

Name of Project: Ascent: Advice and Counselling

Lead partner: Solace

Delivery partner: Ashiana Network

I am 28-year-old Bangladeshi woman. I was forced into marriage in 2018 and came to the UK to join my husband at the end of the year. We lived with his family. I was treated like a slave in the house, forced to cook and clean for everyone. Once I overcooked the rice and they swore at me and beat me.

They abused me daily. I felt very lonely and hopeless. They would not let me have friends, go out, or communicate with anyone. I wanted to speak to my family back home and tell them what was happening, but I was scared.

One day I finally asked them to come and pick me up or I was going to kill myself. On this occasion, I was badly beaten after refusing to ask my parents to send my in-laws money. They wanted the money to buy furniture. My parents are very poor. I left the house that day without anything. I left my documents, all my belongings, and my gold.

After I left, I was still scared. I had no idea what to do next. I did not speak any English. This fear went on until I was put in touch with Ashiana Network. My caseworker was very kind and understanding. She spoke to me in Bengali. First, she referred me to an immigration solicitor for Destitute Domestic Violence Application. She then helped me open a bank account. Because I had no recourse to public funds, she applied for NRPF subsistence which I received until I got benefits. I had money paid into my own bank account for the first time.

I was advised to report to the police. My caseworker helped me do this and get police assistance to collect my belongings from my in-law's house. I managed to bring everything back.

My caseworker then referred me to Ashiana's refuge. I was initially very nervous about moving into a refuge that was not in the same borough as my supportive relatives. My caseworker helped me to trust the process and I felt confident to accept the refuge space.

I would not have been able to do any of these on my own if my caseworker was not there to listen and support me. I am currently on the waiting list for counselling in Bengali with Ashiana. I believe this will enable me to move forward with my life.