

The following insights are from a person with lived experience of domestic and family violence focused on the financial abuse they experienced.

The narrative highlights the **lived experience** of **violence and abuse** including their responses and resistance to violence, and where **social responses** were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. It has been assembled from an interview conducted by [Rosie's Place](#).

## TAMARA

I was in a relationship with Sam for 9 years and we had a boy, Bobby, when we were together. I was 21 years old when I met Sam and now, I am 30. I wasted the best years of my life with him. Every day, Sam's mum, brother and his step dad came around to our place. It was always about his family. They all pretty much just ignored me. They would come to the house and just go straight out the back. They would all talk amongst themselves. I was treated like an idiot by the end. I was the one that was inside doing all the cleaning and cooking. I had to go to the shops and get all the food to cook them lunch and put on barbecues for them. They would just sit around and drink.

Sam's parents were not very safe. I remember once they were in our backyard, Bobby would have only been about three or something, he was playing around and he threw something at Sam's mum. Bobby ran away laughing and he hid under the clothesline. Sam's mum, Lorraine, picked up an outdoor wooden chair and threw it at Bobby. Bobby was on the ground under the clothesline screaming. I ran up to him and hugged him. She could have killed him. She was horrible, absolutely horrible. Lorraine would never let me forget it either, "oh you comforted him after I tried to teach him a lesson".

Sam had an older son, Damien, who was about 21 years old who lived with us for a while. Damien never worked and he took all the drugs he could get. Every now and again, I would get groceries and cook up a really big meal, then I would put all the left overs into little containers in the freezer. That way, if I didn't feel like cooking, I could just heat up meals for my little boy. In three days, Damien had eaten every single thing in the freezer and everything in the fridge. I had to buy everything. It was just ridiculous. Damien would steal things from around the house too.

**“You couldn't leave anything around. Everything would get taken.”**

For my birthday, Sam bought me a fish tank, it was worth about four or five hundred dollars. But then Damien stole that two weeks after my birthday. You couldn't leave anything around. Everything would get taken. If I ever said anything about it, Sam would go off; "oh, how dare you say these things about my son".

Sam worked at a supermarket for a while but he ended up losing his job. He was fired because he wasn't going to work. Sam blamed that on me because somehow it was my fault for not making him go to work.

I was getting some money from the government. But the problem was, Sam was a gambler too and a car thief. Sam stole a lot of cars and made a lot of cash. Then he would take all the

**“Sometimes I would just have to walk home with my little boy. Meanwhile, Sam was pouring money through the poker machines.”**

cash to the pub to play the pokies. A couple of times we'd go out for dinner and Sam would say “oh, I'll be back in a minute”. We would be sitting waiting for two hours. Sometimes I would just have to walk home with my little boy. Meanwhile, Sam was pouring money through the poker machines.

Sam put big money through, like \$6000 through the pokies in one go. Sometimes, Sam didn't come home till lunchtime the next day. He put thousands and thousands and

thousands of dollars through those machines. God it was upsetting. I was obviously mad at him, and I would say, “how could you put that much money through”, and I would tell him “Bobby needs shoes and we need food”. Sam just pretended it wasn't a problem. He kept saying, “oh, I'll fix it, I'll fix it”. Then he would go out all the next night and come home really tired. He would sleep for days. If Sam didn't find anything to steal, then we wouldn't have any money. Sam put pressure on me to get money from my mum. He would say, “you're going to have to ring your mum. Tell her ‘we haven't got money for petrol and we can't take Bobby to school’”. Then I would have to ring my mum and ask “can I borrow this and that?” My mum had to bring me over bags of groceries. We were pretty much living off that.

**“you're going to have to ring your mum. Tell her ‘we haven't got money for petrol and we can't take Bobby to school’”**

Sam would borrow money off his brother too. But I wasn't allowed to touch that money, it was all for him. One time, Sam stole a truck full of stuff worth lots of money. He ended up with about \$50,000. Straight away, Sam put \$20,000 into making drugs. He bought his son, Craig, from another relationship, an \$8000 four-wheel drive. At that time, I didn't have a car. My car was broken. Sam wouldn't even fix my car. I had to walk my son to day care for three months. It was quite embarrassing. Now, I think, “how could someone stay in a situation like that?” But I always thought, “it's going to get better”.

There were some moments where all of a sudden, Sam would get some money. He would take us to the shops and we could buy anything we wanted. But that didn't happen often enough.

I was just as bad. I wasn't very good at saving money. Sam did pay the rent when he had money, which was good. The electricity was in his name at that house too. But by the time he left, there was a bill for \$7000. I paid the phone and the internet. I was always up to date. But I think I left owing about a thousand dollars on the electricity. That's bad credit and I could probably never get a loan or anything now.

Sam and I were both heavily into drugs, mostly Ice. At the start it was just weed and we would spend, fifty to eighty dollars a week on that. Sometimes Sam got free drugs, big bags of it and we would smoke it. But Sam became violent the more he became involved with drugs.

In the beginning, Sam wasn't violent. But when Sam started taking Ice things changed. About that time, I had my little boy and that's when Sam's violence got worse and worse, and worse. He would always hit me in front of my son. That's what hurt the most. One of the last times Sam did it, my little boy actually stood up to him and he said "don't touch my mum". Sam went to hit him. He was only four. It was awful. A kid that age should never have to see or do anything like that.

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Last year Sam put a lot of money into cooking Ice. He got a friend to make it all and one night he drove all the way to Lithgow and back. He was up all night and he came home with a whole sandwich bag full of Ice. Strangely, that's when he tried to get me into rehab. He called up his mum and brother and they arranged to meet at my mum's house. They all decided that I needed to go to rehab for my Ice addiction. I wasn't really prepared to go to rehab at that point. I also knew that Sam just wanted me to go away for the week, so he could have the whole bag full of drugs for himself. I just thought he was being ridiculous. But then Sam's mum and his brother, turned up and they actually took my boy away. They had Bobby for 3 days and they weren't prepared to give him back until I went to rehab. I thought, "how dare you take my son". I knew they weren't really prepared to look after him.

Sam organised for his mum to look after my little boy, while I was at rehab. Sam wasn't even prepared to look after his own son. I said "all right, I'll go, whatever". So, later that day I went over to my mum's house with a bag full of clothes. I tried, and I tried, and I tried and I couldn't get into any rehab centres anywhere.

I went back over to Sam's house for the night. Bobby was still at Lorraine's place. It had been about two days and Lorraine had said she would give Bobby back to me. But Sam and I were on drugs that night and we had a huge fight in the morning. Sam, started smashing every window in the house and then he put my head through the window of the front door as well. Sam was hassling me and getting in my face. Sam held up his phone and he said "I'll video you and I'll tie you up and make you sit down and everyone will watch how you carry on".

I got up and managed to push the phone out of Sam's hand. Sam down bent to pick up the phone and then I pushed the front door and it hit him really hard in the nose. There was blood everywhere and he started carrying on, "now who's going to call the police 'cause of violence". But Sam's son, Damien, saw everything and he went straight to Lorraine's place and told her not to bring Bobby back. It was at that moment I just knew it was all over. I could never, ever stay there again.

Lorraine finally gave my boy back when they found out I was trying to get into a rehab place. I had been a mess for 3 days. In that time, I decided I wasn't going back to Sam or his house. No way. I knew what I'd be going back to. I fixed myself up and I did it all on my own with my mum's support. I started seeing a counsellor at an addiction management centre fairly regularly. I got off everything and I moved back in with my mum. So, in the end, I didn't have to go to rehab.

It all turned out all right, I stayed with my mum for 3 months. Then I got my own house. My mum re-mortgaged her house and borrowed some money to help me out. It's an older house but it's good. We've got a big yard. Mum bought me a wall unit and a little TV. So, I'm getting there slowly.

I'm doing really well now. I'm on top of my gas, electricity, rent, food and now I see myself living as a normal person. I think I just needed that real urgency to get out of that situation. It was the thought of Sam's family taking my son off me that did it.

But everything I ever owned was in Sam's house. He wouldn't let me get any of it. God knows where all my stuff and all my son's stuff went. It probably went straight into the bin. I sent Sam a few messages and tried to call him. I went back twice and got two car loads full of stuff. It was just some clothes, I had to leave so much behind. The next time I went back Sam had changed all the locks. So, I couldn't get back in. Sam did show up at my mum's front door with two photo albums and that was it. He asked my mum for a box full of his old photos in return. So, he took the one and only thing I had of his, but he couldn't return all of my stuff. So, I lost 9 years' worth of stuff.

**“I pretty much lost everything. I went and saw Legal Aid to see if they could help me try to get my stuff back. But they told me to go to the police, then the police told me to go to Legal Aid.”**

I pretty much lost everything. I went and saw Legal Aid to see if they could help me try to get my stuff back. But they told me to go to the police, then the police told me to go to Legal Aid. Legal Aid then told me I had to go to court to get a recovery order.

I actually went to court because I tried to get an ADVO out on him. Sam started harassing me and my family. Sam started showing up at my mum's place saying “I just want to see my son. I want to be like a normal father and see him every second weekend”. Sam's family also started driving up and down my mum's street all the time. They were knocking on mum's door and sitting out on the front yard.

A couple of times, Sam said he was going to take Bobby away for a weekend. I let Sam take Bobby once and my poor son ended up being dumped at Sam's mum's house. My little boy didn't like that at all. Lorraine wasn't very nice at all and apparently Bobby was really upset. So, then Lorraine dropped Bobby off at Sam's brother's place for a couple of days. Sam wouldn't answer the phone the whole time. I didn't know where Sam was or where Bobby

was. I was leaving messages “if you don't call me back, I'm going to have to call the police”. I finally got Bobby back. Sam’s family never took any real responsibility for Bobby.

I was quite scared that Sam or Sam’s family would just turn up at Bobby’s school and take him. They all knew where he went to school, So, I changed Bobby’s school. I told the old principal and the new principal the whole situation. I told them both that Sam can't come near Bobby. Both principles simply said they couldn’t do anything without the paperwork in place. I thought “it’s all right, as long Sam doesn't know where Bobby is, it will be okay”. Sam went to the old principal, said “I want to know where my son is”. All the old principle had to say was “he doesn't attend this school any more”, but the principle actually gave Sam the name and address of the new school. Everyday, I sit in a complete panic wondering whether or not Bobby going to be at school when I go to pick him up.

Two weeks ago, Sam showed up at the new school and asked to see Bobby. The teacher and the principal asked my son, “do you want to see your dad?” Bobby said “no”. Then they said “if you want to, it's okay, you're in a safe situation”. They were trying to talk him into seeing Sam. Thank God Bobby still said “no”. Apparently later that that day Sam showed up at my mum's house, but mum was out. My mum’s neighbours said that Sam was completely off his head on drugs.

Another day I was driving home after dropping Bobby off from school. A four-wheel drive pulled up straight behind me and started and following me. I changed lanes four times and the car was still following me. I knew it was Sam’s son Craig. Somehow, I ended up losing him, thank God. But Sam and his family keep trying to figure out where I live.

**“My lawyer advised me not to go for custody because that would open the doors for Sam to see Bobby. It's all very confusing.”**

I saw a solicitor who sent me a parenting plan saying they want a 50/50 arrangement. I've contacted a lawyer about that and she told me that I don't have to sign it. The problem is, if I want full custody, I will have to go to court. My lawyer advised me not to go for custody because that would open the doors for Sam to see Bobby. It's all very confusing.

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#### Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange would like to thank [Rosie’s Place](#) for conducting these interviews and providing these transcripts to Insight Exchange to ensure the voices of lived experience are able to help inform and strengthen social, service and systemic responses to domestic and family violence.

The initiative to conduct the interviews was from an informal pro-bono collaboration by [Rosie’s Place](#), [WASH House](#), and the [Mt Druitt Family Violence Team](#). The narratives were

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provided by the individuals for the benefit of others. The narratives were obtained through interviews with Rosie's Place and assembled by the Insight Exchange team.

Insight Exchange would also 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.

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