

“My Face Was a Mess – and so Was my Life” - Haley’s* story

“From the moment I met Colin* it was full on. He was so attentive and interested in me, it was exactly what my low self-esteem at the time was looking for. I felt like I was literally swept off my feet. Colin said he’d done work for Life Line in the past, and I’d done social work papers; so together we thought we would save the world! The reality was we were both heavy drinkers and using cannabis daily. I don’t know what we were thinking.

“Colin wanted to be with me constantly and, within two weeks, we had moved in together. The violence started soon after. He pushed me to the ground, straddled me and punched me all over my body. My 14 year old daughter was in the room at the time. Afterwards, she begged me to leave; he begged me to stay. He cried and said he was sorry. He said he’d get help. I wanted to believe it was a one off incident; I wanted to believe he really did love me. Part of me even felt sorry for him. He had been subjected to a lot of abuse in his own life. So I carried on, thinking there was something I could do or say to save him.

“The violence continued and got worse. He would accuse me of having affairs, of not loving him and strangulation became a common theme. Always the next day, he would be the one that was crying, saying he was scared he was going to kill me. But he never sought help. The Police were frequently involved and I soon discovered I was not the first woman to be on the receiving end of Colin’s abuse.

“I began to recognise when a storm was brewing. He would wake up in a mood, quiet, tense, brooding. He would hit his dog for nothing at all, and I knew before long he’d turn his anger onto me. One night, in an argument he grabbed me by the hair, and slammed my face into the wall, yelling “I’ll f*** your face up.” There was blood everywhere. I left the house. My face was a mess and I realised my life was too. I’d been living in a fantasy, believing that this relationship could last. Now I had no roof over my head, no belongings and, to top it off, I found out I was pregnant. I was desperate; hopeless, helpless. I wanted to die. I stayed on a friend’s couch, and my friend convinced me not to go back, but make contact with Christchurch Women’s Refuge (now Aviva).

“I was an emotional wreck at the time, it must have been very difficult to talk to me, but Lyn (a Family Support Worker with Aviva) was amazing. She helped me to stay calm, to breathe and she took me to a lawyer. I got a Protection Order preventing Colin from having contact with me and I did the Protected Persons Programme run by Aviva. It helped me understand that the violence wasn’t my fault; that nobody deserves to be treated that way. Colin had chosen to be violent and he had chosen not to get help.

“It taught me the signs of what to look for in a relationship, and it made me realise what impact the violence had had on my daughter. It was that, and the fact that I was now pregnant, that became the real motivator to get my life together. I wanted to keep strong and role model to my children that change is possible.

“The best thing about my life now is that I’m stable and in control of my own life again. I have a beautiful wee boy, and I can move forward to keep us both safe. I want to give back to the community. I’m very thankful to Aviva for giving me the support and confidence I needed to leave Colin’s violence behind.”