lead*

At the same time he decided I wasn't meant to have a crappy car anymore. So he was like, "we need to get you a new car." And I was saying, "no, you know what, its fine." And then he said, "no, what happens if you have a car accident?" So he was looking online at cars for sale all the time, and I just thought that was one of his things he was going to do for a couple of months that never came through.

Anyway one morning, it was probably about a month and a half after, he said, "I've got a surprise for you." I was, "oh okay." And there was a car in the driveway. And I was actually taken aback, and I was thinking, wait, you didn't ask me what car I wanted, you didn't ask me what colour I wanted. And I was sort of like, "thanks, sort of." It was odd, it was strange. Like I didn't feel, I don't know... it felt a bit like something was hidden, that I didn't know the full story.

So it turned out that that car was odd. I'd be driving and I'd be listening to the radio, and a call would come through the audio system, and it wasn't coming through my phone. And no one would say anything, it would automatically answer, and then I'd try to hang up, and it wouldn't hang up. The only way I could get it to stop would be to turn the car off. And then I was like, "something weird is going on here."

So then I got on the phone to a couple of places and they said, "is the car in your name?" And I said, "no it's not, it's in his name." And they said, "you need to take it back to where you got it from."

I'd be driving sometimes, and I'd just be playing around with the settings, and I could hook into his phone, like I could listen to his music while I was driving, from his phone. Then one day I went to see him at work, and I asked him to come out and just bring something out for me, and I had it on this music that I would never listen to, but it was his music. And he was like, "what are you listening to?" And I said "I don't know, it's just running with the car." As soon as he went back inside it stopped. And I thought, that's odd.

One day, while I was making sure there were no drugs in my car, I literally took the base of the boot out, and I found one of those, you know those little iPods? And it was synced up to the blue tooth in the car. And one of my friends said to me when I asked him, he said "that's a way that you can track your car, and monitor your car." And I was, "oh my gosh, that's so bizarre," like it was really hidden well, like I had to take the base of the boot out. So I hated driving that car. There were periods where for months, I just wouldn't drive.

He gave my old car to a friend. And I don't remember signing anything.

One of the things for him was, if I questioned something, or wanted more answers, he would never answer the question. He would ask another question and say, "well how would I do that?" Or

“what? Prove it; When? Why?” You’d have to answer when, why, how and what’s possible, and why would I do that. And then he’d get really aggressive and defensive. And so if I couldn’t prove it, like he would pester me, and pester me and if I could not give him exactly proof of when it happened, how he did it, then it didn’t happen. And so then I was crazy. And yes, that really annoys me now.

You know those gut feelings that you have for a reason? Like when things don’t add up - it’s because something’s not right. Dean or his parents are saying, “this is how things are,” and you’re going “well, that doesn’t add up, and that doesn’t add up”. But if you ever say anything then you’re the worst person in the world, or “you’re paranoid.” And now I think back, I was always waiting for something to prove that it was wrong so that I could feel like I could justify leaving.

I guess one of the confusing things was, I actually believed he really, really loved me. That’s why it’s called ‘crazy making’, because the actions don’t match the words, or even what you believe of that person. So you’re in this middle ground of believing something that clearly isn’t true, but you want to believe it because you can’t believe that someone would do that.

It was while I was pregnant he also decided that we needed to move house. I was still full time at Uni, I was doing four subjects and everything in that house, besides the clothes, were his. He didn’t help me pack. He didn’t come and see houses with me.

He would send his Mum with me and that was weird for me.

His Mum would come to all the inspections and she’d say, we can’t live here because of this and this and this. Or you can’t do that because of that. When we did the application form, I was told, “I don’t think it’s a good idea that you go on the application. You don’t want to be on the lease because they might look at you, you’re pregnant and at Uni, you’re not working. We might not get it. Now we really like this property so let’s just let Dean go on the lease.” At the time I thought ‘whatever, I don’t care’, I had way too much on.

“Your name’s on the electricity bill, so you’re going to have to pay for it.”

Somehow the electricity at that place got put in my name. And again, I just thought, “oh well, whatever.” I didn’t really think much of it. No one called me, and I just thought, “oh, it doesn’t really matter.” But when I left him and went to the refuge, I didn’t think to call up and tell them I wasn’t living there. So then when I moved into the first house out of the refuge, I got a letter from the electricity company saying, you owe \$1,200. And I rang them and I said, “look I wasn’t living there, I actually left for this and this reason, my ex is still there.” And they said, “but your name’s on the electricity bill, so you’re going to have to pay for it.”

So I rang him and I was like, “hey, you need to sort out your electricity bill, because now they’re chasing me.” And he said “yes, don’t worry I’ll work it out.” This went for ages, and he didn’t pay, so I ended up calling them and I spoke to this lady, she’s one of the head ladies in Melbourne, and she sort of said to me, “we need to sort it out.” And so I said, “look I’ll take responsibility for it, I’ll pay it, even though it’s not mine.”

And then when I did that I got a bit annoyed at myself, because I was like, he earns heaps of money. So I rang his Mum and said, “Dean hasn’t paid the electricity bill. It’s \$1,200 that I don’t have. He needs to pay for it.” And then she said, “oh don’t worry, I’ll pay for it.” So I gave her the bill. Then she sends me a text message saying, “don’t worry, Rose, I fixed that all up for you, not to worry.” Like making it out like she was doing me a favour. And so I sent a message back saying, “I hope Dean pays you back, after all it is his responsibility, and he can’t keep going on like this.” Like it really annoyed me.

The abuse I have experienced in the past might be similar or different to the current or future threats I face. *Follow My Lead*

I had a thesis due and when we moved into that property, for some reason every piece of technology locked out, really badly. To the point that I lost all my work. I ended having to take it back to someone who recovered it for me but everything went weird with technology. Everything and every single device. I ended up having to submit all my Uni work from his mum's computer because everything just went haywire. I don't know why, something dodgy was happening there.

You know how you can get those internet things over the property. I don't know how it works, it some sort of overriding system. Some sort of technology. His parents kept giving us all this technology and I never had passwords to anything.

We couldn't get an internet connection there and we couldn't get a phone line. I rang up and I said, "we've just moved to this property we need..." da, da, da, da, da, da. They said, "there's already an active line, until that's disconnected, we can't reconnect you. Are you the tenant on the lease?" I said, "no I'm not." They said, "we either need the tenant or the real estate agent to do that." So I obviously said to him, "we've got to sort that out," and he was like, "yeah, yeah, we will."

I let it go and then gave birth to Lula a few months later. But during that period, my phone bill would go insane. I would get \$500 bills and stuff and I was thinking "what is going on?" Then Dean would get really angry at me about how big my phone bill was. I ended up calling the phone company and I said, "can you tell me what's going on? How is this happening?" They put me through to technical support. The first thing she said was, "do you have any dodgy neighbours?" I said, "I don't know." "Because there's definitely some suspicious activity on your account. Has someone been using your hot spot?" I didn't really know much about it.

It was around this time that I would have my friend over while Dean was out and I'd bitch about him and be like, "oh my God, I hate this. He doesn't do anything. He's so lazy." And then he'd come home and be like, "you shouldn't say to your friends that I'm lazy." And he'd be using my words. And I was like, that's weird. Did he come home and I'd not noticed and he was listening at the door or something? For a little bit, I thought he was psychic - maybe he just knows what I'm thinking. And then I remember one time, my comment was "oh well, there are no good men left anyway." That's what I said to her. And then when he came home that day, he was furious and he was like well, "there's no good men left anyway, is there?" And that's when I was like, "that was my exact phrase. What is going on?"

I wasn't really into the whole technology thing then. Anyway, so then one of his friends came over and they got this smart TV and everything. And I was like, why are we going to get a smart TV if we don't have the internet? And I remember his friend saying to me, "you know they have televisions now that spy into people's homes?" And I was like, "really?" and then I looked it up and was like "oh my gosh, you can home monitor through your smart TV." And then there was info on how that can be hooked up to your home alarm system. And then I went and had a look at the front little alarm code and I started looking at all the sensors in the rooms. And I was like, "this is a bit uncomfortable." "Why doesn't it work? Why don't we have to punch anything in but it clearly is still active?"

I called the alarm company and said, "Could you just tell me how it works and what it does?" And he said to me that he couldn't. He was like, "no" for security reasons and privacy reasons that he "can't actually disclose that to anyone." And I was like, "what do I do now?" And he was like "just go back to the real estate." I said, "I've done that." And then he was like "well I don't really know."

I got a friend to drop me at the police station. I said, "there's a security system in my home, my phone keeps getting hacked into, my car is being monitored. I'm scared, what do I do? Is there any

protection that you can give me? Can you tell him it's not okay to have this thing in the house that no one will give me information about?"

I only had 15 minutes and he said, "no, he can do that if he wants," and I said, "no, he can't." And he said, "well he can," and then he was going on and on about crap that was not really helping me. I was getting really anxious because I had to get back outside. I was backing out the door saying, "I'm really sorry, I can't finish this conversation, I really have to go." I was really scared. You would think if a woman came in and was saying to you that all this was happening and then they were petrified because they could only stay for a short amount of time, that there would be some sort of concern?

I might be in relationships with more than one person who is committing violence against me. *Follow My Lead*

The thing that made it so much harder was the fact that his parents were so involved in it and contributed to it. Because initially I went to his parents for help, and then I didn't realise they were part of it. The level of deceit by people.

I remember his Mum once saying to me, "oh we love you Rose," but it was the way that she said it made me feel icky inside. You know that feeling where you're just like, "hmm, that sounded really odd." It's just when the words she was saying didn't match the look on her face when she was saying it. It actually made you feel uncomfortable. It was just a very odd situation to be in, it was like being surrounded by three very mentally deranged people, and actually trying to believe, and thinking for a short time, it was normal.

It's completely ridiculous that these three people have a business together. I used to look at them and think they're a bit odd, then all of a sudden, I'm in it and I don't know how to get them away. I realised I didn't know who pays everyone. I didn't know anything and that always made me feel uncomfortable.

After Lula was born, his Mum and Dad would pop in whenever they liked, always subtly saying things to make me feel guilty about either the state of the house or "if you want Lula to sleep, then you have to do this." She was extremely challenging initially. She never slept for more than two hours at a time. His dad would come over and say, "this place is just always a mess." But there was only so much I could do. I wasn't getting much sleep.

Dean would get annoyed at me and ask, "where's this or where's that?" And I'd say, "oh I don't know" and he'd say, "when someone asks me at work where something is, I always know where it is because that's my domain. This is yours. You should know and if you would just stay more organised and get Lula into a routine."

Firstly, we had a routine. And I thought, "you have never once been alone with this child. You have no idea." It was always my fault whenever Lula was upset and I genuinely started to believe that I must be a shit mum and that other kids don't seem to have these problems.

When I had my second child, he was an angel and he'd sleep all day. I felt so much better after. And when Lula got to one, she was fine anyway. But I was always made to feel that that was my fault.

I felt very lonely. I used to think that Dean didn't like me anymore. I remember nine weeks after having Lula he was yelling at me because I didn't have sex with him. I was thinking I've just had my first baby, no one's going down there. But I noticed that something felt off - I felt like he was hiding a lot from me. I felt things weren't right. Then I was trying to look for what it was that was being hidden. That's when I realised that the mail wasn't coming there. When I asked him about it he would get angry about that as well. He would be like "it's because of the business" or because of this or that. Straight away there was anger about it.

I respond to and resist the violence ... in my own way, despite the danger and unpredictability. *Follow My Lead*

I'd pop up to visit him at work and go into the office room and pretend to read the paper and be scanning, trying to find what mail had been sent there.

When there was a really high phone bill or something his mum used to print it out and highlight it and give it to him and he used to hide it in the garage. I found all these things and I'd ask, "why is all of this going to your Mum's place and has your name on it?" "Mum and Dad do it because they run the business," and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Then I noticed that there was stuff going to a PO Box. That was concerning for me and then I realised that basically the only thing that came in the mail were toll notices or electricity or anything to do with driving. I knew that there was something going on that I didn't know about. So I became this detective because I was trying to figure out what was going on. I thought I needed proof before I could leave him. I thought I needed proof to say "this is why I'm leaving you."

When I went to the refuge I thought it was all over, then I realised, no, it wasn't.

It sounds a bit weird now but when I would look, I'd always find paperwork and things in weird places. I started collecting all the weird things that had different postcodes on them. Things that didn't make sense. I used to put them in a laptop zipper thingy. If I didn't do all of that, I wouldn't know half of what's going on now. It's starting to make a little bit of sense and I'm starting to see where the discrepancies are,

where there have been loopholes that either have given him access to my privacy or to claim benefits from me with superannuation and taxation. And then when I started looking into the business I found out there were other superannuation funds they hadn't told me about.

I always felt like it meant something, all those weird things; things that actually were relevant to me, I just didn't know about. I'm so glad I did, so glad I kept that stuff.

It got to a point though, where I'd been there for three years and that was three years too long. So I thought "blow it, I'm leaving. I don't care about that anymore." When I went to the refuge, I told myself "whatever it was, I don't care. What he did was wrong." And I was happy with that. I thought it was all over and then I realised, no, it wasn't.

The first sign was just how long it took for my Centrelink to come through. I had never been on Centrelink before. The women's place from the domestic violence line, they were the ones who got me the accommodation in the various places. They said to me, "what income do you have?" And I told them I had nothing. They went down to Centrelink with me and it took about six weeks. They told me that it should have been about two weeks. Not being familiar with the system, I didn't know much about it, so I just thought I'm at its mercy.

When the kids went into day care everything was fine. There was 15 weeks free that you get, when you're in a refuge. A couple of weeks into that, the owner said to me that my son's benefit wasn't coming through. I said I would go and try and sort it out. I went down to Centrelink and they told me it was fine and there was this back and forth for months, where I was trying to get Centrelink to pay the day care. The day care said he could keep coming but for some reason they'd be paid for a little bit and then all of a sudden, his fees stopped being paid.

I had gone into Centrelink about three times and people kept telling me it was fine. I had called up, they kept telling me it was fine. And I was going through my statements it said that I had deemed income from assets and investments and I had a working credit. I still don't know what that is now. I rang up and said, "it says that I have deemed income from assets and investments? I don't. Can you explain that to me?" She said, "oh, no, everyone has that," da, da, da, da, da. I called up one of my friends and asked, "do you have deemed income from assets and investments?" She said, "no." I said, "are you sure?" She said, "yes, have you cut everything off?" I said, "I never had anything. I've just been a Uni student. If anything, all I have is a HECS debt." But they kept telling me, "it's fine, everyone has it." No matter how many times I've asked them or gone in, they just tell me that it's normal and it's fine and that happens.

"It's fine, everyone has it."

Because of this issue with Centrelink I decided that I would check out my tax. I'd had multiple jobs and unless you choose to pay your tax as you go, they take half of your wage and then you can claim it back. So I knew that I had quite a lot of tax that I hadn't claimed back and I thought maybe this would come in handy and decided to go in and do my tax return. That's when I noticed that my super was gone, that I had all these different tax accounts. His Mum used to do all the books for the business and everything. Straight away I was suspicious because someone had been fiddling around with my tax without me knowing. I was also suspicious because I found out only that Dean and his family had all these other, different self-managed super funds that were never mentioned to me and he was claiming benefits back for me from our private health fund and that's when I realised the privacy issues there.

I called the privacy officer at the health fund and told him that I wanted to access to all the information from 2014 to 2018 that they had to do with my health and sensitive information. I didn't give him a reason at that point and he said, "I'm going to let you know that Dean has no access to any of this, besides your health claims, that's not what we do." I said to him, "I want to know what you have and how you've collected it," and he kept repeating the same thing "I just want to assure you, Dean can't do this," la, la, la, la, la. I have asked them so many times, even just for a history of my claims benefits that they will not give to me because Dean is the policy holder and I am the member. They can't even send my mail to my address, it was going to the PO Box even though it was addressed to me. So, someone was opening that, that would have been his mum, and I really didn't like that.

"You're a psycho."

I asked Dean about that, this was recently, and I said "How come some of my mail was being sent to your PO Box?" and he said, "it wasn't." I said, "it was. I just want to know who's been opening my mail? I know that it's got to do with your tax because it's your policy. I just want to know, who opened my mail?" He said to me, "you're a psycho. It was never going there," blah, blah, blah. I didn't tell him that I literally had a letter addressed to the PO Box in my car. I could have proved it to him but I didn't because that's counterproductive with him.

There was life insurance as part of the policy that we were on. When I called to get my name off the policy, they kept saying to me, "what you can do is you can get the exact same one but get one transferred over into your name. You won't have any waiting times." I said, "Look, I'm homeless. I don't have a home, I don't have a job, I have a health condition and I have two little kids. No, I don't have any spare money to take out another cover." They said, "we've got these cheaper ones," and the girl was trying to push it on to me. "If you accept this now, you've got 30 days to take it back." I'm telling them, "I've just been in a refuge, all this stuff has happened and you won't even let me know what you have or give me any sense of security."

Dean also has access to my Medicare card and he went in a couple of weeks ago and changed my banking details to his banking details. I got a letter in the mail saying that your banking details have

changed, on this date. I took the letter into Medicare and asked, “how did this happen?” They said to me, “that’s really bad,” sit down at the computer and fix it up and “I’m going to take this to my manager and see if everything’s okay.” Then she came back and said, “don’t worry, just change it back.” But I never got an answer. They never answered my question.

I did report this to police and the detective, along with the monitoring of the house. I have photographic evidence of everything and it’s “we’ll investigate the physical assaults,” that’s all they’re willing to investigate. I don’t want to bring that stuff up [the physical stuff]. Worse than that was what was happening via technology. The control and that intimidation and harassment, there are charges for that too but no one wants to do anything about that. The detective said, “we’ll look at this bit,” but I don’t even care about that, I don’t. I just want this to stop.

You just feel like there’s no hope. The reason I probably never pressed charges with anything is because when I’d gone to the police, they told me “he’s allowed to.” Then you get, “if this is happening to you, call the police” and that’s a big step and when you do tell them and they go “oh”, you know... You get two different stories.

I think I’m past that point now. I’ll get to the bottom of it if I do it myself.

I am always aware of the actual and possible responses of others, from professionals to my friends and family members. *Follow My Lead*

You’d think at times like that, that your family is really going to be there. But that’s not always the case. Like with my Dad, because he’s so religious every time something didn’t work out in my life, it would be like, “well that’s what happens when you turn away from God,” like these are the consequences, and this is your life, and now you have to deal with it. And so, that’s why I didn’t really want to tell Dad my problems.

Mum on the other hand is very empathetic and she will say “we’ll just have to call this person and we’ll tell them, they can’t do it.” I say, “Mum that’s not how the world works you can’t call up the tax office and yell at them for me. They’re not going to listen to you,” and she says, “I suppose not, it’s probably not the best idea anyway.”

At least I get the sympathy from Mum because sometimes I just need to call and say, “I’m having a shit day. I don’t get this,” and sometimes I have one of those defeatist attitudes, “that’s it, it’s never going to get worked out. I don’t know what’s happening, no one can help me.” Mum says, “I know sweetie, it feels like that,” and the next day I’ll say, “hey Mum you know what I did?” Sometimes you just need that. Just to let it out but at the same time, with all of this, there is eventually a way to sort it out.

“Rose, are you sure you’re not on the same drugs Dean’s on?”

At the moment, my sister and I, we haven’t had a falling out per sé, but she doesn’t want to know. She doesn’t believe anything until it’s 100 per cent proven in writing. Like when she found out that I went to a refuge, she was like, “oh they actually accepted her?” And my Mum was like “have you not been there, and seen all of this happen?” But things like this don’t come into her reality, and to her, it couldn’t possibly happen. If I told her about something, she’d be, “Rose, are you sure you’re not on the same drugs Dean’s on?” And I’m like, “oh my God.” It’s heartbreaking because when you get to the point where you can’t talk to your friends anymore because either you’re sick of complaining about the same thing and it’s just embarrassing, or you haven’t seen your friends in such a long time that it’s awkward to talk about really big problems. And so the people that you have left are your family, and when your family doesn’t care to listen, you’re like, well this is really crap.

The electricity company also really annoyed me. They gave my address to Dean when I first moved out, or I don't know if he rang up and put himself on the account, but something obviously went wrong there. And when I told them, everyone was really defensive, like, "we didn't give him your address," and even if it's there, well he didn't call up. And I'm like, "no, no, no, I'm just saying can we take it off? I'm not saying that you endangered my life, I'm saying can we take it off and make sure it doesn't happen again?" But their first initial reaction is, "well it wasn't us." And it clearly was the electricity company

"We didn't give him your address."

Even child support, when they said to me, "no," to me getting child support because of the risk of family violence. That really annoyed me because I was like, "I'm eating two-minute noodles for dinner, and he's literally putting [hundreds] in the pokies tonight." Although he's the criminal one, and I'm not, and yet he's favoured; "you don't have to pay." Like what kind of benefit do you get for being an abusive person? "Oh you don't have to pay child support like everybody else does." That's not right. Even if he gave me \$100 a week, I don't care, but just contribute a little bit.

One of the new doctors I went to, the receptionist asked me for my address, and this was when I was in the refuge. And I said, "well I can't really give it out, I can give you a postal address." And she was, "but why?" And I said, "because I live in a refuge." She was, "but why?" And I said, "because my ex hit me." And she was, "oh."

As much as there's the negative side of certain thing, there are other people who are really nice.

Even though I had a couple of doctors who were horrible, one doctor's been so good – having someone who will explain medical things with my health condition and other things. But I can also talk to her about a financial thing that I don't understand, or a financial thing with private health insurance. She has no problem with me coming in and bringing in a whole heap of stuff. I mean like, "do you know much about this?" and she'll sort of clarify things for me, that's been really good.

The Women's Health Centre was great. You can walk in there any day of the week and just say, "hey, I've got a problem," and someone will tell you, "I'll be there in ten minutes." They will sit down, they will help you, they will call people for you, they'll say, "do you need..." Like whatever you need, they'll shove you a bag full of biscuits and stuff for the kids. That was really, really helpful because the refuge I was in, the case workers were never there, and that was really, really, really crap. And literally, the only way I got through that was having the Women's Health Centre in walking distance.

There's a stigma sometimes I think; like you don't deserve help because it's 'just' domestic violence. Like the lady from Housing. When I was having my surgery, my case manager said to me, "get your doctor to fill out this form for Housing because you don't know when you're going to work." And I when I went to the interview with the lady from Housing and she said to me, "so when will you be able to work?" And I said, "well to be honest there's a good chance I'll die." And she was like, "I don't think so." And I was, "okay," and I'm like, "well I've had the surgery before, and that's what they've told me both times." I was like, you have the notes there, that's what it says. And she goes, "but it's not a surgery, it's a procedure." And I'm just, "do I have to prove to you that I might die?"

"Okay, I believe that you believe that."

After I'd left the refuge, my case manager came over one day and she said, "how's everything going?" And it was when I was first aware of the private health stuff. And I explained to her, "I'm really concerned about this privacy thing, even at the electricity company, now he knows where I am, and the way the private health policy works." And then she was like, "are you okay?" And I was, "no, I'm a little bit stressed about it," I was like, "it's really concerning me." And she was like, "okay I believe that you believe that." And I'm like, "sorry?" And

she was like, "I know that's what you think," and then she recommended I go and see a psychiatrist. And so I did, even though that irritated me. But I thought, "no, I'm going to, because I know that I'm okay," and I thought, "what have I got to lose?" And when I went to see this guy first of all he was typing on his laptop, and then he was leaning in and he put the laptop down, he was listening to every word I said, and then he was, "I'm really concerned." And I said, "why?" And he goes, "well my wife, she takes care of everything." And he's having this lightbulb moment. And he says "I think that you are primed to work through life's troubles." He's like, "if you ever need to come back, you're free to," but "yes, you've got a lot of stress going on, maybe talk to a counsellor about that." And I was like, "okay."

I resist and respond to the violence ... I do this in visible and invisible ways that might not seem obvious. *Follow My Lead*

Dean always makes me feel bad about, "oh the kids had all of this when you were here, but because of you, because you're crazy, look what you've done to them now." And he was, "you're living in that little flat." I'm like, "do you think that that's something I really wanted to do?" No, but I would rather that than live with him. And life is better - just because we don't have a huge house, or Foxtel or whatever, I don't care, "I will do anything to not be with you" is basically what I'm saying. But he tries to make me feel bad for it, and he says stuff to my daughter as well, like "if Mummy let you stay here then this wouldn't be like this." And she's only four.

The other day, we were watching *Little Rascals*, and she was just on the verge of tears, and I said, "honey, are you okay?" and she just burst into tears. And then she said, "no, I'm really, really angry." And I was, "oh okay, do you want to talk about it?" And she said, "you're not with Daddy anymore, and Daddy always shouts at you," and she was just going on with all this stuff, and I was just like, oh my gosh, this is so affecting her.

Then she said, "Daddy's going to be alone." And I said, "no, Daddy has Buster the dog." And so, anyway, Lula went back and told Dean that, "don't worry Daddy, you have Buster." And then Dean said something sarcastic, like, "oh well thanks Lu, it shows how much you really care." Lula didn't understand what that means, but she can feel that tone. And that's just so damaging to a little person.

Your shit does not work anymore.

He was always putting it all back on me. If I brought something up that he didn't want to talk about, well then I was the one ruining the relationship. And I knew that wasn't the truth, and it wasn't that I felt that I had to justify myself to the outside world, but if I ever left then I felt like I was

the one who was going to have to take responsibility for making his life even harder. He'd say to me, "you're exactly like my parents, I thought you were different." And I couldn't let that be. I couldn't, in my mind, let that be.

A lot of what he's done, I wouldn't talk about it, because I was so worried that I was crazy. Now I'm like, I remember when I thought I was crazy, and I'm okay to say that because I know why it was. Now when he tries to do those sorts of things, it's just humorous to me, because like I'm just, "your shit does not work anymore," like "keep going." But until I understood how deliberate it was I could not separate myself from it. So now that stuff doesn't bother me, obviously to an extent it does if it comes down to the kids, but it has no effect like it used to.

But it's not like he'll ever take responsibility for anything. I don't think his parents have ever made him take responsibility for anything, whether it's a bill, or whatever. And he's never had to, and now he's in his 40s and he still can't/won't.

I would say I've got a healthy level of resentment towards him. I was so young when we got together. I'm in my late 20s now and I look back, and I just see him as a predator, that's how I look at him, and it's like he can't even hide it anymore, like the looks on his face. I think he knows that I know what he is now. And I'm like, "shit that's a little bit scary."

Acknowledgement and thanks

Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) would like to thank the person with lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence who has generously shared their insights for the benefit of others.

We acknowledge that despite our best efforts to assemble with a person a more accurate representation of some of their experiences of violence, we can never fully understand all that their experiences mean to them now or through their life. We understand that no one's life experience can ever be fully represented in language or any other form.

Handle with dignity

You have been reading a carefully assembled excerpts of peoples lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence. These are not simply another 'story', 'sample' or 'case study'.

Whilst consent has been obtained to share these accounts we ask that as the custodian of these copies that you uphold the dignity of the people who shared them as you distribute and store them. Tips for handling with dignity:

- Keep the copies in an envelope distinct from paperwork and reports
 - Explain the importance and value of these accounts before distributing them
 - Collect any copies left behind by delegates/participants after workshops
-

Copyright: © DVSM 2019 www.insightexchange.net. DVSM gives permission for this resource to be photocopied or reproduced provided that the source is clearly and properly acknowledged.

Disclaimer: This Voices of Insight is a carefully assembled excerpt of a person's lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence. Details of this person's identity have been altered to protect their safety. Whilst great care has been taken to do no harm and to contribute to improved understanding of and responses to Domestic and Family Violence, DVSM assumes no responsibility for how the resource is used by other parties.
