

Facing up to Family Violence – Cameron’s* Story

What comes to mind when you think of family violence, of a person who frightens or controls their family? Chances are that you have a picture in your head of who that person is, where they live, what they do for a living.

The reality is that the power and control that is at the core of family violence – whether it is emotional, psychological, financial and/or physical – doesn’t know any geographical or professional boundaries. Your neighbour, colleague, or friend might be living with family violence - or using it.

Cameron knows how true that is. An intelligent, professional and articulate man, his may not be the face you’d associate with the words ‘family violence’. But Cameron has started his own journey away from behaviours that have damaged his relationships with the people he loves the most – his family.

“Things had been difficult for a while. We had our kids quite early in our relationship, whilst I was still studying, and it was a real strain financially. We now have four children under seven and, although money is not tight any more, things were still really stressful at home. But really, it was more than that; I know I have a lot of anger and aggression that I have to address. I know I have a way of going about things, even at work, and it’s not the best way.

“It came to a head recently when I really lost my temper and got violent with my partner. She reached the point where she wanted me out of the house, so I left. It was the best thing to do. I knew I needed to do something, to change something, but I was unsure where to go or what to do. I got information on programmes and on ReachOut from several people - my GP and even my partner - but was unsure which would be best. Should I do an anger management programme? That felt a bit intimidating, to walk into a group of people – what if I knew someone there? I had felt a little overwhelmed but fortunately Ramon from ReachOut responded within 48 hours and he was very passionate; he just listened to me and I found that I actually wanted to talk to him about what was happening.

“After I moved out, I just wanted to pack up and leave town. The rapid response of the service was one of the best things because I was in a fight or flight stage – it was very intense. You’re not thinking straight after something like that happens and it’s not the best time to make major decisions. Maybe Sarah* and I might have defused things on our own, but having access to someone like Ramon really helped. I really think that I landed on my feet because I got a phone call from this guy and he showed empathy at the first contact; it wasn’t an administrative call - there was a connection.

“It’s early days for me – I’ve only seen Ramon three times so far, but it’s already helping. I’m learning things like stress management techniques, but the main thing for me is my increasing awareness of why I’m getting angry. It’s allowing me the time and space to think about why I get so upset and stressed. I can calm down and think about the future. Before I was very angry a lot of the time, but now Sarah and I are able to talk more; Sarah is getting support too, which is great for her. We’re having one-on-one conversations more now rather than just relating through the kids or watching TV. I hate TV, but before I’d do anything to avoid talking.

“At present we’re working towards making the best decision for the kids. I could go and get my own place, go off fishing etc, run away from the reality. That would be great for me, but not for my kids, not for the future. My dad left when I was 16; he didn’t maintain a real relationship with us kids and he later told me he regretted it. I want to make sure that I’m there for my kids, and that I can be the father they need. Long-term change is hard, but I hope that my behaviours will change. I’ve got to put my pains and hurts and anger aside and think about what’s best thing for everybody, especially my children.”

(*not their real names)