

CASE STUDY 4

This is a young Romany Gypsy woman, aged 20. At the age of 14, she started a relationship with a boy from the settled community unbeknown to her parents. When they did find out, they were not happy about it as they were aware of his bad temper and also they thought she was too young to be in a relationship. They sent her away to stay with extended family for a while until the parents found another place to live, away from the boyfriend, hoping she would forget about him and find someone from the Gypsy community that would be able to provide for her, as her boyfriend was young and had no future plans for employment.

Behind her parents back, she started seeing him again, saying she was staying with her friend for the weekend. She got pregnant at 15, and when her parents found out, they were in shock and she decided to live with him and his parents in a house.

Her family was devastated but they had no control over the situation. She felt ashamed because the Gypsy and Traveller community is very conservative, she could not even look her parents in the face. The parents finally accepted the situation and supported her. She had the baby at 16, stayed with his parents and got help and support from them but there were deeper problems because her partner felt trapped and being only 17 at the time himself he started going out with his mates and coming back all hours and they would argue, resulting to him being violent. It became a regular thing with the beatings and fights. They would make up, for him to do the same thing over on a regular basis with her parents unaware what was happening.

She got pregnant again, but had a full term still birth. Devastated and a funeral to face, she deteriorated into depression with no support from the boyfriend. She wouldn't return to her parents as she felt shameful of everything that had happened and also her own father was an alcoholic and he could be violent at times.

After a long time of violence she left and the Council found her and the child temporary accommodation but he found her, broke the door panel in, and with a piece of wood from the door that had nails in it, he started to beat her with it in front of their child, who was traumatised and affected by everything that had been happening. She phoned the police again, thankfully this time she had a witness. They made a statement and had photos taken of her injuries. There was a conviction, he denied it at first, until he found out there was a witness who had heard everything.

He pled guilty and was sent to prison. A community worker from the Romany community supported her throughout her ordeal and contacted all the relevant agencies on her behalf. She has become a strong person, she has moved on in her life. She now has permanent accommodation in a quiet area near where her child goes to school and she now goes to college and is doing a course to further her education and give her child a better quality of life.

● *She has learned a lot from her personal experience and now supports and give advice to teenage mums who are suffering domestic violence.*

● *The Gypsy and Traveller community is brought up to believe a marriage or that kind of relationship is for life, so for a woman to leave her husband is very hard indeed.*