

Name of Project: Ascent Advice & Counselling

Lead partner: Solace Women's Aid

Delivery partner: EACH Counselling and Support

I am a 35-year-old Eastern European woman and currently live with my 5 year old daughter in a refuge. I was referred to EACH Counselling and Support by my IDVA because of my experiences of abuse and violence from my husband.

I had an assessment just before the Government lockdown. My counsellor explained that my symptoms of fear, anxiety, insomnia, intrusive memories and images, and confusion were related to the trauma that I had experienced. I felt feelings of shame and guilt in relation to the abuse. I often blamed myself for leaving and felt like a complete failure, as I felt like I was letting my daughter down.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic my sessions were carried out over the telephone. It was different to face-to-face, but I found it to be really useful and having that weekly safe space on the telephone was a life saver. The pandemic increased my uncertainty and I felt very anxious a lot of the time and had feelings of being overwhelmed.

Telephone counselling gave me the opportunity to speak about my experiences of abuse and identify the barriers that stopped me from disclosing the abuse and leaving my abusive partner. I was able to reflect and recognise the challenges I faced in identifying my husband's abusive behaviour. I was able to rebuild my self-esteem which I realised was stripped away by my controlling husband.

I learnt that fears of the unknown, anxieties and my own guilt was holding me back from everyday decision making, preventing me from moving forward. My counsellor introduced a weekly journal for me, which helped me to understand things better. I started to make a list of all my worries and anxieties. I was able to reflect on how to overcome them by making a plan to manage my anxiety, through new skills such as 'grounding skills'.

This freed up some mental space and I began to think more clearly and make informed choices rather than defensive reactions. I gained awareness of my own strengths, started to believe in my own resilience and recognise the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships. I now understand what abuse is and what a healthy relationship looks like. I am taking steps towards developing my self-esteem. Now I see myself as a survivor and not a victim.