

Oral History Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Marion MacNeil

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Interviewer: Sarah Browne

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Groups: Inverness Women's Aid

Roles: Domestic abuse survivor

Okay, so that's us recording now. So, the first question we've, kind of, being asking everybody is just to let us know what your connection is to Women's Aid. So, if you just want to describe what your connection is.

Well, my connection goes back a long way when, um, I was married at a very young age and my partner was abusive and so I, um, was taken in by the Women's Aid refuge in Inverness when I decided that enough was enough. I needed to get away. I didn't have anywhere to run to that would have been safe and I wouldn't have had anywhere that I could have hidden from him, he would have known where I was. And we ... I talked to my family about it and we really didn't feel there was any other option than, um, going to Women's Aid and asking for help. And I was very, um, grateful that they took me in. So, that's my connection. That was, um, 25 years ago.

Goodness. Okay. Okay. And how did you hear about Women's Aid then? How did you know that they existed?

Oh, I think I had always known they had existed but I'd lived in Orkney when I was first married and they didn't have a refuge there. Um, I was painfully aware of how isolated I was up there and that there was nowhere to run to. There was nobody that could take me in that would have been able to protect me from him. So, um, yeah, when I came to Inverness I was able to get here because I was from here originally and, eh, yeah, so, he followed me down here but, em, at least I had family here that I could stay with for a while and then I got my own place and, eh, yeah, after that we had a

reconciliation and things just got worse instead of better. Yeah, so, um, so, yeah, I suppose I just always knew about Women's Aid. I don't really remember the first time that I heard about them.

So, so, you came to Inverness without him then and then he, he followed you here?

Yeah. Yeah. Um, and he followed me and managed to get a place to live and just kept, you know ... I mean, obviously, we had a daughter, and he just kept hanging around and working on me and persuading me and begging and pleading. So, eventually I decided that maybe it was worth it, maybe we can make the marriage work and get back together but things got much, much worse after that, so...

And so did you go to Women's Aid again after that?

No, the first ... That was the first time. So, so I've confused this situation. When I first came to Inverness I didn't come straight to Women's Aid, I just came to stay with family. Um, and it was only after the reconciliation and that not working that we went to Women's Aid and my mum took ... Because, um, she felt her front door wasn't that secure and she wouldn't have been able to protect me if he came knocking so and he'd threatened to, to kill my entire family if I had ever left him so.

00:03:18 *How long had that been going on for then? How long had the abuse...?*

Well, we'd only been married three years and he was only abusive after I'd miscarried the first time, so probably about a year into the marriage, um, he became abusive after that.

And what kind of forms did the abuse take?

Um, usually it was threatening. I mean, he would take great pleasure in describing the ways he was going to kill me, kill my daughter, kill the rest of my family. You know, how strong he was and how much pain and torture he could inflict. That ... He got quite a kick out of that. But then when he got really angry it would get physical, um, and he would punch me in the face, he would pull my hair and bang my head on the floor, um, throw me about, just ... It was only when he really lost it though. He did try to control himself but, I suppose, for me I felt that I perceived it as a huge defence mechanism. It was his way of saying, 'Don't even try hurting me, because I can hurt you twice as

much back', you know. So, it was his way of defending himself against possibly being hurt by somebody, you know?

And so what were your first impressions of Women's Aid like then, can you remember?

Um, well, I suppose I just saw it as this, um, the last hope, you know, the place that you go to when you've got nowhere else to turn. I didn't know what to expect. I had no preconceived idea of what it would be like inside the refuge, what the staff would be like, what the other residents would be like. I really had no idea. Um, I didn't know what to expect. I don't remember being worried about it. All I remember being worried about was would they take me in? Would they perceive my situation to be bad enough to, to give me some help? Um, and I was just so relieved when they said yes, of course we will take you in. Um, but they were full. So, um, I was sitting in the office and, um, I don't remember the lady's name but she went off, she said, 'We are full, um, but there is a lady who might be willing to share, so I'll go and speak to her and I can't promise anything'. Um, I'm going to get emotional now. I'm still friends with this woman.

Oh, wow.

She came back and she said, 'She said no problem, of course you...' [breaks down; crying]. So, she let me and my daughter share with her and her daughter. And our daughters were the same age and we were the same age and we've been friends ever since.

00:06:31 *Oh, wow. Oh, thank goodness for that woman.*

Yep. So, the fact that she was willing to share and she said yeah of course, she wouldn't turn anybody away, so I got in. And because I had already packed up my bags and I'd driven my husband to work that morning, um, I'd pretended that I was going to work, dropped him off at his work, drove straight to my mum's instead of the childminder's and we went and picked her up and went straight down to the refuge. And I had my suitcase packed and I had been packing things over several months and storing them in a friend's loft. So, I'd been, you know, planning my escape and, eh, it was time and if they'd said, 'No, maybe you can try next week', um, I, I could have but I, I don't know how I would have waited any longer, you know? Because this had gotten really bad, so bad that I, I'd escaped in the middle of the night without my daughter once. Um, I'd had to go round to a

friend's. I just had to get out of the house. And I'd tried to take her and he said, 'Don't touch her. If you touch her I'll kill you both'. So, I, um, I just couldn't stay ... I just ... After what he had done to me that night. So, I went round to my friends and I stayed the night and the next day I went to the solicitor's and the CAB and had tried to get help and they'd all said, 'There's nothing we can do about getting your daughter back. You've left her there, the only way you can get her back is to go back there'. So...

That's not that long ago when you think about it. I know.

And somebody, either at the solicitor's or the CAB, told the police and the police came round to our house at night. Luckily, I had went back to speak to him because he'd come round begging and saying, 'I've made dinner and [our daughter]'s missing you so please come and talk to me'. So, I got in the car and agreed to speak to him and he said, 'Look, I've made ... I've cleaned up the house. I've made a meal. Please will you just come home and talk?'. So, I went round to talk and, you know, we were just talking about, you know, this has got to stop, you can't behave like this anymore, I'm not going to stay if you keep doing this, and the police came round knocking on the door saying that they'd been tipped off that I was there to – what was the word they used? – um, to abduct my daughter. So, whoever I went to that day, it was just the CAB and the solicitor's and somebody had phoned them, had said ... Either that or my husband suspected that was what I was going to attempt and tipped them off himself. I don't know but they came round and said, 'We've been told that your wife is here to abduct your daughter'. And so it was like that when I was in the refuge as well, the police just were not supportive at all. They didn't understand but, um, the staff in the refuge were the total opposite.

00:09:52 *So, what would they do? Would they help you with the police then?*

Yeah, so at one point the police came to the refuge door asking to speak to me because he'd called them and asked them to persuade me to bring my daughter out so that he could see her. And, you know, he'd threatened to flee the country with her, um, so, obviously, I wasn't going to do that. Um, but I just couldn't understand why the police would come to the door and ask me that, um, just because he asked them to. You know, it's just man phones police and says, 'My wife's run away to the women's refuge with my daughter. Could you please go and persuade her to bring my daughter out?'. And they do. And I'm just stood there going, 'I really don't understand what you think this

place is'. So, the staff came and said to them – because I was standing there shaking uncontrollably going, 'I'm in a women's refuge. What do you think I'm doing here? Do you think I like it? – you know, um, and the staff came and explained that, you know, women were here for safekeeping, that was the whole point, um, that, you know ... I don't know what they said. I think it was ... **[Name anonymised]** was one of them. Um, she went to speak to them and I hid away because I was just a mess. Um, and we'd, we'd all been in the living area and one of the women had spotted him out the window and he'd been staring at the place and hiding round the corner, um, checking the place out and, eh, one of the women had said, 'Oh, there's a man over there, there's a man across the street looking in this place' and we all, kind of, went on high alert of course. Everyone is there going, 'Is it mine?', you know, and she said, 'Oh, he looks, he looks like he's got the evil eye' and I went, 'Oh, that'll be mine' and I went over to the window to check and sure enough it was. Um, yeah, so yeah, so he'd been, sort of, stalking the place and had called the police and we saw the police car came up, um, stopped to speak to him. Of course me, naïve, twenty-one year old going, 'Um, oh, that'll be the police telling him to go away, he can't hang around the refuge'. So, they spoke to him and then he disappeared and they came to the door and that, that was when they asked, 'He just wants to see his daughter'. Like, 'Oh, is that all he wants? Oh, that's fine then!' [laughter]. You know, just let him in! [laughter].

00:12:32 *What was it like in the refuge then? Was there anything that you remember about it at all?*

Um, it was a bit like summer school [laughter]. It really was. Because you were only there for a short while, um, but it was ... You know, you get that intense relationship with people that you're living with all the time and there was some really fun people in there, some great characters. There was an older woman in there, um, can't remember her name, **[name anonymised]**, I can't remember but she, she was probably in her sixties and she'd lived with this abusive husband all her life. She'd finally got away from him. Um, and she was great because there was quite a lot of us who were younger with young kids and she would help us look after the kids. She was always watching them for us and, um, my vivid, my most vivid memory of her was whenever the kids ever went anywhere near the radiator she would go, 'Oh, burny, burny!' [laughter]. I think she was from Glasgow originally so she had a great accent and, yeah, she was always teaching us things about the kids, you know, like don't put your kids with stinky nappies on the kitchen table, you know? Things that us stupid young girls didn't know! [laughter]. So, yeah, she was very helpful.

She sounds great.

She was good, yeah. Um, but, yeah, I think we spent ... I suppose we all had our own little dramas that we were dealing with separately but then, I suppose, there was some internal dramas going on. But to me I just ... It was genuinely like a safe-haven and I enjoyed being able to put my daughter down for, to, for a sleep at night and then go and join the other women in the living room and just talk about, just, you know, sharing stories and talk about what we'd all been through and then you'd hear some stories and you'd go, 'Oh my god, I'm so lucky that I got out so quickly. I can't believe how long people have suffered and the extreme things that people have gone to...', you know ... Just, yeah, horrific, absolutely horrific. So, um, there's always somebody worse off than you and it always makes you feel better even though that sounds callous but, um, you do feel like there's always someone worse off and it stops you wallowing in self-pity knowing that other people are going through it as well.

And did you speak about those things to workers that worked for Women's Aid as well then?

There was usually a worker in the living area when we were talking. There was always a worker on staff anyway in the evenings so there was usually somebody there. Yeah.

00:15:34 *And how long did you stay there for?*

I think it was three months altogether. Um, because we, we had a flat, um, which I had run away from but once I got lawyers involved and was able to get an eviction order ... So, my solicitor requested an eviction order from the court to get him evicted from the matrimonial home and once he'd gone, we were able to move back in, except he'd cleared all the furniture out. So, even though he was moving in to a bedsit, I think he just sold everything that he could. So, I needed carpets, curtains, appliances, bedding, everything. So, the refuge helped me find all of that, got in touch with the Salvation Army, got what bits of furniture we could get from them. I think somebody on the board was refurbishing their house and was throwing out some unwanted carpet. It was really good carpet and I got some of that. Um, and I just took whatever furniture the Salvation Army could provide for free. So, in those days they had a big store of furniture that was just for giving away to people who were homeless so I was very grateful for any furniture that I could get and moved back in as soon as it was furnished. And they helped me get my benefits sorted because I'd had to give up

work. I'd been working full-time in a shop and when I went to the refuge, the staff there said we can take you in but we can't keep you safe if you keep going to work because he knows where you work. Um, so you, kind of, have to give up your job. So, I had to do that which meant signing on and so that was a whole rigmarole of claiming income support and family credit or whatever it was at that time. Child benefit, no I would have had child benefit already. Anyway, there was some kind of family allowance I had to get, um, but it was just such a joy that actually once it all got sorted I had my own money to be able to make it last! Because I'd had a husband for the previous three years who'd taken all the money, whether it was wages or benefits, it always went to him and he had the purse strings and he would go to the betting shop and bet it all or he would go to the pub and drink it all. I've have to go round the betting shops looking for him saying, 'We need nappies, we need food', you know it was just ... It was a ... It was not a nice way to live. It was, uh, degrading having to go round the pubs looking for him with a baby in a pram and, uh, or having to beg friends or family for money because he'd spent it all.

So, we never had enough food. I was three stone underweight by the time I went into refuge. I was, uh ... I don't suffer from that now! [laughter]. But I had lost so much weight, um, and, in fact, that was what prompted me to move to Inverness in the first place because I was so thin. I went ... I took my daughter to her 18-month check-up, is that right? Yeah. The 18-month medical check-up, um, and the doctor that we saw was the same doctor who saw me all through my pregnancy and as soon as I walked in he said, 'What's happened to you?' and I didn't know what he meant. Um, and he said, 'You're so thin' and I went, 'Oh yeah, I've lost loads of weight. It's breast-feeding, it's great, you know?'. Um, and he said, 'No, no you need to come with me' and he took me to his own consulting room rather than the baby clinic and he put me on the scales and he showed me the chart and he said, 'You're three stone below what you should weigh for your height' and I knew I was thin but I had no idea I was that thin and he said, 'What's wrong?' and I just broke down and told him everything [breaks down; crying]. And he said, 'I think you need to go home'. So, I called my mum and said, 'Can I come and live with you?' and I didn't tell her anything about what was going on. I hadn't told anybody. I just said, 'Can we come and stay with you. I want to come home'. And she'd left Inverness, um, when she'd had me and got married as well and she'd got homesick and moved home, so she thought that was all it was, I was homesick. And I came home and I didn't tell her anything about what was going on until after we'd got back together and then split up again and one night he'd lost the plot at me and then ... I can't remember if he'd hit me that time or whether he'd

just thrown something at me and he sent me out for food, he'd sent me out for chips afterwards, and, um, I got in the car and drove for the chips and while I was standing in the chip shop I just, I don't know, I just suddenly, after years of bottling it up and not telling anybody, I decided I was going straight to my mum's and I was going to tell her. And I had these chips and they were going cold [laughter]. I was thinking, 'I have to go and tell my mum and then quickly run home before the chips are cold because he'll know'. So, yeah, I told her and then I went home.

00:21:32 *And so had you moved to Orkney with him then? Is that how...*

No, I moved to Orkney when I left school because I ... My plan had been go to drama college but, um, my grades weren't great at the end of fifth year so my drama teacher said, 'Well, if you're going to leave school a year early, you're just a bit young to get into drama college yet, so there's probably not much point in trying but there is a youth theatre training programme you can do in Orkney for a year and then once you graduate from that you'll be 18 and you'll be able to apply for drama college'. So, that was the plan. I didn't know anybody in Orkney. I'd never even heard of Orkney! [laughter]. I, honestly, didn't know where Kirkwall was. I thought it was in Aberdeenshire! [laughter].

Close! [laughter].

Accent's similar, so! But then I went up to audition because they normally only take Orcadians at ... The training programme was funded by Orkney Islands Council specifically for islanders and they would only take, uh, an incomer if they didn't get the places filled by locals. But in the end they needed ... So, they'd ... So, yeah, they needed me to go up and meet with them. It wasn't really an audition, it was just an interview. So, I went up to meet with the director and that was my first trip to Orkney and it was in December. It was two hours of throwing up on the ferry to get there and then I spent maybe a long weekend there or something and the, the other folk in the youth theatre were just so lovely and friendly and one of them put me up for the weekend and, yeah. So, by the time I had spent the weekend there, I really wanted to stay. So, I came back home, waited for news and then right at the end of December, it must have been 31st December, I think because I was working at Eden Court backstage, so I was a dresser for the pantomime, um, and I remember getting the call saying, 'Someone's dropped out of the youth theatre a month before we finish and we're in the middle of a show, would you come and join us?'. Because I was already experienced [and] they needed somebody who could just hit the ground running. So, they asked me and I was delighted and

I was like, 'But it's the 31st of December. It's new year's day tomorrow. I'm supposed to be on holiday and I'm supposed to be having a party and now you want me to move to Orkney'. So, they wanted me to start work on the 5th I think it was, so, um ... And they'd arranged for somebody to put me up in a room in their house for the first month or two until I'd found a bedsit. Um, so, yeah, I just did it and my mum dropped me off in Thurso or Scrabster and I got the ferry over and, um, that was it. I stayed in someone's house for a couple of months and then I found a bedsit. So, yeah, at the age of seventeen I was off up to Orkney, living on my own and loving every minute of it, it was great. The youth theatre was just fab because it was, it was ... There was nothing like it in the UK. It was the one thing of its kind. It was a youth training scheme but in theatre. So, you did it for a year, you got a wage, you got your £50 a week wage which was sufficient at that time, believe it or not. You got housing benefit on top if you wanted. You could even get cheap prescriptions because it was considered a low income and, um, you worked nine till five but you did all kinds of exciting things like writing plays, performing round primary schools, um, you could make puppets, masks and they would bring lots of specialists up to do different workshops with you. So, we learned so much in that year. So, um, I learned singing, directing, acting, devising plays, um, making scenery, making costumes, putting on make-up, everything.

00:25:47 *That sounds amazing.*

It was great. It was really great. I would have happily done that for a couple more years.

I can imagine.

But, unfortunately, I met my husband half-way through the year there. Um, and it was love at first sight. It was, it was completely crazy, whirlwind romance, we have to get married straight away. But I think part of that now, retrospectively I can look back at it and go, part of that was because of his deep insecurity. He needed to know ... I needed to make a commitment to him because he couldn't believe that I wanted to be with him and he had put me up on a, kind of, a pedestal, um, and I suppose he saw ... He, he was, um, what's the word? He was troubled and he had a drink problem and he had a violence problem. He wasn't a happy person but he saw me as his saviour because he was happy when he was with me. He didn't feel violent or the need to get drunk or any of that. So, I suppose he put me on a pedestal for that reason but also was terrified of losing me. And was also really insecure about that I would cheat on him or that I would leave him. So, when I look back on it I

realise that I wasn't in any particular hurry to get married other than the fact that I needed to convince him that I really wanted to be with him. That was it. So, we had to get married and we had to do it quickly, um, and our families were not too happy with us but eventually they gave in and we did get married. So, we met in the March, we met in March 1987, we got married in September 1987. And we had **[name anonymised]** in December 1988, um, but we'd been pregnant before and I'd miscarried and that was when I fell off my pedestal. I was no longer perfect. He just couldn't believe, um, that any genetic cells of his could fail to survive. He just couldn't accept it all. And from then on his behaviour towards me changed quite dramatically. So, yeah, that was when everything started going horribly wrong.

Thank goodness you got into the refuge then.

I know, I know.

00:28:14 *And how long did you ... So, um, by the sounds of it there was some contact with Women's Aid after you'd got into housing after the refuge? How long did that contact go on for then roughly?*

I don't remember having contact after I moved out. Um, it was the three months that I was in there. And they were constantly helping with the forms and the lawyer stuff and, um, helping with the police when they got involved and, um, helping with the furnishings. But once I'd actually moved back into my own home I don't recall having any further contact with them.

And what was it like then those first few weeks out on your own in your own house?

Do you know, I don't remember very much about it, I really don't. All I remember is being able to get that benefit cheque and make it last an entire fortnight with no problem whatsoever. I was like, 'I don't know why people moan about this benefits thing, it's plenty to live on, you know'. I'd had nothing to live on before and we survived on so little that I always felt like this is amazing just having all this money to spend and we can afford to buy socks, air freshener and, you know, really interesting things that we'd never have bothered with before. We just wore socks with holes in them, we'd never have replaced them, we'd never have bought ornaments or, you know, or even practical things that we would have done without. That's all I remember is the money side of things being so dramatically different. Um, and, I suppose, I did have quite a lot, um, support from friends as well. So, I had, already had loads of friends in Inverness and I'd maintained contact with most of

them while I was in Orkney. Um, and, of course, as soon as they found out that things were, um, had not been great with **[name anonymised]**, they all said, 'Well, we never liked him. Yes, he was always shifty' [laughter]. You know, as people do.

Hindsight's great isn't it? [laughter].

It's amazing. But, you know, to this day, um, some of my friends still say but **[my partner]** was such a character, what stories he had. And it's true. When we would all get together and we'd just be having a nice drink, a nice social time, he had so many stories because he'd lived such a crazy life, you know, he'd always been up to stuff. He'd stolen a car when he was 16 and his friend had driven it off the road at 80 miles per hour and he'd walked away from an accident like that with just a few scratches on his face, not even a broken leg. Um, you know, and he just had stories like that and he was very funny. In fact, I remember going through family mediation at one point when we were reconciling, I think it was. Um, in fact, it was through family mediation, that was how it came about, yeah, because we'd set up family mediation to discuss custody so that we could come to an agreement on how often he would see **[name anonymised]** because I wanted him to see **[her]**, but I couldn't trust him because he was always saying, 'I'm going to get a passport for her when you're not looking and I'm going to take her abroad and you'll never see her again' and he was always threatening things like that. So, and I wanted her to have a relationship with her father, I didn't want them to be estranged so I couldn't see a way of doing it, you know, protecting her and protecting myself. So, we went to family mediation but the sessions with the family mediator ... He just spent the entire time taking the piss out of the mediator and making me laugh and so that was how we ended up reconciling was his stupid sense of humour [laughter]. Um, we would end up having a laugh outside afterwards about the mediation session and how stupid it was.

Oh dear.

Because he was so argumentative. I mean, belligerent doesn't cover it, you know. You, you just couldn't win an argument with him, he would just take you all round the houses. So, um, you know, it was very, very difficult to have a mediation session with him because you would try to be reasonable and he just wasn't interested in the end result. He was interested in winning the point, you know. That was all it was, it was all about winning the point. It was the same when **[name anonymised]** was small. You would see them playing together and it wasn't about the playing itself,

it was always about the winning for him. He would never let her win a game. You know, she was a tiny baby and he always had to be one up. Just, just a twisted personality, unfortunately.

00:33:37 *And did he stay away then when you got set up on your own?*

No. He would call and come round constantly but, um, once we'd had that time of separation where I had been able to establish, 'Look, you have, you know, you've been evicted from your house because of this behaviour. You've had an interim interdict placed on you to stay away from us, you know. This, this was a line in the sand of you've been a violent, abusive person that we are no longer having anything to do with. However, um, you can see your daughter, you can come round and visit any time you like as long as you are sober and that that's the only rule, any time. It would be nice if you called first but I actually don't mind as long as you turn up sober'. So, that was the, the ground rule. And most of the time he couldn't stick to it. He would turn up and you could tell instantly he'd been drinking and I would just put the foot in the door and say, 'No, you're not coming in'. At one point he fell asleep on our doorstep, he was that drunk and he just wouldn't stop hammering on the door and then eventually, um, we didn't even know he'd fallen asleep, we were just ignoring him and hoping he'd go away and then eventually I think one of **[name anonymised]** pals knocked on the door and said, 'Do you realise your dad's sleeping on your doorstep?', just mortifying for her. Um, and he would call and shout abuse down the phone, um, but at no point after that did he ever hurt me again. Um, because I just wouldn't let him get that close. I wouldn't let him in the house if there was any sign that he was drinking at all. And he didn't push it after that as well. He knew that he would be in big trouble with the police if he did it again. And then eventually, um, I'm trying to think ... Was it, it must have been about four years before I got into another relationship and it was only then that we got divorced. Um, because, you know, I still held out some hope that he would realise the error of his ways, go on a rehabilitation programme, give up drinking and everything would be fine and we'd get back together. Um, I really did think the relationship was worth saving but he never has, he's still an addict to this day. I don't know all what he's addicted to to this day, to be honest, but he still lives in Inverness, doesn't see his daughter and is still a waster. He doesn't work, he doesn't do anything, he's just useless. So, um ... But I waited four years and eventually we, we got divorced and I changed my name, um, and then I got into a long-term relationship and the phone-calls and the visits slowed down considerably but it wasn't actually until I got married again that he just stopped all contact but by that time **[our daughter]** was 14. So, we'd moved from ... We were

living in a council flat around the corner. I'd eventually been earning enough to buy this place and we moved here when she was 14. And it was shortly after that I met someone else and we got married and he's never called me since, which is great.

Yeah, what a relief.

Yes. I mean, I can't quite believe now that I was seven years with another partner and he would still call every now and again and beg me to take him back and he'd always start the conversation with pleading, apologising, begging and then he'd end up with vile abuse down the phone, you know? Because you weren't listening to it or you were going, 'Whatever. Yeah, it's all words, you know. If you can't actually keep a promise to your daughter then none of it means anything actually'. Because he would promise the earth. He would say, 'Oh, I'm buying this for **[our daughter's]** birthday. I'm saving up. I've got loads of money. Tell her she can pick anything she wants', you know, and then the day would come and she would be sat there waiting.

What a shame.

He never, he never came up with the goods. One time he came round two weeks after Christmas with a black bag full of toys but it was two weeks later, you know, and she'd been waiting all Christmas for him. So, yeah, so, she eventually made up her own mind. I, I maintained my position of, you know, as long as you don't expect too much and don't pin your hopes on him, you know. I, I ... There was no way I was going to stop them from having a relationship.

00:38:38 *That's really, that's really brave of you, I would have to say. Because, you know, some women would say no, you're not getting anywhere near her.*

Well, but that's short-term thinking, you know. The long-term game is let your child decide for themselves. They will eventually make up their own mind. And they might not have the whole history but they'll make up their own mind from their perception and that's what's important.

Yeah. Wow. So, just, because I know you've got somebody coming round, I was just, kind of, winding up, I wanted ... Obviously, the refuge was important, but I wondered if you could just say what impact Women's Aid has had on you.

Well the, the overriding feeling for me is that Women's Aid as an organisation allows women like me to change our lives round and more importantly my daughter's life [breaks down; crying]. She was just, um, two months off her second birthday when we moved in there. She had her second birthday in the refuge and I don't have any regrets about that whatsoever because she's had a much better life for getting away from him and for being able to take a stand against him and say, 'You will not do this to our family and you'll not, you know, I'm not bringing my daughter up around that situation. There's nothing I can do about the fact that I, you know, I've landed her with a father like you but you're not going to mess up the rest of her life'. And I'm so relieved that I got her out of that situation before she had any memories. She has no memories of us being a couple, us all living together in a family home together, so she's not missing that, you know. And, um, we had a good life, you know. She, she says she had a great life being brought up by me so we're great friends now so it's all worked out beautifully for us. And we couldn't have done that without Women's Aid. We, you know ... My family were not in a position to protect me from him. It, you know ... Even, even after I'd done the most difficult thing for any woman in that situation, which is to tell someone that it's happening, even then they couldn't protect me. There, there was nowhere for me to hide from him because he'd threatened to hunt us down. So, the refuge was the only way that we could be protected and Women's Aid provide that for people and that's the most important thing for me.

Thank you very much. Is there anything that you would like to add, anything that maybe I've not asked or...?

Um, I suppose there's all the other – apart from all the one-to-one work with women and their children that is so important – there's all the other work that goes on behind the scenes, educating the police, educating, um, the education system, educating anyone who works with families really. Um, how to protect or how to help people in that situation, how to identify people who might be in that situation and who might need help and what to do when you come across them and not to, um, take too ... Well, not to do what they did in my situation, you know. And I think the police have gone through a huge programme of change since then, thank goodness. But Women's Aid have been instrumental in that because they've had the first hand experiences from women seeing what a difference that attitude had on them, what impact that had and being able to change that and I'm fairly confident that that no longer happens and that's down to Women's Aid and educating people.

Yeah, that's why it's so important that people like yourself share their stories because it does show how, you know, how things have developed and reminds people that other women shouldn't have to go through what, what you did.

That's it. We've come a long way in this country.

Keep pushing it forward.

Yeah. Absolutely.

Thank you very much.

End interview