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Marion

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.

MARION

I was born in Australia and I came from a pretty stable, good upbringing. I have multiple university degrees and speak several languages. I have many friends. I was very outwardly confident but extremely shy with boys and I ended up in a relationship that wasn't great when I was in my mid-20s.

I was pretty financially secure at that age. I was successful in my job and after five years working in the one place, I got a transfer to another city. I'd had a really close group of friends where I was. But when I moved, it was a smaller, quieter place and I was isolated. I wasn't living near any of my family and I didn't have a big group of friends. I think I was lonely.

I always wanted to get married and have kids. That was always one of my dreams; to find a partner, live in Australia and raise children like I was raised. I guess I don't feel like I fit the mould of someone who experiences domestic violence, but I don't know if there is a mould. I wanted to meet someone, but it didn't feel like there was much opportunity in this new city. It was quite difficult to meet people outside of the people I worked with.

I met a lot of men that couldn't change a light bulb. My father was very handy; he knew how things worked and could fix things. I think that's something that I held as important with a partner and someone who had a sense of humour, who was intelligent; they're the things that I was looking for. I think when I met my ex-husband, he ticked those boxes for me at the time and he was also from a farming family. My mother's side of the family were from a large farming family. And I think because I came from that, I expected farming people to be good. And I guess that set the scene for our relationship.

Lawrence had a sense of humour and told me all the things that I wanted to hear at the start, like how he performed on his final year exams which was good, and he had a similar score to me. I found out later he didn't do anywhere near that well. His parents' had a farming business. And he said that he owned some of the livestock and that he did lots of work out there. He took me to visit his grandmother and bought her groceries and told me he visited often. Later it became very clear he did not like his grandmother at all and he told me he visited her when we first met so I would think he was nice.

He lived in a house that was owned by his parents, but he said, "this house is pretty much mine. I live here and can do whatever I want to it. You can live here with me." It was just the story that I

wanted to hear. I met him through a group of friends from work and it looked like he was friendly with everyone in that group but it became apparent that he'd only just become friends with those people. And he didn't keep those friendships. But we met and we had sex. And it was like I'd made a decision that I was going to be with him already and it was perfect.

He took me to his family's place soon after we met. And I guess for me, meeting the family is a big deal. And the fact that he wanted me to meet his family, I saw that as flattering.

We went to his parents' farm and we went on a horse ride. He asked me to stop and get off the horse. And then he kissed me. I was leaning over a branch and then I realised he wanted to have sex. He turned me around and I didn't like the idea of sex doggy style, so I said "no, I don't want to do this. We're in the middle of a paddock." I just didn't like that idea at all. He said, "there's no one here for miles around. No one will see us." And I said, "no, don't." And he just continued to force himself on me. But I said, "no, I don't want to do this. Please stop." But he continued. Then, he just got back on the horse and kept going as if nothing had happened. And in my mind, at the time, part of me thought, "is this what you do in a relationship? Is this what you should do?" I didn't even consider it rape, for some reason. I didn't think of it like that. I just thought, I don't like that. And in my mind, I said, "I'm never going to have 'sex' like that again." And for years, I didn't ever let him have 'sex' with me that way.

A lot of the things that happened over the years, I knew they weren't right. I'm not stupid. But then there was goodness from him, which took away the gravity of the other situations. I mean 80 per cent of the time was good and then there were moments when really bad things happened. The behaviour I didn't like started about six months after we met and then it deteriorated from there. During that period Lawrence came to visit my parents. He had a black SUV sports car kind of thing that didn't look like the car you wanted your daughter's boyfriend to have. His father was like, "don't drive that car when you go there. Drive our car." His father was very good at making a nice impression. His parents also said, "you should go to your parents' place for Christmas because we live closer to you, and you won't get to see your parents." They were supportive and he made out that he was very open to visiting my relatives. When he did meet them, he made a lot of effort to get along with them. At the start.

When I met him, I'd just gotten a job in Europe. We'd met six weeks before and got together really quickly. And we decided that we'd have a long-term relationship. But I was still going overseas, and I was getting ready to leave. He said, "I'll try and get a job over there."

He came over to visit twice and the first was for a couple of weeks. He'd never been overseas so being the organiser that I am, I organised a trip across Germany, Italy, Austria, France. We did all these little trips, and he didn't really deal well with different environments. You go from Italy where

everything's a bit crazy and then Austria and it's really strict and he couldn't deal with change very well. And he was very hesitant about everything.

I spent just over a year over there. And he called me constantly. He contacted me all the time; constant messaging and asking, "where are you?" And I remember thinking, I'm just going to throw my mobile phone in the river because I'm sick of dealing with him. And he sent me lots of gifts like underwear and jewellery that was ridiculous and too much; embarrassing and just way over the top. A good friend I had over there, one of my closest friends during the year, she actually raised it with me; his constant calling and jealousy. I knew that she was right. Inside, I knew she was right. But for some reason, I didn't want to acknowledge it.

**A good friend I had over there...
she actually raised it with me;
his constant calling and jealousy.**

At one point, we were hanging out with some people and one of them was a guy that she ended up going out with. And I remember being on the phone to him and he thought I had something to do with this fellow. And I had to explain that I didn't. And my friend overheard me explaining, "no, I haven't got anything to do with him." And she heard me having to work hard to put him at ease. And she brought it up with me. I acknowledged it to her. I guess. I acknowledged it to her, but I didn't make a change because of it.

He wasn't interested in meeting my friends over there. When he came back to Europe the second time, we'd become engaged and I'd decided to return to Australia, and I'd made this dinner for him to meet all the people that I'd spent the year with. He turned up and said he was too tired and didn't speak to anyone and then went home. It was embarrassing and it felt off. And I'm very good at compensating for his lack of engagement. I made excuses for him and said he's tired from his trip. I feel like I've probably got better at skills at making people feel at ease when things are not at all ok. If I sense someone's discomfort, I'll work hard to making them feel comfortable.

I'd organised and paid for a trip around the world for us both at the end of that stint in Europe. I had wanted him to experience the world like I had, because I wanted him to know who I was. I'd spent time in Europe as a teenager and met people from many countries. Everywhere we went, I wanted to meet up with people that I knew. And I had relatives over there. We went everywhere but he complained a lot. There was a lot of arguing and a lot of him not wanting to meet people that I knew in different places. And it was difficult.

We went to visit a concentration camp and there was an area where they had the people who were gay, a different colour and made them wear certain things. He said really offensive, homophobic things to me about those people. I didn't like that at all. And he knew that I didn't like it. I would say, "I can't believe you said that." And wouldn't speak to him for a couple of hours until eventually, he

would apologise or make some excuse. But I didn't ever not show that I wasn't okay with what he said.

On one occasion, we went out and he got really drunk and was abusive and started touching a girl. I was trying to get us home and he didn't like that. He was like, "fuck off, bitch. I don't want to go back to the hotel." He was really abusive and really drunk. I didn't speak to him at all the next day and then he profusely apologised and was sick for a couple of days, because he was so drunk. So there were lots of signs, but it was like I wanted it to work and I was doing everything that I could to make it work.

When we got back to Australia, we moved in together. We moved into the house his parents' owned. We joined everything together financially. We decided to buy a property in the country. I had an apartment I owned which I re-mortgaged to get the equity to be able to use that as a deposit and put his name on it. I did everything. I think my view was that if you're not 100 per cent in, you're not fully in the relationship. And if you're holding back something, you're not actually in.

I got us organised and helped do everything. We spent a lot of money on his parents' house. That was the house that he'd lived in as a kid. And then his parents had let him and his sister live there for ten years rent-free. It needed a lot of work and I walked in and said, "I can't live here. We'll have to clean it up." And he was like, okay. We both worked cleaning it up. But I paid for new carpet, paint and new curtains. He was happy to do the work and it was a project. But I funded it because I wanted it, and I was happy to pay for it because we were doing it together. That period was pretty good. We built a house in the country during that period, and we were making plans and planning a wedding. It was a good period then.

Leading up to the wedding, I wanted to get married near my parents' property in Victoria and he was comfortable with that, but his father wanted us to get married at their family farm. His father constantly talked about that and harassed me about it for a long time. And he wanted to pick my bridesmaids' dresses, who my bridesmaids were and even my wedding dress. He got involved in every detail of the wedding, and I found it very odd and wrong. There's no way I wanted to have the wedding at the farm. And my parents had offered to pay for most of the wedding. And they said to me, "we don't care where it's held, we can pay for the set-up or a marquee or something. We can have it anywhere." And I was like, "I really don't want to have it there." It's got nothing to do with my life. I'd rather have it in a neutral place rather than at one or the other place.

The other thing that happened with the wedding was I thought his mother was lovely. And I thought, as the daughter-in-law, I'd ask her if she wanted to go shopping, because she'd said that she didn't have anything to wear and there weren't any dress shops where they lived. And I said, "would you like to come to the city for the weekend and go shopping with me?" And she said that would be great. We organised a date and she came, but so did the father. And he came to the shops, and he

said, "you can try on that," or "you can try on this." And I said, "I didn't think that you would be here." And he said, "I have to sit next to her at the wedding, so I need to choose what she wears." And at that point, I turned to Lawrence and said, "get him out of here." And he just said to me, "I can't." And that was when I realised that the father was really not okay. It just got worse from there.

"I have to sit next to her at the wedding, so I need to choose what she wears."

My partner talked to his father on a regular basis - all the time. I felt a bit like, when I hear that Princess Diana story, there were three people in the marriage; Camilla, Charles and Diana. There was Lawrence, his father and me. Because every decision that we made, he spoke about it with his father, and they would make a decision themselves. And he'd come back and say, "this is what I think we should do." It became worse as we went along.

After the wedding (which he hardly contributed to), his father said to him, "the location was terrible, and the food was really cold." when my partner told me that and I said, "I don't think I can speak to your father again because I can't believe that any father would say that to their own child about their wedding." And at that point, my partner knew that I had switched off from his father. And I think that's when he turned on my parents, like revenge. If you're not nice to my parents, I'm not going to be nice to your parents.

"We'll just have to agree to disagree. And I've got to go to bed now. Night."

I was never openly rude to his parents. But his father would have arguments with people, and you couldn't leave unless you agreed with him. I never agreed with him but used to say, "we'll just have to agree to disagree. And I've got to go to

bed now. Night." And he would hate that. You could tell it annoyed him not being able to have the last word in an argument.

When my first daughter was born, my mum wanted to come and help. She was a doctor and had helped my sisters out when they had children. I talked to Lawrence about it and he wasn't overly excited. But I said, "I'll need help." off. So he agreed to her coming. But then his father said to him, one evening when we were at the farm, "you wouldn't want your mother-in-law coming to your house with a new baby." And after his father said that to him, his view of my mum coming changed dramatically.

When she did come, he was extremely rude. He wouldn't say good morning and he wouldn't tell her he was going to the hospital to visit me. She wanted to invite a friend to visit (while I was in hospital and he was working) that she knew from childhood who was in town and he was like, "no, I don't want your friends at our house." I was embarrassed, but I was not well enough to argue with him and didn't say much about it. I just had a baby. Later, Mum said she was in tears with the way he

treated her and me. I knew he would never act like that in front of my father. It was like this power play of, I won't act like that in front of him. But in front of her, I can do what I want. And he didn't ever say thank you. My parents gave us a lot of money and gifts and he didn't say thank you once. I didn't really talk to anyone about it at the time. I think that that comes down to our culture of making out everything's great and talking about the good things. My friends now say they didn't really like him at all.

“I don't like you visiting because you make her far too independent.”

One of my good friends did come and visit me for a weekend while I was pregnant and Lawrence said to her, “I don't like you visiting

because you make her far too independent.” That weekend, I was doing things that I'd planned to do with her while he went out drinking with his friends. He'd then call me to pick him up, because I was pregnant, so I could drive. And he bothered me all weekend and made sure it was difficult for us to have a good time together, but he didn't want to do anything with us. He didn't really make an effort with my friends and that became a pattern.

I got to the point where I just socialised without him. And if he did have to do something with my friends, he would make a big song and dance about how he didn't want to go. And then he would enjoy himself at whatever the event it was. And then afterwards, he would complain about it. For me it was this big build-up, “oh my goodness, what's he going to act like? And do I have to look after him?” And then afterwards, he'd say things like, “your friend looked awful.” Or, “I can't believe you're friends with those people.” It hurt me emotionally. I'd just say, “please don't say that about my friends.” It was stressful to do anything with him to the point where I just started going to things by myself.

I realise now that I didn't really have a relationship with him where we could have a nice chat. We seemed to get along well when we were working on a project together only. We worked really well together when we had things to do, and if it was a project that he wanted to do. We renovated, we built a house. If we did a project that he was happy to do, then we got along really well.

His Dad was so rude. I mean, one time I cooked a meal for everyone and at the table he said, “You are not a very good cook.” No one at the table said anything. He'd say things to his wife like, “What are you doing wench?” He was always cooked for. Once he came in and she was cooking dinner and he said, “I don't want that for dinner” so she just threw it out and started again.

I remember one time at the farm, after a rough night when I had kids vomiting and not sleeping and I'd been up through the night; the next day the kids were a bit ratty and the father looked at me and said, “You need to learn to manage your children better”. After that I refused to visit the farm for a year and a half after that; but eventually my partner convinced me to go back for something, but I wasn't keen.

The first big, violent incident was in response to something that his father had said to him. I'd had my first child and I got a job as a Personal Assistant to the CEO of the company we both worked for. And he, for some reason, thought that his boss thought it was a conflict of interest that his' wife worked for the CEO. And said, don't worry, she won't get the job. And then I did get the job.

And my partner felt uncomfortable, but he wasn't angry about it. He just thought I'm out of the boys' club because my boss doesn't like what's going on. And I don't know if that was his perceived view or if it was actual. But my partner wasn't angry about it. But then he told his father what was happening, and his father said, "she should really quit her job." And that started six months of arguing and him yelling at me all the way to

work and all the way home from work. I'd come to work in tears, but I was so good at being able to act like everything was fine, I

"Maybe you should consider leaving your job."

think that I'd get an Oscar for that. When things got really bad, I thought about going to my boss, but he was really busy. So I went to one of his Executive Directors and I said, "I'm having these issues because my husband thinks that one of the team leaders is insinuating that it's not okay for me to have this job." And he said to me, "maybe you should consider leaving your job, it wasn't that long ago when women had to leave the workforce when they had children."

I got to the point where I went to my doctor and said, "we need help." And my partner walked out of that appointment. A couple of days later, we had an argument late at night and I decided I was going to fly home with our baby as I needed to get away. He was stopping me from packing to get things to leave, and he slammed the door in our room, and it broke my finger into four pieces. I took myself to the hospital after it occurred at about 2am and lied and said I'd accidentally slammed my finger in a door. That wasn't the worst thing, but that was the incident I remember the most because of the whole work thing and his father's influence on him.

I flew home the day after he broke my finger with my hand all bandaged my parents knew what was going on. And for them, it was awful. I think I said "he didn't mean to do it. But he slammed the door. We were fighting." And my dad said to me, "why was he slamming the door at two o'clock in the morning anyway?" And at that point, I made an appointment with a lawyer, and I had a consultation. I set up a bank account and got ready to leave. I was very careful about what I said to people because I knew that if you said certain things, it would mean that I would have to do something about it. So I was very careful about what I said to people. And when I talked to the lawyer, she said, have you been injured? And I said, yes, and told her about my hand. And she said, you should go to the police.

At that point, I thought, I'm not ready to do that. I think mentally, I was thinking about my child and growing up in a single-parent family, not having a stable family. I didn't want my child to have a father who ends up in jail or with a charge. I didn't want that to be their life. And I'd be a single

mum. I'd have to move home to my parents', and I wouldn't be independent. I felt like a failure. I think that was key, and the shame factor.

After that happened, my partner kept calling me multiple times a day and night and then insinuated that he was going to kill himself. I was away for about six days but then returned home due to the pressure he placed on me to return. I flew back on the plane and he didn't even pick me up. His mother did. He was playing golf with his dad instead. And that was a real hit for me. When I told my father that, I don't think he ever had any respect for him again. That was it.

When I returned I insisted we go to counselling. We each went for a session separately before attending together. My partner came home from his individual session in tears, and I could tell it had really affected him. For the next 10 days he spent all his spare time reading psychology textbooks at the library and online. By the time our joint session was held. He had the psychologist wrapped around his finger and I was the problem in our relationship and needed to change my ways.

I got pregnant again very quickly. I think my partner wanted to get me pregnant straight away as that would trap me. That's what I feel like happened because we hadn't discussed having a second child. Once I was pregnant, I felt trapped because, again, I didn't want to be shamed, leaving my husband while pregnant.

He kicked me while I was pregnant. We had an argument and he'd said, "you're not welcome here, this isn't your house," and he actually kicked me physically out the door and said, "get out." and locked it. And for some reason, there was a car key outside, and I kept a credit card in the car. So I went and stayed in a hotel for the night. I didn't tell anyone about it because I was heavily pregnant, embarrassed and couldn't believe it was happening to me. He called all night asking me to come home and that he was sorry. I went straight to work from the hotel the next day.

When my second child was born, I made an agreement with my partner, because the last name of the children would be his last name, that I wanted to pick their middle name. I wanted her middle name to be Sarah, after my Grandma. And I had an emergency caesarean. When the doctors left the room and put the baby on my chest and they left us for a few minutes, he argued with me and said he wanted her middle name to be his mother's name. And I was like, no, we've already agreed for it to be Sarah. And I was in tears and I was emotional and in pain. And he wouldn't stop arguing that it's only fair for it to be his mother's name. He wouldn't stop and I was not in a position to argue. Eventually, I said let's make it a double-barrelled middle name, so use both names. I agreed to that. But it was me giving in rather than him. It was just awful having my first hours with my new-born being subjected to that pressure. Everyone was coming up to me and saying, "congratulations, you and your baby, it's wonderful." And I'm thinking, yes, and I was just abused by my partner. It wasn't a good feeling at all.

He always wanted to buy the best of everything. I like going to op shops and buying second-hand. He likes to buy the best and the latest model.

And if he was being awful and then you let him get something that he wanted, he'd be happy for a little while. I guess I got a

reward from giving in because I kind of bought "better" behaviour. Not openly, but I knew that that was happening.

You got maternity leave. I need something in return."

When I was on maternity leave the third time, he said, "you've got a holiday." And his father always used to say to me, "how are you enjoying your holiday?". I'm not sure that any mum with three kids under three, no family close by and a husband that did not help, could consider maternity leave a holiday. That was his fathers' opening greeting to me. And Lawrence said, which I think now he planned with his father, "you got maternity leave. I need something in return." At that point, I'd been off for 12 months and I wanted a few more months off because I just didn't think I could go back to work with three under three and survive. I said I need to take a few more months off and that would cost us. So I sold shares that I owned to fund it. Even with this my partner kept saying, "I need something because you're getting something." And he wanted to spend \$50,000 on a caravan and we'd go halves with his dad. I thought that was ridiculous. And we argued and argued. But he kept going. And I was so tired with not sleeping and getting up ten times a night and three sets of nappies. Eventually, I said yes.

Then he had to get a new car to pull it, because the caravan couldn't be pulled by any car. He found this SUV which cost more than \$80,000 and signed us up to a car loan. I didn't want to sign it and we had an argument. He forced me to sign it. He said, "if you don't sign it, we can't get it and I've already got the caravan. What's the point of that?" He put me in a position that was, if you don't do it, you ruin everything.

We already had a massive mortgage on two houses. And then he was into credit cards, finding zero interest credit cards, plus the car loan, three kids and the plan to have au pairs to help with the kids so I could return to work. We were living beyond our means, and I sold shares I owned to fund the lifestyle he wanted. The car loan he put in both our names, but the car was in his name, not my name. I only found that out when I went to get the car registration renewed and I lined up for an hour at the rego offices with three children in tow to be told, "you're not listed on the papers, so he has to do it." At that point, I wasn't thinking of separation. I didn't think of it as, "he's doing this on purpose." I just thought, he just hasn't even thought about it.

But it turns out that the caravan was bought in his father's name. When we got to financial settlement, it didn't even exist. He refused to provide bank statements showing half of the money was transferred to his parents' account.

When we got to settlement, I worked out that when I met him, I had a net worth of \$550,000 and he had a debt of \$10,000. While we were together, I funded all the deposits for the houses and the projects that we did. I funded everything and went through all of that money until our separation. On separation, we had \$150,000 left of equity in one property.

Separation

When we mutually agreed to separate, we didn't have anywhere else to live. We'd already bought a property that we'd planned to move into, so we were still living separately but under the one roof. We still worked for the same company and were going to take two days off for the move. A week before, he said to me, "I'm not helping move. I'm going to go surfing for four days." And I didn't know if he was just telling me that to make me stressed before the move or if he was actually going to do it. I didn't really know how I'd be able to move by myself and the kids. But he did go. On the morning of the move, he got up and left.

I called his mother because she'd always said, "if you need help with anything, just ask." And I didn't know if he'd told her we were separating but I rang her and said, "I'm not sure if he's told you but we're separating and moving house and he won't help. I need help moving, can you help?" she whispered that she couldn't.

I rang my dad and I said, I need you to come up and help me today. I called my neighbour who I didn't know very well, but I knew she was a travel agent, and I said can you get my Dad a flight? She got him there quickly. I got another neighbour who was pregnant, who I was good friends with, to open doors for removalists. I farmed the kids out to friends. And I hired someone to help me unpack and I got it all done by Sunday night. And that's when the incident happened.

He came home and I think he was angry that I got it done, because I got it done by myself. We never swore in front of the kids. And he started saying, "you're a fucking bitch. Your dad's a fucking arsehole. I'm going to tell the kids that every day for the rest of their lives." When we got upstairs, he saw that I'd got most of the house unpacked, but I hadn't unpacked a box of his clothes. And he ripped all of my clothes out of my cupboard and threw them out on the balcony and started putting his clothes away.

As soon as he did it in front of the children ... I called the police.

And then he picked up a soccer ball and threw it at my head in front of the children. And as soon as he did it in front of the children, I put them to bed and then I walked outside and called the police and ended up getting an interim restraining order at that point.

He was told to leave the home that night by the police and then because of the restraining order and after a couple of weeks living with his family, he came back and rented a unit 100 metres from our home. That was the distance he had to stay away

under the terms of the order. He could have moved back into the house his parents owned at any point, but he rented a place 100 metres away.

At that stage we had money coming from a sale of a house in the country coming into our bank accounts. And he kept telling me that he was going to take that money and use it for a deposit on a property for himself. I went to the bank and asked for that account to become “two to sign” so he couldn’t just take out all the money and use it.

I went to counsellors and talked with them. I wasn't open about everything that happened at that point. But they knew that there was a restraining order in place and that there was some violence.

And the counsellor that I spoke to, who was a child psychologist, said to me, “children are much better if they have 50 per cent care with both parents.” The lawyers that I was going to said, don't give

“Children are much better if they have 50 per cent care with both parents.”

50 per cent care. But I went with my heart thinking, I've got to do the best thing for my children. And once I gave over 50/50 care he started doing lots of things that were really concerning, but weren't physical. They were emotional and manipulative. And I was told once you've given 50/50 custody, it's really hard to get that back.

He was making movies of the kids and getting them to say I hurt them. They told me they didn't like it. I went to the police and made an appointment at the domestic violence unit to discuss what he was doing. They listened to me, but said, “there's nothing we can do.” And they didn't even record it as a formal report. So, it looks like I haven't even talked to the police. I told the lawyer what was occurring, but the recurring response was, “it's not enough. They really need to break their arm or something, in his care, to be enough to get over the line for you to get more care.” They used to be open with me about, “Dad told me to lie to you,” and “Dad told me to tell you this.”

“Dad told me to lie to you.”

But they don't say that anymore.

In the meantime, the mortgage was more than my salary and he said, “I can't contribute to the mortgage, I've got rent to pay.” I put in a claim for child support because I couldn't pay the mortgage and then I found out about mortgage holidays, so I got that sorted but in the meantime, in response to the Child Support claim, he set up a farming business with his father and wrote his income down to \$10,000 and claimed child support from me. He was earning over \$120,000 but via the primary producer loophole in the tax system got it down to \$10,000, got a healthcare card.

I still had the mortgage. I tried to sell the house. First, I tried to buy it from him and go through settlement, he wouldn't agree to that. His parents paid for a really expensive lawyer. I had to do the same. My parents paid for some of the lawyer who I engaged who was good. who told me, it'll cost you \$100,000 with me if you want to go all the way with child custody and financial separation.

I fought the child support claim. That took six months to get to the end, but I won. We got a four-year exemption in place.

He moved back to his parents' place and no longer has to pay rent but on his child support papers, he's paying his parents' rent. He's paying them to look after his farming interests, and he's done it so he pays no tax. So if he's got custody of the children, I have to pay him. I can't even afford to live where I'm living, because my partner and I have bought a new house together, to try and start again. So, that'll put me back in financial distress.

But the things that worry me the most is the way he's manipulating the children, so they're not being able to have a free life and a childhood. It's so subtle that unless you can tell the whole story, you can't really see it. They're under his thumb. They'll do anything for him and will lie and cover up for him. He undermines my parenting at every opportunity including the school as it's a school he knows I wanted them to attend. He tells them that teachers are dumb, and they're only a teacher because they couldn't do anything else.

When they're in his care he takes them to the farm and doesn't allow them to go to birthday parties or participate in sport. When one of them was getting into fights, he'd write to the school and say, "I can't believe you're not looking after my child." while training them to fight at home. When the oldest child was having issues with a group of peers, his advice was "don't worry about it, I don't speak to anyone I ever went to school with, you don't need friends you only need your family." He also makes fun of people and puts a negative spin on everything I do. We had a holiday with my new partner and the kids had a really good time. But after going back to their Dad, they came back next week going, "that was the shittiest holiday we ever had. And we didn't enjoy this bit and this bit." It's like he twists and exaggerates any little negative thing and changes their memory of something.

Now, it's got to the point where the kids are abusing me. My daughter was really hurting me, punching, and kicking me. And I think it all comes from the way he's talked and behaved the last five years, "don't listen to your mum. She can't tell you what to do." Now the kids say that I hurt them. They don't have any basis for that. I do yell at them because their behaviour is so bad. When I say bad behaviour I mean like throwing food around the house, raw eggs, breaking doors, hitting. Obviously, I get angry and raise my voice and try to safely hold them when they are lashing out at me. But I feel like he's creating the drama that makes it difficult for me to parent at all.

I think lawyers look at your net worth and go, is it worth pursuing? And there wasn't anything there. My parents paid for a little bit of legal help, but I didn't want to keep asking them. And every time I was told it's not enough to get over the line. I didn't ever make an application to the court because it just seemed too much to do. And I was being told, "it's not enough. You won't get through." Now I think I should have never listened to anyone, and I should have gone to court straightaway.

The hardest thing for me is that I was in this relationship and I'm now out of it. But I'm still not able to protect my children from it. So, that's the hardest thing for me. That hurts. That's the most important thing.

Our legal system is not well set up for people like me. If I understood how reporting works better, it could have been different. Unfortunately, if there's no evidence, our legal system treats it like it didn't happen. When he strangled me, I had bruises on my neck for four days and so I stayed inside. If I'd gone to the police at that point, it would have been no question that he has done all these things. But because I don't have the 'evidence', it didn't happen.

The child protection system is set up for kids who are being physically and sexually abused rather than psychologically abused. I was even told by child protection and the magistrate that unless I had proof of sexual or physical abuse they wouldn't take any action.

I was horrified at having to call the domestic violence support line, because I wasn't in danger. I wasn't getting killed at this moment. And I felt like I was using resources that could be used for someone who was about to get murdered. So, there was a lot of that. I've got over that now and I realise what they're there for. But at the start, that was a big step for me. I never went to Emergency for help either because I thought, "I can afford to go to the doctor." And hospital emergency is for people who can't afford it.

I guess it depends on how you're brought up. I think carefully about using public resources and what's okay, and what's not okay. I was also very hesitant to ask people for help. I think the hesitation is that once you tell people something like that they might stay away, because they fear, "oh, these kids are going through a hard time, I'm not going to let my kids play with them." And I think that my former self probably would have done that too – or made decisions like that.

More recently, my children have made false allegations to the police that I abuse them. I also had an interim Family Violence Order taken out on me that was withdrawn based on false evidence in order to withhold the children. My son continued week about care against his father's wishes but I think it's something to do with being male and having a bit of influence and his age. I have made an application to the family court and that process is under-resourced. I am self-representing, my ex has obtained a legal aid grant as he has reduced his taxable income to \$0 using the primary producer special exemption while making over \$120,000 contractor salary. My two daughters 10 and 12 have limited time with me and no overnights. The court was hesitant to agree to me having them overnight due to the interim domestic violence order that was in place at the time of my application.

We have a lot of discussion about family violence in the media currently, but I am yet to find a service that can help me immediately to protect my children from this abuse.

I have become better at asking for help when I need it. I don't think we do anything for ourselves as a society sometimes in some of our interactions. My experience has changed how I interact with people. It's changed my view of everything.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange (Domestic Violence Service Management) 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.

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