

Working together helps Jane on road to recovery

An ad on Facebook prompted Jane* to contact the Women's Centre to start the process of getting her life back on track, after two decades of family violence and abuse. The social media prompt came at the right time. Jane knew she had to put her trust in the Women's Centre to help her, and help her sort out the issues weighing her down.

The Women's Centre, led by CEO Teresa Law, and HRCLS lawyer Diana Bruce, started working together to help Jane move on from a life of utter control and abuse over 20 years. The relationship is over but the impact lingers, financially and psychological.

Jane is still fearful of her ex-husband, but has found the courage to put the 21-year marriage far enough behind her to focus on the future, not the past. With the combined support, Jane feels as though she has a chance to make a new start and is grateful for the care and assistance. "I can't praise them enough," she said. "I feel like I'm in the right place now to deal with things, and am starting to get my life back."

Clearing debt

A huge debt incurred by her ex-husband during the relationship has her name attached to it, however she had no idea it had been racked up in her name. "He was a control freak. I wasn't allowed to have my own debit cards, couldn't get mail from the letterbox, and couldn't see my family," Jane said.

As part of their support, the Women's Centre referred Jane to Diana, concerned Jane would need advice about declaring bankruptcy due to the debt. Diana spoke to Jane about the debt, and identified other legal problems. Diana contacted the companies holding the debt, and began the process of sorting out this major problem. Diana recommended Jane see a UMFC financial counsellor.

For Jane, the advice from Diana was reassuring and gave her confidence that there was a way out of her predicament. "I feel very comfortable talking about my life to Diana. Her approach has helped me with everything. There is no stress or strain when I talk to her."

Putting everything behind her

Several years before separating, Jane had reached out to The Women's Centre for advice about ending the relationship, but the circumstances were such she didn't go ahead with it.

Jane eventually took the bold step of leaving and went to the police. It was a massive step after being controlled for so long. "When you're in a domestic violence relationship for so long and afraid to go to the police, you're petrified of getting help," she said. When she left, it was with the kids, pets, and clothes on her back.

The Women's Centre's counselling has helped Jane immensely, as she tries to recover from her ordeal. Jane said the lack of judgement from everyone involved has helped her gain the confidence she needed to say 'I can do this.'

“I should have got counselling before, but I just wasn’t in the right place,” she said. “I might have made the move sooner. I had no idea that all this help was out there.”

Life changes

“I had no idea the house payments were six months behind. Two months later the house was gone.” Her house had been repossessed, only months after Jane discovered through a financial counsellor that her ex-husband had drawn down superannuation and put it into her bank account without her knowledge. The financial counsellor Jane had linked with through the Women’s Centre uncovered the full story. Only her ex-husband had access to the account. It was another instance in how Jane, despite being the main income provider, had little or no say over how the finances were managed.

Getting her share

Now she has her economic independence, Jane wants to get what she deserves with the relationship behind her. She had received a letter from a lawyer acting for her former husband about a property settlement and asking for details of her superannuation. Diana is helping Jane respond to her ex-husband’s call for a property settlement.

Fear is constant

Jane is still living in fear for her and her children’s safety. Just the everyday task of picking her child up after school causes Jane’s stress to heighten. “My eyes are peeled at school, waiting for the bell to go, just in case.”

As for the court system, Jane has little faith in it, after her ex-husband broke the terms of the ADVO with no consequences. Despite the deep concerns she has with her safety, and that of her children, Jane is adamant she’s staying in the area. “All my family are here, so I’m not going anywhere.”

*name changed