



## **The value of legal aid: case studies from individual women, professionals who respond to violence against women and legal professionals**

As part of our research on the current operation of civil legal aid and the Ministry of Justice's proposals for its 'reform', we asked individual women, professionals who responded to violence against women and legal professionals for examples of cases where legal aid had helped them or a woman they supported. The following are the responses of those who shared their experiences of legal aid with us.

### **Responses of individual women to the legal aid proposals**

#### **Have you been helped by legal aid? Tell us about it**

I received partial legal aid when going through a court case regarding domestic violence, and family issues, child contact etc. I paid a substantial contribution towards it, and being a single parent, who had experienced domestic violence, I thought the fact I had to pay disgusting. I was after all, a victim of abuse. He on the other hand, was represented by a charity, and paid nothing. The amount I paid reduced my monthly income substantially, in fact, I paid more in contributions than my ex partner paid in child support. It was a farce, and put myself and my son in serious financial hardship.

Very useful.

Whilst on Income Support I received legal aid to obtain a non-molestation order which was valid for a year. This has now expired and I am working full time. Recent events have resulted in me having to consult a solicitor and pay for it.

I received legal aid for domestic violence and later to get a divorce. I had to pay the legal aid fee back a few years later when I sold my house

I have had to see a solicitor several times about my son's father's behaviour and how to arrange regular contact between him and my son.

If it wasn't for legal aid paying my solicitor to get the injunction etc - it all went on for years - I might have been killed by my first husband. I had no money of my own (he wouldn't let me work, incidentally) and without the injunction, which finally was the only thing that helped, the behaviour would still have carried on.

Legal aid enabled me to resolve legally and permanently the issues around violence and emotional abuse which had been plaguing myself and my son for years. Legal aid made it possible for me to stand up to my ex partner with the full weight of the law behind me. Since that time I have experienced no abuse and the contact issues have also been resolved.

Without legal aid I would not have known my legal position. I would have given up without representing myself. Even though I could not afford representation at court I was instructed about my rights and things that I would need to do in order to defend my side. The outcome was successful in both events.

Legal information has always been obtainable in Camden either through the Citizen Advice Bureau or the Law Centre. They have offered an invaluable source of help face to face. They have empowered me to be positive about defending myself. I am a working mother with little income and I needed help with the law and they were there. When I needed legal aid I wasn't entitled in the end because of working and my solicitor's fees to continue were more than I could afford. I had to attend the family court on my own without the solicitor. It was very distressing, and had an impact on my health and work because of all the time I had to spend on my representation.

I received legal aid for my divorce, my financial settlement, and contact arrangements for the children, my case was very very complex, with the court of protection involved, it took almost 5 years to resolve, how could an operator deal with that.

I received legal aid for my divorce and then private law defending a child contact case which is ongoing but I can no longer afford legal aid.

When husband left - was left with a new mortgage, and new baby. Needed advice on divorce in his absence and mortgage company would not liaise with me alone.

Husband disappeared so needed courts to look for him and hand legal responsibility to me so I could negotiate payments etc.

My ex husband (violent alcoholic) refused to acknowledge/sign divorce papers which meant they hadn't been served on him which in turn meant i would have had to wait at least 2/3 years for a court to grant me a divorce but i had a very determined female solicitor and between us we managed after about 9 months to obtain a letter from my ex stating why he was refusing to sign them, that in itself was proof he had received them and thankfully my divorce went through without needing his signed papers I have also twice needed legal representation to appeal against a decision to stop my incapacity benefit. Both times the CAB were successful in getting the decision overturned, without them i would have been lost as it is a legal minefield when dealing with my particular case due to the fact that i am an agoraphobic which seems to cause endless problems within the benefit system. I have also needed the help of the CAB in the past in dealing with housing issues again related to my agoraphobia and the problems this seems to cause to my local authority.

I received legal aid many years ago when I was going through a divorce. Obviously I had to pay it back when I received the settlement but that seemed fair enough.

I have had legal aid for divorce. Also via Community Legal Service concerning debt and housing issues.

I feel it is important anyone on a low income has access to free legal advice. Housing problems can be a particular problem and concern to anyone in such circumstances, i.e. on a low income, or in receipt of benefits.

yes. it enabled me to get a non molestation order, on the day i went to the solicitor. also enabled my divorce, set out framework for child access, and then to stop all access in child's interest. helped get back some of possessions, and deal with debts for marriage

I had help with my children's contact with their father. This was a massive help as i had very low income and know other way of getting structured contact which is very important for the children to feel secure.

when i was unemployed I received legal aid in getting an injunction against my ex partner. When i was working i was told it would cost two thousand pound I could not afford this and therefore did not apply and the abuse continued. I was told it would cost one hundred and fifty pounds just to send him a solicitor's letter to tell him to stop harassing me.

It was a very long time ago - 24 years - so I imagine a lot has changed. However, as a single parent at that time and being distressed at having to undergo divorce proceedings and being under financial pressure, it was a huge relief to know that issues regarding my child could be legally resolved without a significant financial burden.

Yes when i was going through a Divorce from my Husband and for the Residency of the children without it i would have not been able to get these.

I was helped by legal aid re my divorce / child. I was only on benefits as my husband refused to pay any monies towards our child or myself. I had no savings or income.

i have took my x partner to court 3 times for violent behaviour i also had a life line injunction

yes. injunction, divorce, and financial settlement

Shelter provided me with legal aid. The advice and support provided was free and very competent. I could swiftly resolve my housing problem. It's a great organization to work with.

It is an invaluable service and really cannot be replaced by an operator system. We have to think of the individuals who are in most need of legal aid. Individuals who do not have the means or the capacity to represent themselves (a daunting task for most, regardless of education) and the further negative impact that will have on the victims of crime particularly. It distracts from the aim of the judicial process.

Access to Legal aid gave me the confidence not to remain in a very, very, very, very, very, very bad life-threatening marriage. I was able to protect myself as a result. Yes, I was helped by legal aid

I obtained a divorce and help to save myself from eviction

The first occasion I was awarded full legal aid. The second occasion I had to pay a contribution. This in itself was traumatic as they kept miscalculating what I should pay. I received letters demanding over £900, or else...and wasn't offered an easy pay option at first. I had to fight for that. I found the situation totally depressing, and I was afraid of this huge sum of money that I owed. This happened back in the early 90's. I remember asking myself if it was worth the hassle...swapping one powerful and threatening force DEBT, for the other... HIM!

Yes on contact, criminal (re domestic violence)

My ex-partner applied for contact after he was convicted of Harassment. I am

extremely thankful I received legal aid, as I had very good legal representation. My solicitor did everything she could to ensure both my son and I were fully protected from this man.

My ex partner significantly helped me to get into in £4,000 of debt which I am still struggling to get out of and has threatened to take me to court for custody of our 10 month old son. Without legal aid I would end up in even more debt which impacts greatly on my child's standard of living and what I can provide for him as well as having a significant affect on my health through stress

Yes, regarding my daughter and her dad (my ex) who was harassing me and also not doing so well with taking care of his daughter during contact.

yes. at the time that my relationship broke down and i was being harassed by ex-partner, my daughter was under one year old. mediation was not appropriate and legal aid assisted me to formalise arrangements for contact, whilst keeping both me and my daughter safe. I would not have been able to do that by myself - the effect of contacting my ex-partner was too unsafe.

when i married my Turkish husband, i was informed that he had no recourse to public funds. i was working when my husband came to live in the country and was receiving working and child tax credits. i informed both working tax credits and housing benefits i was married and changed my name accordingly. when i asked could i include my husband in the claims i was told to put his details on the form but not to let him sign any joint claims as this would get him into trouble with immigration. my husband came to the uk in may 2005 and in sept 2005 he started to get a couple of days work here and there from agencies. i got called in by the housing benefits fraud dept for not letting him sign a joint claim for housing benefit, and in the financial year of 2006 i called the tax credits to renew my claim for tax credits. my claim for 2005 was made void because i never made a joint claim and i was asked to pay back £6500. we had not even earned that much between us during that financial year. i told them i could not make a joint claim as i had spoken to the immigration advisory service who told me that this was public funds and my husband would get his leave to remain refused if he claimed. i later learned from the CAB that we could make a claim together because of my entitlement. the CAB could not win this case on there own and asked Louis Elman to get involved. i seen Louise and she thankfully got this overpayment overturned for me, and we made a joint claim. i would have still been paying this back today if it wasn't for being able to go to the CAB

I took a case against police when they misused anti terror legislation against me whilst working as a journalist.

In defence against charges brought against me connected with protest. Prosecuting the police for misconduct and human rights breaches.

Yes - for a solicitor to write to and receive letters from an abusive 'ex' during the early period after relationship break down, to arrange the allocation of personal effects without him claiming unlimited access to my home - esp as he was frequently drunk and aggressive / violent.

I believe the aid meant a resolution was reached without further legal intervention / expense being required - e.g. an arrest / court case / incarceration....this course of action also helped the perpetrator to address his behaviour to some degree - a shot across the bows?...

I received Housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit for about 1.5 years (2008-2009). I was overpaid for a short time. When I brought the issue to the attention of the council, I was told I had to repay about £4000. I did not have the resources to pay the money back (because after all, I was using it to pay my rent to a private landlord). With the help of my local Citizen's Advice Bureau I was entitled to legal aid and the matter was resolved on my behalf by a competent, helpful and friendly young woman lawyer. I will always remember the help she gave me.

I was going through DV for many years. So i received Legal Aid every time i needed to get injunctions and to also more importantly to make it safe for my children and to protect them with an order in place.

I left a controlling and abusive ex-husband who it then transpired was a child abuser something for which he was later prosecuted and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. I had 2 young children at the time, I then had to spend about 6 years fighting his various applications for contact with our children, despite the severity of the charges he was convicted for. Without the support of legal aid I would have found it impossible to fund my legal bills. This would have placed my two young daughters at a very real risk of future abuse.

#### LEGAL AID HELPED ME WITH INJUNCTIONS WITH MY EX PARTNER

In attempting to achieve my rightful share of the marital estate I was forced to go to a solicitor as my now ex-husband said that I should have nothing. I had been abused so much over the years and I was so frightened (having fled the home and he 'attempting suicide') that I would have 'given in' and gone away with nothing had it not been the strength, wisdom of my solicitor. Today, i could not have done this - yet my case only ended 3 years ago - after 3 years of court cases. he was a very obstructive, difficult man. i was very vulnerable at the time. Legal Aid was invaluable.

I could not have divorced my husband without the help of legal aid. He had controlled our finances and run up debts on a joint account so I had no money to access. Although I had a job when he left I was unable to continue working as I had no help with childcare. My daughter was young. Her dad had left in the middle of the night. She started school that week and I was expected to leave her with a stranger and go off to work leaving her to wonder what on earth had happened to the world she used to live in. It was very distressing. I had loved my job but my child was and always is my priority. As I 'voluntarily' gave up my job I was not entitled to benefits. I needed legal aid and without it I would have been at risk for refusing to divorce my husband. He insisted I divorced him immediately despite the fact that he had the affair, I wanted mediation but he refused. He became more and more aggressive until I got legal aid and was able to give him what he wanted...divorce. I feel it is very important to stress how happy I though we were as a couple until I found out he had been having an affair. If he wanted a divorce surely he was responsible for paying for it? Every case is different but women should always be helped to escape from an unhappy life...whatever the reason.

Prior to becoming eligible for legal aid I paid over 40k on legal bills using credit cards as I earned just above the legal aid limit in my part time job. A fully contested non molestation order and occupation order cost me over £15k in solicitor's fees (statement time, court time, issuing paperwork, process server etc) and barrister's fees. It's totally unacceptable that in this country women are denied access to legal help because they are trying to work and raise a family. Eventually I had to give up work meaning that I am now dependent on state benefits and therefore qualify for legal aid - unfortunately I am now stuck in the trap of being unable to work for many

years to come as the legal process is continuing indefinitely, so this will cost the state longer term far more than if I had just been given legal aid.

Legal aid helped in that I didn't have to go to court alone but Family Law meant that I could not protect myself or my child from my abusive ex partner.

Divorce, custody and property division

I was helped so far by legal aid then the help was withdrawn as they said I had assets due to having our own home. The trouble is I need to go to court as the ex will not obey the court order and sign the deeds over to me. I cannot sell the house until he does to access funds and Legal Aid won't help. I am now in a catch 22 situation with a home that will be re-possessed. Stupid situation!

yeah they helped me fight a contact order from kid's dad who was being investigated by police and social services for sexual and emotional abuse.

i needed to pay the court to get my divorce absolute. Also my son doing his GCSE and I've got letter that we've have no basis stay so my solicitor ask for leave to remain for my kids on article 8 of the human right but the home office return it and said to apply on the first application which was the form for an extension of stay and paid for it (like we used to pay before for our visa as my ex was on student visa and myself and children were his dependent). they accept the application when we paid it i mean it's not been return but still waiting for an answer nothing yet.

I am in the process of divorcing my mentally abusive husband with the help of legal aid.

No I apparently earned too much (20000 per annum) so didn't qualify case ongoing at present. I have 3 young children. If i have to repay costs i will lose my home for my children in order to pay these costs. Why are people who have a mortgage expected to repay costs from the equity yet tenants pay nothing - i am being penalised for owning my own home

I could write a book.

I thought it would help me but at the end of the day the MALE judges decide what happens to you and they perceive themselves to be God and ruin family's lives. I have and am currently still getting it. Started off with DV...then contact orders, residence orders, several restraining orders....been 3 and half years of legal aid. I was on Income Support. I did a few months of part-time work and am being assessed on this and if it will affect my legal aid certificate.

## **Responses of VAW Professionals to the legal aid proposals**

**If you have a story about a woman who was helped by legal aid please tell us.**

We have over the years dealt with many women who have been assisted by legal aid and this had made it possible for them to seek injunctions, stop harassment, move away from violent relationships and get divorced from violent partners.

I have many cases where woman have received life saving help by legal aid both

for themselves and their children. Cases where women without recourse to public funds were helped to access shelter for themselves and their children. Cases where women and children who flee from perpetrators were helped to fight successfully against child contact. case where women and children were helped to remain in their house and perpetrator removed. Legal aid is not only a necessary tool for victim of domestic violence, it is also a life saving tool both for women and children.

One woman continued to be intimidated and threatened by ex-partner periodically for over 2 years. He also had mental health issues and substance abuse issues. She felt she could never stop his turning up and terrifying herself and the children, leaving them in a state of continued anxiety. Legal aid was the key to her obtaining a non-molestation order and a residence order which safeguarded herself and her children. It still took nearly 2 years before he recognised the law, behind her, and stopped. It involved him receiving a fine in court for continuing to break the injunction before he finally stopped.

I work for a Women's advice agency and we help around 15 women a week get help through the legal aid system

Many of my victims have been helped by legal aid to obtain injunctions, non molestation orders sort out child access agreements etc. I think legal aid is very important for those on no or low income sometimes dependant on the perpetrators without it.

I supported a woman who had taken her children into refuge to escape domestic abuse. The father applied to have access to the children and whilst having visitation he refused to give the children back. She now has to apply through the courts to get her children back.

all the women i have supported have been assisted by legal aid to change their lives and access safety. i cannot envisage a future or safety for those women without legal aid. Already solicitors who have helped those women have worked above and beyond what legal aid gives them, without legal aid the women i support would have remained unjustly detained, unsafe, unjustly returned to home countries to face ongoing abuse, not having access to their children and a host of other terrible things

I would say that 90% of the women i have supported over the past 12 months have benefited from legal aid in relation to their experiences of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse effects many aspects of a woman's life, e.g. Financial issues, debts, benefits, injunctions, divorce, child contact, child care proceedings etc.

All of the women I have supported have needed some form of Legal advice.

All the women I have supported over the last 6 months have used legal aid services. All of them for debt advice, the least being for debts of £3000, the most for £9000, debts which were accrued because of financial abuse by the perpetrator. All of them have accessed legal aid for help with benefits, as most ESA and DLA claims are being refused because of inaccurate fit for work assessments. approximately 70% have accessed legal aid for child contact issues etc.

My client has had her son taken off her and he has been living with his father for the past 5 years. This was due to my client's neglectful ex partner who she experienced DA from. Of course she did make mistakes in this situation but due to her vulnerability and poor mental health she wasn't strong enough to support herself. 5 years later she is receiving intensive support, she is more confident, she has vast amounts of self

esteem, she is out of her abusive relationships and is turning her life around, and she is now on the right benefits to receive legal aid and is currently working towards contact with her son. Without this she will be forever fighting and childless.

Most of our women who needed legal assistance have accessed legal aid. They have used it to proceed with Child contact and residence cases, injunctions and immigration. It is absolutely VITAL that the current system of legal aid remains or more and more women and children will be placed at harm or be killed.

I worked with a lot of women who received legal aid and the particular solicitor we used was so helpful and knowledgeable, he did not seem to take no for an answer, therefore most of the outcomes were very positive, this enabled the women to concentrate on other parts of their lives.

i supported an African woman who fled domestic violence. i took her to benefits and was able to gain benefits for her, however when i took her to housing, because the housing officers did not understand her immigration status, they refused assistance. when i challenged this and said she had been awarded JSA, they responded that they would be reporting her to JSA and the home office as she should not be here. i took her to an immigration solicitor who was fantastic, and informed her immediately she is entitled to benefits and housing and had indefinite leave to remain. i asked him to write a letter to that effect, which he did. this is a shortened version of the story, in fact the whole process took months, and eventually the woman was rehoused after a year following gaining the solicitors letter and writing a letter of complaint. it caused the woman a lot of stress and anxiety on top of the abuse she suffered. if there had not been any legal support available, these women have no choice but to return.

i have supported a few women who had applied to stay in the UK under the 2 yr domestic violence rule. these women could not speak, read or write in English. they had no family or friends in the UK and were completely isolated. when they disclosed the abuse to their families who lived in countries such as India and Pakistan the families told the women to return to the perp regardless of the abuse. they were also told that should they return to the family then they will be killed as they have brought shame upon the family's honour as there is a stigma attached to women who leave their husbands. these women are then left with no money, house, support, family/friends and a t risk of harm or even homicide should they return to the perp or if they are deported. fortunately thanks to the legal aid, these women were given a chance for someone to represent them and awarded indefinite leave to remain in the UK. this meant that the women had a chance to live without violence and threats to their life. if there was no legal aid then these women who are destitute with no support would not have a fighting chance and the consequences could have been brutal

I suspect that most of the cases in my own research where women were able to successfully challenge a violent perpetrator's contact or residence were legally aided although this was not an issue which I focussed on as was looking at Cafcass practice, .

a client was granted legal aid to challenge a local authority whom refused to rehouse her in a local area

Many women are helped enormously through having legal aid. If this were not available, it would certainly increase the risk to women and children who are made to stay with perpetrators.

Many of my clients have been able to access safer lives through legal aid - both in

terms of non molestation orders and child contact / residence orders. Other clients have been able to challenge the decisions of local authority in terms of child residence and been successful in having their children returned home to live with them. One cannot put a price on keeping mums and children together.

Have thousands....too many to report but it is a life line

a woman had legal help in applying for an injunction and occupation order..this made her feel safe at home and gave her the confidence to apply for a divorce . Many of the women who come to us have had legal aid to ensure safe child contact, Residency Orders, Prohibited Steps Orders, Occupation Orders and Non-Molestation Orders. We find that the women who have to pay do not pursue them. several of our Asian women who have fled domestic violence have been supported through the Legal Aid system, usually with a successful outcome. This has given the women more independence and they have been able to get on with their lives

So many of our women who have escaped from an abusive partner have relied on legal aid to keep them safe during child contact proceedings. They could not have done it on their own. It is just too hard. Many women are adamant about not reporting their abusive partner to the police or to the courts as they don't want to get him in trouble and see this as the start to him going to jail. Even though it would be his fault if he did (if he broke an order for e.g.), they would feel that they had done this to him. However, they have to go through the courts for child contact proceedings. Without legal aid this would be impossible for most women. The abuse that continues through child contact proceedings is bad enough with solicitors are involved but without it even worse.

One of the women I supported was thrown out of the family home with nothing, not even her baby's clothes. Her husband is a wealthy man with several properties and in a high income bracket. He stole all her money from her account before he threw her out. She needed legal aid to get her money back, she needed legal aid to help her with her asylum claim. If she could not access either of these we would be affectively supporting her ex-husband in his abuse.

Not a particular one, but some women have actually received all the help they needed and now they are living normal lives, with their children and without the fear of being close to their abusers.

Many of our clients have hugely benefitted from legal aid, not just by the provision of domestic violence orders, but also in relation to child contact as this further protects not just the children but also the victim from further abuse through the children. I feel that the eligibility criteria should be INCREASED nor decreased. Clients I have supported who are not entitled to legal aid either do not pursue court protection at all, or are forced to quit work/reduce hours in order to receive it, which leaves them further in poverty.

One woman was the wife of a university lecturer. Legal aid helped her access a really good solicitor to negotiate a financial settlement concerning their joint assets. She had been a victim for over 20 years. In another case an asylum seeker was able to gain an injunction at the county court, and assist with her immigration status claim. The perpetrator had brought her from Germany where she originally sought asylum. They married and he brought her to a part of England where there are very few BAMER people and told her that she was now his slave for life, and subjected her to high levels of physical and mental torture. The domestic violence and abuse these two women went through.

Too many to mention.

Almost all of the women I have worked with have been helped by legal aid to address a variety of issues, including immigration, benefits, housing and family matters (primarily child contact and divorce) that they would otherwise not have been able to adequately address otherwise.

One particular example involved a woman who did not know she was entitled to legal aid and received representation from a law firm that did not handle legal aid cases. She reported that she had to resort to prostitution to cover her legal expenses. Such desperate and extremely damaging action may be taken by victim/survivors who find that they are not entitled to legal aid and have no other means of paying for legal help.

One of the women that I have supported had separated from her husband due to domestic violence. There was a language barrier and during an altercation with her husband there was a misunderstanding whereby the Police actually gave the child of the relationship over to the abusive partner. For a few months that woman was not allowed to see her own child. With the assistance of the Solicitor this was overturned and resolved. The Solicitors enlisted the services of an interpreter and translator. The woman was reunited with her child and remains eternally grateful to the Solicitor for her assistance in resolving the issue. Throughout the ordeal the woman was able to speak to the Solicitor on the phone, had several appointments in her office and was supported in court by the same Solicitor.

My client Sarah was destitute in the UK and a stateless person. Legal Aid allowed her to get good quality professional representation to get status in the UK and to become fully part of the community she has been contributing to for 14 years. She is now pursuing work and training goals and has moved away from homelessness.

I have dozens. A client of mine recently fled honour violence in a country I will not name and successfully gained asylum because of this. She had been raped by a family member. Without the legal aid she might have been sent back- the Home Office refuse the majority of asylum cases, including many where the client has a case. She would probably be dead by now.

I supported a victim of DV who also had children to the perpetrator. After the relationship ended he continued to abuse her and used the children as an excuse to do so. We helped her consult a solicitor. She was eligible for Legal Aid & was granted a non molestation order. The judge also looked at his contact with the children in view of his drug issues and the DV the judge ordered supervised contact at a centre. This victim felt empowered by the experience. Eventually the perp did not continue with the child contact when he realised he was no longer able to abuse her via the children. Without Legal Aid this victim may not have been able to make such progress and lead a life free of violence.

Many women have been helped and assisted by legal aid through various solicitors we use in our area. It has been an invaluable service and without it many women would continue to suffer in silence, creating more mental and physical problems, increasing the risks of homicides (women and children) and creating more crime in the UK.

A person I supported in getting an injunction and this is the case with many women. Were able to feel safe and protected and able to rebuild their lives and move onto a violence free lives which improved the outcomes of their children and broke the cycle

of abuse. Women I have supported grew in confidence and returned to work and education by having the security of an injunction and the perpetrator not being able to have contact. In many cases the abuse women experienced stopped.

In all cases I worked with the severity of the abuse reduced and risk was reduced. Reduces the risk of them becoming repeat victims over and over again

Several women I have supported have been successful in obtaining defined contact orders, residence orders, prohibited steps orders and injunctions thanks to legal aid. Without this they would have struggled to take a positive stand against their abuser and bring to an end often years of harassment, intimidation and abuse. Women who get good legal advice and support are empowered to bring about really significant changes in their life.

I supported one woman who was very vulnerable and had some learning difficulties. She had no confidence to follow through any complaint with the police as she lived in a small community where she would have experienced ongoing abuse from the perpetrator's family if she had done so. She felt very intimidated by her ex-partner and had no confidence to stop the incessant harassment and demands to have contact with his son as and when he chose. I took her to a solicitor who applied for an emergency injunction - which she was granted. The solicitor also wrote to the perpetrator informing him that he was to have no contact with his son until he applied to the court and agreed to some assessments. This woman would not have had the strength, courage or confidence to stand up in a criminal court to give evidence so a criminal remedy was a non-starter for her - she would not have been able to represent herself in a civil case - in fact she hardly spoke to her solicitor - as her advocate I supported her to tell her story to the very skilled solicitor who had a good awareness of DV issues. Without legal aid this woman would still be locked in a constant cycle of physical and emotional abuse and harassment. Her 2-year-old son was beginning to display violent behaviours himself - that he had learnt off his dad - as contact has now been stopped this little boy is getting his own support and is away from a violent role model. Without legal aid this woman's children would still be experiencing and witnessing abuse on an almost daily basis and continuing to learn that violence is the way to solve problems. So legal aid in this case has potentially saved the country a lot of money in terms of the problems that would have resulted from this family experiencing ongoing abuse.

In my time working with Women's aid I lost count of the women who were helped to leave abusive relationships by accessing legal aid and taking the perpetrator to court and/or following divorce proceedings - these women could not have done that without legal aid.

By accessing Legal Aid, my client was able to have her family and friends support her in other areas thus keeping the 'horrible' stuff separate and allowing the client to resume as normal a life as possible while the proceedings were occurring. Trauma and difficult situations have a habit of overwhelming a client, and may lead to them not even wanting or having the strength to continue with proceedings.

Woman was beaten on her back with a spade she called the police, the perpetrator showed the police a scratch on his hand. The police arrested her and held her in the cells over night. She accepted a caution in the morning. She came to us for advice we took photographs of the spade mark on her back. She did not want to do anything at the time as she feared no one would believe her (not surprising). After several months of contact with us and a few more photos of injuries. She decided to leave and seek an injunction - she was referred to our legal clinic. The photos were used in family

proceedings and child residency order and injunction was secured.

There have been many situations where client's have been assisted to get away from their abusive partners through legal aid. Cases where client's have thought there is nowhere out of their situation and been referred through to our organisation, advice been given regarding civil options that are appropriate to their situation, appointments have been obtained for legal advice and orders such as, non-molestation, occupation and child contact orders have been applied for; if legal aid was not available for these cases, then women and children are going to be put further at risk, worse case be killed by their abusive partners if there is no help for them financially.

A lady from South Africa had experienced domestic abuse over many years, part of the abuse being around immigration issues and her partners control as a result of her being in the country as a dependant of his. The visa's were due to run out in a couple of weeks time and her husband had not applied for an extension, her feeling being that he intends to remain here illegally when it runs out. She has a job and children who are settled here but as a result of the abuse she is no longer safe to remain with her husband. Through a legal aid solicitor she was able to receive all the information and guidance she needed in order to apply to remain in her own right under rule 8 and what her options were. As a result she was able to submit an application and was able to remain in the country and working whilst the application was decided. Without legal aid immigration advice she would have been in great danger as she would have had to remain with her husband, would have lost her job and potentially had to leave to return to South Africa where she has no relatives or support.

We have many stories at Lancaster and District Women's Aid who have been helped through legal aid, and many of those could have ended up being seriously wounded or even killed had this service not been available.

Many of my service users benefit from legal aid. Their cases are usually related to civil in junctions; child contact; residency orders; divorce; care proceedings.

In one particular case a young woman was informed her perpetrator was to be released from prison only one week before his release date. He had been imprisoned following a domestic violence related offence where he tried to set fire to her home whilst her and her family were inside. Children and Young People's Services stated she was failing to protect her child by living near to where the perpetrator would be released to, so they removed her child (2 years). She sought legal advice, with legal aid which enabled her to be represented at court. Her perpetrator also tried to get child contact once he was released from prison, for which she needed representation. Her views were represented to CYPS and to his solicitor at court. She moved into a refuge and after 2 weeks the child was allowed to return to her care. He has not been granted access for at least 2 years. The child has undoubtedly been impacted by the separation, however her legal representation was pivotal in enabling them to be reunited relatively quickly. It also prevented her ex partner from gaining access to the child and continuing his control over the family.

I have worked with a huge number of victims of domestic violence in my role as a family solicitor. It is these clients that I feel able to help the most and who require my help the most. They are normally in a very difficult and lonely place and often have been for a number of years. It takes a lot of strength from them to seek help in the first place. It is therefore imperative that the help they need is there for them when they seek it.

A woman was (and still is) being persecuted by her husband, he is representing

himself and continually takes her to court and fires questions at her, the case has been going on for 2 years, she is an ethnic minority, living in vulnerable housing (until the case is settled) with a 5 year old daughter. She is highly intelligent and generally able to represent herself well, but in front of the perpetrator she becomes a wreck and is unable to string two coherent words together. I don't believe under any circumstances she could represent herself and could certainly not afford to pay for representation.

I am currently supporting a woman who receives legal aid. She works hard and has two children, she is also a victim of domestic abuse. She has been able to sort out child contact and housing issues with the support of her solicitor and legal aid. She has also been kept informed about her right to be safe from her abusive partner

I have thousands from where I was a practicing Legal Aid family lawyer. In my honest opinion NONE of those women would have been able to take action on their own. It is one of the hardest things they will ever do, one the majority do only when they have reached crisis point and where they are already "on their knees". They need ALL the help they can get and if they don't get it they won't try again. Look at the statistics on domestic violence homicide and the impact of witnessing domestic violence to children and LIVE WITH YOURSELVES if you take accessibility to civil remedy and legal representation away from this already victimised and vulnerable group. Anyone who has ever worked with this group will feel as strongly as I do for very real and legitimate reason. Talk to victims before you condemn them.

I have many stories about women who for the first time in their lives feel they have some control in their lives because they are able to sort out child contact or get an injunction - or an occupation order.

Social housing customer, fled an abusive relationship, and moved away. The customer encountered a number of issues, such as rehousing, finding new schools for children, and dealing with mental health issues that had developed - all of this was without family and friends. Legal aid supported the customer to access legal services to obtain a Non Molestation order, the customer returned to her local town, and to date the legal intervention has worked.

I work with a number of women who have obtained non-molestation orders with the help of legal aid. Without it they would have been at risk of being pressurised by their abusive partners into reconciling. Legal aid has enabled them to access legal protection to keep themselves and their children safe. This is empowering for them. In addition, many cases are complex, involving child care issues, debt and rent / mortgage / benefits matters, as well as the abuse and often the legal professional can help with these as well. It can take women a long time to start disclosing and reporting domestic abuse and when they reach this point they need access to legal advice and representation.

I have numerous success stories of women who have been helped by being able to access legal aid, too many to think of one in particular, but enough to know that to withhold this vital service from women will lead to more women and their children being more seriously injured and suffering more unnecessary psychological harm at the hands of abusive men. To change the system as the MoJ are proposing is to collude with perpetrators and to 'close the door' on women who are seeking to remove themselves - safely - from abusive relationships

Many are supported by legal aid and have successful outcomes. one client who had no recourse to public funds was able to obtain an occupation order removing her

partner from his home allowing her to live there through the help of legal aid.

A woman I supported was granted legal aid when the perpetrator manipulated her children not to have contact with her. He then isolated the children and she only resumed contact with the children when she was given legal aid to have a solicitor represent her in court, and she went to court to get contact with her children.

A large majority of women I support access legal aid for some aspects of their legal needs - too many to mention

I had a client with NRPF, who was able to access legal aid and apply for ILR under the DV rule. This was processed quickly (15 days) and she was then able to access LA housing and welfare benefits.

A client came into refuge extremely at risk from her perp if he was to find her or the children. Initially she believed like many others before her and since that he had a right to see his children and them to see him as he was their Dad. This lady had suffered extreme physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse for over 8yrs. His family reciprocated his rights to the children and continued the manipulation around the fact that she was depriving this man of seeing his children. These children had seen the physical and extreme battery he regularly dealt out to her, and the effects of this. They lacked normal socialisation, as she was not allowed to go out, quality food as she had to keep all receipts, he destroyed their flat regularly, many occasions the mother and children had to leave to stay elsewhere prior to the final time when she landed at our service. The second child he suggested was not his and accused her of it being someone else to the degree that he tried to cut it out of her during pregnancy, and when born he never acknowledged it and the mother never left the baby alone for fear of what he would do. When she eventually came to us, we arranged for a Solicitor to come out to see her and due to his record and the history they applied straight away for a residency order, which the process took some time and was granted. The whole case had to go via CAFCASS etc, he requested DNA test for second child but never followed through using it as a tool for manipulation over the court process. The whole thing took over 18mths to resolve fully as the court had to give him opportunity to prove himself and ordered him to attend various parenting courses etc. He eventually messed it up himself and she is now free, safe etc and he is in prison for other offences. This does not mean that he will not try again in the future and she will not need the help again. The child used to tell me that his Dad tried to kill his mum and described how he had dragged her up the road by her hair screaming and many other things. He has behaved towards his mum in a very threatening way telling her she is scared of his Dad etc but was very clear that he does not want to see him.

Majority of our clients will have received legal aid at some point, whether for non molestation orders, occupancy orders, or child contact proceedings.

Legal aid is Vitally important, as it helps many women get the legal support advice and help they need, to live their lives free from violence and abuse.

i have various case studies of women that have been assisted with legal aid to obtain non-molestation orders, residence orders, child contact agreements, occupation orders, in relation to children against the local authority.

Legal Aid has been invaluable to enable many of our clients receive the necessary protective orders that they require for both themselves and their children in order to keep safe and begin process of leaving an abusive relationship

In 2009/10 we dealt with 1811 referrals (from three local authority areas). Through the

current legal aid scheme we are able to provide women with a drop in legal advice clinic at our offices, the nearest legal aid firm is almost an hour away for some women and would therefore be impossible to reach. This scheme has enabled us to help 100's of women who would not have been able to access support before - it is under threat due to these changes. The safety of women and children is being put at significant risk should these measures go through. Sorry I don't have one case study I have hundreds!

Lady A

A was referred to our service after being assaulted by her partner, she was very reluctant to talk to us at first, she just took our number and said that everything had changed her partner B has said he will not do it again.

A month or so later we received another referral from the police, there had been another incident this time the assault was more severe as her hands and mouth had been taped up. I advised her of her options she decided to end the relationship we helped her to move.

Things went quiet for about 6 months and then incidents started coming through from the police. A period then followed of about a year of incidents both reporting coming in sporadically. I spoke to the women several times about safety and options available. Lady A eventually came to me and asked for support as the situation had got way out of hand her now husband B had tracked her down persuaded her to resume the relationship and then became even more controlling and abusive, he persuaded her to put him on her tenancy. he was also using the police to abuse her. Lady A said that if they had argued and she had ran out of their home in fear he would report her to the police for assaulting him even down to inflicting wounds on himself.

Through legal aid Lady A manage to get an injunction against B, an occupation order to live in her home safely for a year. The solicitor also went on to transfer the tenancy and handle the divorce.

Women from refuge often access legal aid, mainly to support in matters around child contact. Women feel better about going through the court process if they have qualified legal support from a person that they have met before and who they feel they can trust. Taking these matters to court protects the women from agreeing to contact situations that may place them at risk and also helps the fathers and children to maintain an appropriate family relationship.

Lucy' (not her real name) is disabled and lives in a Housing Association property. She was told by her Housing Association that she had to move as they were pulling down her house. The Housing Association showed Lucy 3 properties, none were not suitable because of her disabilities, with help from her specialist VAW support worker she turned them all down. The Housing Association said that they would not show her any more properties, and despite the medical evidence provided that showed Lucy could not have lived in the properties, and she was making herself intentionally homeless. Lucy was very distressed and frightened.

Lucy's specialist VAW support worker arranged for Lucy to get face to face legal advice from a housing solicitor. The solicitor wrote a letter to the Housing Association, explaining that legally, Lucy's disabilities had to be taken into account when she was offered a new house. The Housing Association offered Lucy a suitable property shortly afterwards, and she subsequently moved to a new home she is very happy with.

A woman I worked with received legal aid and a solicitor was able to represent her with the DWP - complicated case and part of the abuse; she was in receipt of benefits when she shouldn't have been, the perpetrator was able to use this against her and

continue to abuse her under the threat of telling the DWP. She came to an agreement with DWP (with the support of the solicitor), obtained a non-molestation order and arranged for supervised contact. If she hadn't had the support of a specialist DA worker and received legal aid for a solicitor she had got to the point where seeing no way out she was thinking about suicide

I have got many clients, but I will choose one case. She came on spousal visa. Her husband sent her back home to visit her sick mum. When she returned he curtail her visa and the immigration officers at the airport told her to go back. She was allowed to enter after she found a family to sponsor her stay. When lost her right to stay, she attempted suicide and luckily she was saved. Then she appealed and won on humanitarian grounds.

#### Background:

Ms X is a 48 year old heterosexual woman who was referred to xxxxxx by her CPN from Mental Health team. Ms X was referred in 2009 to xxxxxx; according to the notes Ms X was not in a position to engage with our service in 2009. Ms X's CPN worker was concerned about recent disclosures Ms X had made about her partner and wanted to re-refer her to our service.

#### Issues:

Ms X has been in a relationship for 19 years with her partner, whom she met in hospital. Ms X was a victim of emotional abuse, physical abuse, and intimidation by her partner. The abuse began early on in the relationship and had become a regular occurrence. Ms X was very frightened by the perp, especially since his mental health was getting worse; he wasn't taking his medication and was taking cocaine.

Ms X wanted to engage with our services as she felt unsafe and scared of the perp. The areas we addressed were her safety and possible civil remedies that we could put into place to make her safe.

#### Our support

Understanding the urgency of the situation, I began working with Ms X and offering her practical advice on making herself safe. I referred her to the Sanctuary and locking fitting scheme. Within a few days her locks had been changed and Ms X said she felt safe in her accommodation. I also provided emotional support for Ms X; she was finding it very difficult to disengage and not blame herself for the perp's actions. I helped her over this emotional hurdle, empowering herself to try new things and rebuild her life. I supported her when she wanted to apply for a part time position as a receptionist at her Day Centre. Ms X wished to learn some IT skills and do some volunteering work, so she was also referred to Psychological and Therapies Service. Ms X saw our solicitor who made an application for a Non-molestation Order. As Ms X is a vulnerable adult I accompanied her to the Court, explained the process and offered her emotional support.

#### Outcomes:

- Ms X was granted a Non-molestation Order for a year
- Ms X's home is now secure and she has changed her phone numbers
- Ms X has built up her confidence and now wants to start training and get a volunteering position or job within Southwark
- Ms X is no longer suffering from domestic violence

Legal aid has enabled many women I have worked with over the years to live free from violence and take control of their lives. Women often feel empowered when they know their rights and can access the same level of representation as the abuser no matter what their financial circumstances are. To remove legal aid is to remove a tool that enables some of the most vulnerable people who are at risk in the one place they should always be safe, their home, to live with liberty, autonomy over their own lives and justice.

a young mum of 2 children-she had become an over stayer as her husband had deliberately not applied for her indefinite leave to remain in order to keep power and control over her. social services were involved as he was a drug user and there were concerns about the children's safety. through legal aid support the woman has been granted an initial period of 3 years leave to remain- this has been based on her Human rights - her husband has child contact through the courts. this means that the children have been able to remain with the best parent to care for them (if the mum was not able to care for them (i.e. sent back to Pakistan) social services would have had to take the children into care .

'Vicky' is a domestic worker from India. She came to the UK one and a half years ago, accompanying the sister of her previous employer as a nanny and cleaner. It had been a difficult decision to leave India and her two young children but she had been assured that she would be paid £450 a month, more than double her Indian earnings and by sending this money home she hoped that her children would be able to complete their education and not have to make the same difficult decisions as her. When Vicky first arrived in the UK she was only paid £200/month for the first six months. She didn't question this as she was slightly confused about the exchange rates and she didn't want to show too much disrespect to her employers. However when a close family member needed an urgent operation and asked to borrow money for this Vicky asked for her salary and was told by her employers that their outgoings in the UK were too high for them to pay her any more. Vicky was unhappy but felt unable to challenge them. After 8 months they stopped paying her altogether. Vicky protested the first time her salary was unpaid but was told that she was 'illegal' in this country and her employers were spending a lot of money trying to sort out her status so she should not complain. By the time Vicky ran away in desperation she had not been paid at all for 10 months. During this time she had no regular day off, worked 13 hour + days and shared a room with the children. She was frantic with worry about her family whom she had been unable to send any money to at all during this time. When Vicky came to Kalayaan and told us her story we thought it likely that she might need immigration and employment advice on legal aid. If her employer had let her visa expire without her knowledge as they told her they had done, Vicky would have needed a solicitor to represent her to the Home Office. Fortunately, in Vicky's case, the employers were lying to her and her visa had been renewed. Vicky did however want to try and get some of her unpaid wages from her employers and we referred her to a legal aid employment solicitor. In the end Vicky and her employers 'settled' and she secured a lump sum to send to her children in India. Without legal representation it is very unlikely that the employers would have agreed to pay Vicky any of her unpaid wages.

i know of hundreds

Client was referred to our service after the police were called to an incident where he had sexually abused and assaulted her, client went to court and was awarded a non molestation order and an occupation order so that she could return to her home, she had been staying with her son who was schizophrenic and living in a 1 bedroom flat and sleeping on the floor, if client had not received legal aid, she would not have received the protection of a non mol order, would not be able to return to her home and would have resumed the relationship with the perpetrator.

I have had a few Asian women with no recourse to public funds, who were helped by legal aid to obtain Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. So they were able to access welfare benefits and housing support, and were able to turn around their lives, free from violence and abuse.

Many women have been helped by legal aid, my concern are the ones that are currently not supported because they work or own houses (usually with a joint mortgage) the new proposals will mean even more women will be in a similar situation where they simply cannot have access to the legal system. Not really reasonable in Great Britain for women to not access legal services.

A significant percentage of women going through contact cases with our member services receive legal aid (as do the fathers that are trying to have contact with their children). Without that support it is unlikely that they would have been able to contest the cases and poor decisions around child safety would have been taken. Equally, the male partners involved (who had perpetrated severe violence in many cases) would not have been compelled to seek programmes that addressed their abusive behaviour.

One of the biggest issues we deal with is child contact. A high number of perpetrators of DV/SV continue to intimidate, harass and threaten women by using child contact as their vehicle to do so. Many of our clients have benefited by being eligible for legal aid and have been able to fight their ex partner in court; in a way they would not have done without it.

Without legal aid many 1000's of women will be subject to more DV by partners or ex partners and as usual for the UK; the private law court system and criminal legal system will enable the perps to do so.

A young client of mine was trafficked into the UK for the purposes of domestic servitude. During her experiences here she had been emotionally abused and threatened with physical and sexual abuse by the head of the household. Following a violent altercation my client fled the house and subsequently found herself homeless and destitute. We approached welfare and an immigration solicitor, both of whom used legal aid to ensure my client was looked after by social services and to make an asylum application on her behalf. My client now has 5 years leave to remain and is still being supported by social services. Without legal aid, she would have been forced to return to a dangerous environment where her safety was increasingly in jeopardy.

Many women were helped by legal aid, they were able to get an injunction, a PSO and a residence order

Most of my client's obtain help from LA. They have obtained injunctions to ensure that their children and themselves are safe from the perpetrator. I have also obtained orders for no contact due to the perpetrators conduct towards the children and the effects that this has had upon the children. When Social Services are involved they advise client to obtain legal advice so that they can demonstrate that they are keeping their children safe but obtaining the relevant orders and being proactive. This will be hugely problematic if they cannot get legal advice

Worked with a woman whose ex partner would not stop harassing and stalking her, he did not obey restraining order and police failed to act upon restraining order. she was able to get legal aid to get a non molestation order and this is finally something he has listened to and she feels much more secure and bale to move on with her life.

Peruvian woman married to a British citizen, four months old baby, has a 2 years spouse visa NRPF, suffers domestic violence from her husband, reports abuse to the

police, ends up staying with a girl friend and apart from being afraid and destitute has nowhere to turn or does not know where to go. Comes to LAWRS, ( has been told by friend that she cannot have her staying much longer after client's husband turned at friend's address and threatened her, police were called, husband told to leave) client is advised about her rights, about legal aid, about the Sojourner, about injunctions. Eventually, after too many weeks looking for a refuge, she was taken into a women's refuge, most women's refuges reluctant to take women with NRPF, even though our client had secured the 8 weeks financial support through the Sojourner pilot project. Client applies for ILR under the home office DV concession rule and is successful with her application. The case of this woman speaks for itself, if she had not been able to apply for legal aid she would have probably been forced to stay with her abusive husband or else give up and return to her home country, abuse, humiliated and destitute.

## Responses of legal professionals to the legal aid proposals

**If you have a story about a woman who has been helped by legal aid please tell us.**

i have lots of stories, i don't know where to begin. there are so many who have experienced low level harassment and intimidation and even physical violence who have not involved the police through fear of how it would impact on the children and family finances. with assistance they have been able to move forward for the benefit of the family in terms of their welfare, financial and otherwise, with less impact on the courts, police, education, benefits, agencies which has meant savings from these other agencies which has meant savings from these other agencies, by these individuals receiving high value service at an exceptionally low cost - our fixed fees under CW1 are usually around £162.

The Mother who had felt bullied in mediation and agreed to contact with her violent ex partner and daughter. With legal aid she was able to fight the case, prove the violence and obtain a domestic violence report and a CAFCASS report which showed that the ex partner posed a significant risk of physical and emotional harm to her and that indirect contact was appropriate. Without legal aid she would still be at risk of physical harm. She would now be sent to mediation and that would not be appropriate. She was a victim of domestic abuse and she was not able to discuss the abuse for some time.

35 yr old, mother of 3. eldest son was a male teenager. punched by her ex-partner. sought urgent ex parte injunction and an occupation order. court would not grant ex-parte occupation as man was disabled (despite the house having stairs and no downstairs bathroom). I got the case listed for a contested hearing within one week at the PRFD and client secured a 12 month injunction, occupation order and transfer of tenancy. client could not go to a refuge as her eldest son was too old. housing would not help her if she didn't go into a refuge but she could not leave her eldest son behind in the house! Legal aid made sure she was protected and allowed to return to her home and continue raising her children. if she couldn't get legal aid she would have been forced to live alone without her children in a refuge and wait for housing, or remain living with a violent man.

I have a story of a middle class client who was raped by her husband sustaining broken bones and withdrew the allegation pre trial because of the stigma of the children's father going to prison and constant manipulation by husband (of course now

a day's depending on how she withdrew she could be in prison for withdrawing the allegation - in her case she did not retract). The CPS were sympathetic and wrote to her saying they felt there were good prospects of success but would withdraw after reading a letter from her. Contact with the children took place throughout notwithstanding the bail conditions. Of course that is when the intimidation started with the father immediately turning up on the doorstep insisting he had every right to. She obtained an injunction via her first solicitors with the benefit of legal aid. Time moved on. The injunction lapsed. The constant wearing down began, the manipulation of the children, the constant pushing for more and more contact and more and more flexibility and the never giving the client peace and the harassing phone calls. The client felt that every solicitor she went to was rubbished by her ex partner and such was her intimidation that she was affected by this. She chose my firm because we were out of the area, perhaps 80 miles away. She travelled for first interview where a very full background was taken and we applied for legal aid. It was a limited issue to define his contact to the contact he was having and to stop him from constantly pushing her for more. In the current climate i can see that failing on a merits standard yet the issue was of huge importance to this client and she could never have taken it alone, neither would mediation have worked as this would simply have encouraged the behaviour complained of, the right on father's behalf to constantly pressurise. With the benefit of legal aid and at only one hearing we secured exactly what our client needed to give her respite and peace of mind and to be able to put the phone down or shut the door and say you have your contact every fortnight for a weekend and your holiday contact now leave me alone in peace. She gave us permission to use her story when we applied for and recently won the Law Society's Excellence in Client Service award. It was a small victory but one of hundreds of similarly moving and extremely important cases we have represented over the years where the client and children were being emotionally manipulated and suffering continual harassment if not in one format another over years and where mediation would have actually almost undoubtedly made the problem worse not better.

S, a woman from Somalia, came to the UK as a spouse. Before her probation period was up, she left her violent and abusive husband, and his violent and abusive family, with a baby and a toddler in tow. She didn't speak English. She couldn't read and write. Legal aid assisted her with welfare benefits advice and with a domestic violence application. At the DV appointment it was identified that she was in fact eligible to apply for asylum. Without legal aid she and the kids would have been unable to access accommodation, and she would have been tasked with making a complex application in a language she neither spoke nor understood, despite being illiterate, and she would not herself have identified that she was a refugee (she didn't think she could apply as she had entered on a spouse visa.)

O, a woman from Nigeria, was trafficked to the UK as a prostitute. Although she was literate and spoke English, she was so terrified of authority that she took no steps to regularise her status until she was arrested. Without legal aid she would not have been able to make the relevant application as a victim of trafficking, because she had no idea this existed. Those are just two of many.

i have lots of stories, i don't know where to begin. there are so many who have experienced low level harassment and intimidation and even physical violence and have not involved the police through fear of how it would impact on their welfare, financial and otherwise, with less impact on the courts, police and education, benefits agencies which has meant savings from these other agencies, by these individuals receiving a high value service at an exceptionally low individual cost - our fixed fees under CW1 are usually around £162.

I represented a young mother who had been in a relationship with a Ghanaian man.

The relationship had broken down by mother continued to have a good relationship with paternal grandparents. She agreed to a holiday of 3 weeks to Ghana. Mother, on benefits was told she could come to Ghana but had no money and was anxious about Grandparents influence there. I had to issue wardship as non-Hague convention country and put pressure on father and family in UK to ensure the child was returned. Eventually Grandfather brought the child back to UK to be reunited with Mother-greatly influences by the High Court orders requested return as they were concerned about implications of ongoing proceedings rather than desire to reunite very young child with her mother. If no legal aid, mother could not have secured child's return. One woman who springs to mind was a woman I assisted in obtaining a non molestation order against her violent partner. He had tried to kill her three times and the police did not charge him - they said there was insufficient evidence because she did not speak English. We also assisted her with rehousing and benefits advice and this holistic approach will no longer be possible if the proposed reforms are implemented.

Single parent Ghanaian overstayer with seriously disabled large adult dependent son. In receipt of only £34 a week Social Services help for both self and son. After issue of judicial review proceedings support increased to £73 a week. Single parent Nigerian overstayer with 2 year old daughter. Social Services support about to end when reached 21. Persuaded Social Services to assess child's needs and continue support

My client had been experiencing domestic abuse which was sometimes VHR and other times more standard in its nature, She had an ineffectual lawyer, who did not promote the domestic violence in the Children proceedings. the ex partner, who clearly has mental health issues, appeared in person and on occasions was given a certain degree of leniency by the judges. After 4 years, my client has had his name removed from her property, obtained a contact order with the support of CAFCASS, that protects to a degree her and the children and the threat of a s91(14) order if he makes any further applications to the court in respect of the children.

My client consulted me about contact issues in relation to her ex-partner who although had not been violent towards her, had been threatening and had previous convictions for armed robbery coupled with mental health problems. During my involvement, the threats became so extreme that she felt forced to allow him to have contact with their child causing them both to be at risk. Once became aware, able to obtain injunction from Court and Prohibited Steps Orders. Ensured that Court has stayed involved so that risk is minimised to her and child. If client had represented herself, consider that she would have been forced to allow contact and proceedings would have been discharged.

Every case I'm involved in.

Mrs K was married to a clever and devious man who had buried his assets in offshore trust funds and foreign bank accounts, in an effort originally to defeat the tax authorities and later the family Court. Over the course of two years, Mrs K's solicitors and I chased this money around the world, running up a six figure legal aid costs bill in the process. However, our search was successful and resulted in a large sum being repatriated to the UK and an Order of the High Court breaking open an offshore trust fund which in reality he controlled. Mrs K was awarded enough money to buy a flat over a florist's shop which she could run, thus taking her off the social security budget and we recovered all her costs from the husband. The net cost to the taxpayer was nil and justice was done.

I recently represented a lady (with four children) who had endured many years of physical, psychological and sexual abuse by her partner (the children's father). The violence was such that she and the children had fled to another part of the country (with significant disruption to the children) and, on police advice, had changed their names. The Father took proceedings for residence and contact. The Mother initially responded with her allegations against the father, but at that time was simply unable to see it through, due to her fear of repercussions (Father had found their address). Sometime later, and with significant and expert support from both her solicitor and myself, a hearing took place (with our support she was able to give evidence without the need for screens (and later said that doing so had been an important part of her recovery). The court made findings of very serious physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse of the mother - and of the impact on the children. An order was made for no contact and an order barring the father from bringing any further court action for 4 years. Without the support and expert management of both the client and the evidence, I have no doubt that this mother would have again felt the need to relocate.

I was dealing with an application for an occupation order which was potentially legally difficult as there had been no actual physical violence but she had felt intimidated by her husband to the extent that she did not feel able to continue living in their house. He had threatened to hit her but had not actually done so. More importantly though was not that he was potentially violent but that she had had to move out with her Autistic son who has seriously disturbed by not being able to continue with his routine in his own home. The husband was privately paying as the wife had not worked very much in order to care for their son. I have no doubt that had she had to represent herself she would not have succeeded in obtaining an occupation order and enabling her son to return to his home with her. This is because she would probably have been persuaded into not pursuing the claim by the judge at the direction hearing who thought that it would be an uphill battle, her case required legal research which she would not have been able to do, her case needed someone who could argue about the law not simply comment on the facts and also turned significantly on the evidence given by her husband in cross examination which influenced the judge's decision - cross examination would have been difficult for her to do herself as she felt intimidated by her husband and she would not necessarily have know what to focus it on. Without legal aid i do not believe that her son would have been able to return home and i have concerns that under the new proposals she would not be entitled to legal aid as in reality she was scared that something might happen but there was no previous history of violence or propensity to it. This case involved the welfare of a vulnerable child and that is why she was so determined to obtain an occupation order, it was not for herself but her children as otherwise she could just have taken the easy way of staying on a friend's floor until rehoused by the council. As i understand it these sort of cases may not qualify for funding soon and therefore this vulnerable child would have been seriously let down by the system.

Too many to tell. The removal of Legal Aid will lead to the relegation of women to second class citizens. Something it took many years and great sacrifice for women to escape from will be gone for many women.

actually my horror stories are about women who have struggled to stay working and keep their families in an independent financial structure who have been just outside legal aid threshold and who have had to fight a legally aided partner who has taken through years of litigation. I have done several cases pro bono because of this.

Every week I encounter a number of publicly funded women, either as client or an opposing party. I would estimate that at least one of those cases in each week

involves allegations of domestic abuse of one kind or another, but there are also many that involve other equally difficult issues such as sexual abuse of children, over chastisement of children, non accidental injury or parental alienation. I have had many female clients who have only been able to seek protection from the courts or to navigate the complexities of their family problems through the services of sensitive and experienced solicitors and counsel.

Many wives/female cohabitants leave a marriage with nothing. The male partner is frequently very controlling and holds the purse strings and assets. Without access to legal aid these women would not have access to funds with which to pursue legal remedies, nor would they often consider leaving their abusive partner without the knowledge they will have every assistance if they do so.

Every day I or someone else in my chambers represents a victim of domestic violence separate from their partner by representing them in injunction applications, children act and ancillary relief cases

How could a family lawyer list 'a story' when it can only be true to say that each and every client is assisted by legal aid to allow them access to the justice that they both need and deserve

There are too many to tell.

One very moving experience I had was representing a woman at a fact finding in private law children proceedings. She made allegations of serious domestic violence that had been denied throughout by her ex-partner. She was clearly very intimidated by him but after an incident for which he had been arrested she felt she needed to pursue the issue of his violence so as to protect her children from growing up thinking that was "ok". After a full day of evidence the Judge gave judgment and made findings on all the allegations made. I was writing down the judgement and it wasn't until the end that I got a chance to turn round to speak to client. According to my solicitor's clerk she had sat there with tears running down her face for the whole judgment. Afterwards she said she was crying because she was just so overwhelmed that someone had believed her. As a result of those findings the father was made the subject of a DVIP risk assessment and a full DVIP course recommended. I have no doubt that without the support of her solicitor and counsel that woman would not have pursued her allegations. She had time and again withdrawn complaints and reconciled with her abuser and was living in fear. The idea of her cross-examining the father or making submissions to the Judge on the strength of various pieces of police evidence is quite frankly unthinkable. I very much hope I will be able to help other women protect themselves and their children in the future, and just as importantly make them feel they have been listened to and believed. If the proposed legal aid cuts are brought it I would have real concerns this will not be possible.

Almost daily, I have reason to be grateful for such women to the LSC. Last Thursday I represented a woman with sickle cell anaemia, affecting her emotionally as well as physically; such that her stress and upset were at the levels of someone who had experienced significant DV in this private children matter; she had in fact suffered neither. Her ex-partner was unrepresented. The idea of these two sitting down in a room together was, in such circumstances, a joke; yet her ex-partner and I were able to significantly settle the matter pending a final hearing, which may not now be necessary. Were she to have represented herself, there would have been no prospect of any progress at this stage; there would inevitably be a final hearing; old wounds would be re-opened and new ones inflicted in what would turn out to be a bloodbath of a hearing (which family advocates can avoid); it would take forever; and

the children's interests would not be served by two people even more at loggerheads than when they went in.

We have many cases in which we have assisted women, some of them highly vulnerable in light of their life experiences.

I represented a Sikh woman who was nearly bludgeoned to death by her husband. She had been subjected to horrific sexual and physical abuse since giving birth to their only child who was a girl and not the son he desired.

Legal aid helped this lady secure a house for herself and the child as part of divorce/financial proceedings together with an injunction once husband was released from prison and a No Contact Order in Children Act Proceedings. Without the benefit of legal aid none of this would have been possible. The lady and her daughter would probably have been forced to flee the area with very little money or return to her home country. The lady suffered from severe PTSD and required therapy which it was possible to secure funding of from the husband as part of the financial case. As a result she was able to continue caring for her daughter and start a new life. This man was such a risk that he has since gone on to allegedly murder another woman.

My client - Somalia refugee with 3 children. Husband came from Somalia and got her with him - subjected her to violence every day and often beat up children as well. Client came to office having run away and with no money. We got an interpreter for her and applied for an injunction and occupation order against him. She was too scared to even be in the same building as him! We assisted with her welfare benefits, referred her to immigration specialist and in time, she applied for divorce. She remains grateful for rescuing her and her children from a horrific situation but in reality, we were only able to do it because she was eligible for legal aid.

I had a client who was pregnant with her ex-partner's child. Her ex-partner had emotionally and physically abused her and would not allow this lady to continue living her normal life. If she had not been able to access legal aid, then she would have had to deal with the stress of the pregnancy, the abuse and the worry of her ex-partner's presence, then I am confident that she and the baby would have been significantly more affected by his behaviour. This is just one of hundreds of examples one sees every day at court.

So many. My legal aid clients are some of my most grateful clients. Their lawyers have been their lifeline out of horrendously violent and destructive relationship. Female clients have said to me more than once that they would not have been able to go through it without their legal team. They would have remained in relationships exposing themselves and their children to ever increasing violence. As most of my clients are legally aided, this would apply to most of them, but I have concerns about confidentiality.

A child of 4years, a boy, having weekend contact with his father, despite the Mother fearing for her own wellbeing, she genuinely wanted the child to have a relationship with his Father. After a weekend away the child returned and sat on his Mother's lap and kissed her- (with his tongue in her mouth), saying that's how Daddy kisses me! Despite her own fear (which was palpable) she gave clear and concise evidence to the Judge, the Father who had been on the weekend break with his mother, also gave evidence, as did the Paternal Grandmother. After a day of evidence, what became clear from a simple contact hearing, the father AND the Paternal Grandmother were in league to prepare this child for sexual abuse. The child's Mother would simply have been unable to think straight let alone conduct the hearing, she bravely gave evidence, but only after 1 hour of preparation to think of the child first. The court heard

the Father give his evidence, and the Grandmother - both had prepared a convincing explanation, but had become unseated by a simple point- which made it very clear to everyone listening they had lied about the whole day, and the abuse perpetrated. My concern about the changes to Legal funding is:- this little boy would now be having generous contact with a man who sexually abused him, with court sanction. As, the court only saw the deception of the Father during his cross examination, a task the Mother alone could not have done. Now this little boy has no contact with the abusive Dad, thankfully. Legal Aid saved a family and the generations to follow. This cannot be calculated by 'bottom line' mathematics. The cost of future generations saved from a life of abuse, is simply priceless. And this is only one case- I deal with one every day of the week.

I have many but one was for a maternal grandmother applying for contact with the benefit of legal aid. The father had murdered the mother and the paternal family denied contact to the maternal grandmother. Her case (brought with the benefit of legal aid and reports from experts) expressly highlighted emotional abuse of the children and only after High Court intervention did the Local authority commence care proceedings. The children may well have remained at risk if the grandmother had not been able to bring her case.

DV in an alcoholically abusive situation where he is eventually removed by police bail and then by FLA orders. 9 months to complete the proceedings and a criminal trial where she withdrew her statement so no evidence was offered. DJ made the finding which secured the tenancy for her and the undertakings. She was in tears for much of the proceedings and needed support and representation - he was able by representing himself to attempt to take advantage of her but legal representation for her and the DJ prevented ongoing abuse of her by him.

I have not deal with legal aid cases for some years but one sticks out from my previous experience. A woman was cohabiting with her (abusive) partner, who was a police officer. They had a child together. When I first met with her she was very subdued, found it difficult to discuss matters with me. At the time her hair was falling out due to the difficulties she was under. She was living in his home and had not rights of occupation as a cohabitee. She was scared to apply for an injunction because he had threatened her many times that she would not be believed because he was a police officer. However after she moved into a flat, he continued to harass and threaten her, sitting outside her flat, shouting through the letterbox for hours at a time. Children Act proceedings were commenced to try and arrange contact at set times and to prevent the collection/return of the child being from her home. Eventually she agreed to apply for an injunction, which was successful. Even at this he continued with her pressure indirectly, attempting to leave not just clothes, but a kitten in the reception at the firm where I was employed. Eventually he took notice of the injunction and she was able to rebuild her life. When her matter was concluded, she was a bright individual and her hair was no longer falling out. She could not have dealt with the children matters without legal assistance.

Although my current firm does not have a Legal Aid franchise at the moment, I have in the past worked for many firms that do. I have assisted many clients with Injunctions in the past which has resulted in the domestic violence ceasing. However, there have been clients that the domestic violence did persist although an Injunction was in place and Legal Aid was granted to the client for enforcement proceedings. I am not sure whether the clients would have been able to pursue enforcement proceedings if Legal Aid was not available.

Too many to recount. Legal Aid is an essential service for women experiencing

domestic abuse.

I represent women all the time that are legally aided. They are often confused by the system, overwhelmed, traumatised, etc. By providing robust advice and representation and making sure that they understand the process and where they are in it, then the burden of the proceedings must be eased. I recently represented a woman who had previously been representing herself in a contact application by her violent ex-husband. Although articulate outside of court she would apparently become practically speechless and several orders had been made by a FPC that I am confident would not have been had she been represented. She told me that she could not even express what a relief it was to now have representation at the court hearings.

I have represented a female victim of the Asian community who was responding to her husband's application for contact with their child. It was only when she was represented by (female) legal representatives at court was she able to disclose the reason she was refusing contact was because she had been repeatedly raped by her husband, and feared for her child's safety. She had not confided in her extended family due to shame and fear of reprisals. Her legal team were then able to help her contact the police and put the necessary protective measures and orders in place. I do not believe she would ever have disclosed such serious abuse if she had not had direct face to face contact with a professional who understood her situation. The mother would certainly have never picked up the phone to speak to an 'operator' to enquire about her legal rights.

I have helped many women gain protective orders in family cases. However, I do not agree with the current practice of refusing to refer to mediation any person alleging domestic abuse. Mediation may be suitable in such cases and they should be assessed on an individual basis.

They are too numerous to document.

One recent example was a young mother of two who had been borough through marriage from Pakistan to the UK. She was subject to frequent and extreme abuse from all members of the father's family and the father, including verbal degradation, being hit, made to stay up all night as a punishment and burnt with hot oil. Her children were removed from her care by the family if she displeased them. Eventually she was made to live with the father's sister, who orchestrated a gang rape of her. She eventually fled to a refuge. The family issued residence and contact applications. Ultimately the court accepted all of her allegations. There had been, however, no preceding injunction or criminal convictions.

Ancillary relief. Only asset the secure tenancy on the property that had been the parties' home for many years. Wife elderly but not unwell and informed by LA unlikely to be rehoused for some time if the tenancy went to the Husband. The court concluded the Husband was cohabiting with a new partner and only seeking the tenancy to punish the Wife and awarded the tenancy to the Wife. Without legal aid she could not have pursued the proceedings as she had no funds, or prospect of funds, to pay a lawyer and the likely result was the very forceful Husband would have retained the tenancy, making the wife homeless.

Too many to put in here. Constantly happening. one young 18 year old yesterday in an abusive relationship. Making ex parte applications for non-mol, residence and pso. She would still be with her abusive partner if it were not for legal aid. She has a 9 month old baby.

I acted for an Indian Lady who came to me via women's aid having suffered years of physical abuse by her husband. She had 4 children 2 of whom were disabled following severe chastisement by the husband who regularly beat them with a hard sandal if they in his view misbehaved. It was his view that culturally he was at liberty to beat the children. I obtained an injunction for her and advised her to go to the police and having given a 69 page statement the man was charged with several counts of abuse including sexual assault and received an 8 year prison sentence. As a result his conduct was taken into account in ancillary relief proceedings and she retained the matrimonial home outright for the benefit of her and the children. After the case concluded she sent me a thank you card which said that I changed her life the day she walked into my office. This lady was in receipt of state benefits and had absolutely no means of obtaining private funding for legal services. Her family would not help her financially as they did not approve of her complaint against her husband. She would not have had the courage or knowledge of remedies to go to the police or to obtain an injunction by herself. Without legal aid she would still be in the house with a violent husband, provided of course that he had not murdered her by now!

Very young mother sought advice re domestic violence & private children issues. Had been physically & mentally abused by older partner for years. Threats to snatch child. Partner took drugs & was unpredictable. Partner's violence left on physical marks. Took a huge amount of courage to seek legal advice

Numerous, but because of the volume of work we have to do and are already underfunded I really don't have time to tell you about them.

Confined to private law and financial relief:

- (i) women put out of the house living in Refuge with children able to return after AR process and secure Order to stop father having contact, save as supervised and safe for the children; rather than having to leave the area, to live in a Refuge with the children out of school
- (ii) woman who had been abused for years, Father would come and see her in her flat, despite Restraining Orders and periods in prison, Children's Services threatened to take the child from her care if she allowed him in so she HAD to get injunctions and private law Orders to stop contact; if she did not her child would be removed ( there were at this time no public law proceedings); Orders made to protect Mother and to stop all contact;
- (iii) lady in her 70s who moved out of her home due to violence from her husband; he refuses to give her any money, or to give her any money to compensate her interest in the house which remains in his sole name; needs ancillary relief;
- (iv) mother of children murdered by their father who threatened maternal grandmother; maternal grandmother needed legal aid to secure private law orders for the children else only the murderer father (convicted of murder now) should be the only person with parental responsibility;

I have many stories. For example, ancillary relief cases where homelessness was possible or assets hidden, cases where serious violence only comes out much later, children cases where a vulnerable mother was being put under pressure by CAFCASS.

Very few of my clients would have access to legal aid if cut in this way

I have lots of stories! I think most injunctions I have dealt with have been funded by legal aid and on a private basis it is very expensive and therefore women would be less inclined to obtain the protection they require.

Almost every other case I do involves a woman who would be in an intolerable position if she had to represent herself. One example is an ancillary relief (financial division on divorce) case, where the Husband tried to hide his wealth by putting everything in his friend's name. I took me 3 days of prep and 3 days in court to prove that he was hiding his wealth. The Wife would have had no chance of doing this on her own. The Husband was reported by the judge for benefit fraud. Therefore this case saved the tax-payer significant amounts in the long term: (1) the money which the Wife would otherwise have had to claim in benefits and (2) the benefits the Husband was claiming while leaving everything in his friend's name.

Some solicitors are better than others and specialise in different areas - not all solicitors on the dv panel even do any dv. Client should be able to choose which sol she consults - the trust and relationship between them is vital, we are expecting her to open up and tell us the most horrendous things. Client may have consulted a solicitor previously so she may well want to go back to someone who knows the history of the case. Families of a murder victim don't have a different family liaison officer each day. You cannot be clinical about this type of work, certain solicitors will get a client to open up and others won't - it is a skill that can't be tested by a panel membership but most refuges know who they would recommend. This will be totally counterproductive and will cost more as victims will not get the help they need and will remain in abusive situations for longer. Clients need to be encouraged to take action and need to have trust and confidence in the solicitor... Women will die if these proposals come to fruition it's as simple as that.

A great many over the years!

The one who always sticks out in my mind was a woman with 3 children who had been in several abusive relationships and had 3 children with a man who had significant mental health problems and was one of the 2 men I have met in 15 years at the Bar who actually made me so nervous that I had a plan of how to escape court quickly if he reacted badly during cross-examination. When I first met her, her fear of him was palpable. She shook, could barely speak louder than a whisper and looked ill at Court. It took a long time to convince her that she could even give evidence at the "Re L" hearing of her allegations of severe domestic abuse (both physically violent and, possibly more destructively, psychologically violent) All the allegations were found proved and the proceedings continued over a number of months (I think around 18 months) thereafter. The Father failed to accept the findings or engage with DVIP. By the time the proceedings concluded, my client had utterly changed. She had faced her abuser, had been believed, had accepted wholeheartedly the need for her to have protective therapeutic input herself (which she only managed to get on the NHS as a result of the expert reports in the case) had found a much more healthy relationship and re-entered education. She intended to become a DV worker herself helping women in similar situations to her. The turnaround was quite remarkable and I cannot think it would have been achieved in any other way than her having a legal team which was consistent and could help her at every stage of the proceedings.

A woman who was at immense physical and emotional risk together with her children managed to secure an occupation order and non-molestation against the violent partner for a significant period (18 months). She was funded by legal aid as she did not receive any of her own income due to her husband controlling the family finances. This is a gender discriminatory question - you should be ashamed of yourself for making sexist comments. These issues apply to both men and women.

I do, but I do not have time to write this now. I work in a legal aid firm. I work extremely hard for very little pay. I have trained significantly and have a first class law degree, a masters in law with distinction and have been called to the Bar. However, the

necessity of this type of work drives me on. I am actually very tired right now and cannot muster enough mental energy to conclude effectively. While I have many examples to give, I would prefer to ponder over a particular example and will email this if I can think of an appropriate story to tell.

A woman resigned from her job after lengthy periods of sick leave as a result of the bullying and race discrimination she was experiencing at work. She went straight onto incapacity benefit. Legal Aid (legal help scheme) helped her to bring a Tribunal claim, settle the claim for a very significant sum (over £40,000 - approximately 18 months net salary), a statement of regret and an excellent agreed employment reference. After the conclusion of her case, she felt well enough again to start a new job

I recently represented a Iranian woman who was in the UK on a spouse visa. She was a victim of domestic violence and her marriage broke down. As a result she suffered PTSD, depression and anxiety. She was completely alone in the UK, save for her abusive husband. She called the police following an attack by her husband and was referred to CAB for advice. CAB then referred her to a solicitor for assistance with her divorce proceedings. She was granted legal aid and they helped her gain access to her home and financial support whilst her divorce was going through. The same solicitors also dealt with her immigration appeal through legal aid when her husband informed the Home Office that the marriage had broken-down and curtailed her leave. She was severely depressed and found it difficult to assist her lawyers prepare the appeal. She regularly broke down in tears and found the whole process extremely tiring and hopeless. If she was dealing with the matter herself, I am sure she would have given up. Following thorough preparation by her solicitors her appeal was successful and allowed by the Immigration Judge on the spot.

I had a client who obtained a domestic violence injunction when she started divorce proceeding, all covered by legal aid. The husband was very violent and aggressive and had made threats to take the children away. About two years later he attempted suicide and actually said the children were not safe with him then demanded contact so we obtained an ex parte prohibited steps order preventing him removing the children from the Mother or school (which he would have been entitled to as he had parental responsibility) The children had also been exhibiting behaviour traits that were worrying and the Mother thought they related to the father's erratic behaviour. We requested psychological reports and then the father abandoned his application for contact. If the new rules come in this client would not have been granted legal aid as the dv was more than 12 months ago and there was no recent violence but I really dread what would have happened if I had not been able to obtain an Order, I had serious concerns for the safety of the children, especially in light of recent father murder/suicides

In 2008, I was instructed by a woman (S) from Ghana. S had been subjected to extreme physical, emotional and particularly sexual violence by her older brother from a very young age. Despite reporting him to other family members and the police, nobody did anything. She became pregnant twice and had to undergo 2 abortions and had extensive scarring including cigarette burns in her vagina. Eventually S came to the UK with her family, and was able to escape and claim asylum. S instructed us to work on her asylum matter. Given her nationality, it was of immediate importance to argue that her case should not be certified as "clearly unfounded" by the Home Office and to evidence the abuse she had suffered. I was able to obtain a medical report into this and also did country research on Ghana S had never told anyone about the abuse she had suffered and found it immensely difficult to discuss. She exhibited very high levels of fear of her family locating her and forcing her back to this situation, particularly our ongoing worry that as Ghana is considered a safe country, she could

be forced back there before her appeal had been heard. Fortunately owing to our hard work and S's courage in trusting enough to disclose the full facts of her claim, we were able to argue that there was no effective system of protection in Ghana against this type of abuse and she was granted asylum directly from the Home Office. S is now training to be a midwife in the UK and continues to send cards to our organisation on a yearly basis thanking us for helping her have the opportunity to rebuild her life.

Too many to particularise. These clients come in cowed - they believe they are worthless. Having someone believe them when they say that the absolutely charming man they married/live with (as many perpetrators are very social and charming outwardly) can behave in the way they describe brings a palpable sense of relief. Knowledge that they do not have to leave the family home or leave the children with their abusive partner (because they have been told for so long that they are useless and couldn't run the home on their own/are a useless mother/no one would believe them etc) again brings a palpable sense of relief. Knowledge that despite having no money (financial control having been exerted as well as isolation - losing job/refusing permission to work etc) funding would be available - possibly with conditions as to repayment - to assist them in retaining their children/family home and protecting them from further abuse again brings a palpable sense of relief. I cannot begin to imagine the scenario that that is carried out on the phone, requires proof of domestic violence etc - what happens when a woman is violently beaten and/or raped continuously throughout her relationship, gets the strength together to leave but cannot face or does not have the energy to then seek settlement of finances/protect the children by insisting on supervised contact until months later - the evidence of rape has gone, the police were probably not called - where is the evidence? but the perpetrator is dangerous - how does that woman face being cross examined in court by him? I have seen special measures in place - believe me they do not lower the anxiety levels of the witness. I have always been proud to practice law - however I despair at the current suggestions for reform.

I had a client who had been subject to domestic servitude/slavery in Saudi for 10 years before managing to flee her employers/abusers whilst they were on holiday. Her asylum claim failed as there were no provisions for trafficking victims and she was told she could go to her country of origin. She was homeless for a number of years and suffered from serious mental health problems. She was on anti-psychotics, could not stand loud voices and felt everyone looked down on her and that she was dirty. The Adjudicator had accepted she had suffered abuse in Saudi but that she could return to her country of origin. I had to build her trust and eventually through the help of her psychiatrist discovered she had suffered years of sexual abuse by her brother which is one of the reasons she could not return to her country of origin. She had also been raped a number of times whilst in Saudi, whilst also suffering other abuse. I had to take a statement of her abuse at the hands of her brother as otherwise the HO would not accept this. The onus is on the Applicant to provide evidence. She cried throughout the two-three hours whilst we did this and felt she was a very dirty person. She was brave by disclosing this to me and she obtained ILR. Without legal aid she would have continued to suffer and her mental health would have worsened. She was very ill and needed someone to go through issues in a gentle manner. She was haunted by her previous Hearing where there had been a lot of raised voices and due to her culture was unable to disclose what had happened to her, as abuse and mental health problems are a taboo.

I had a client who was Polish and had moved here with her husband and three children. She was subjected to significant and prolonged violence over a 20 year period. He was an alcoholic. She failed to report anything to the police as she could

not speak any English. She thought that her husband had the right to do this to her. She was referred through Women's Aid after she left her husband following an assault where she feared he would kill her. She was homeless and had to leave her three children behind. She would return to check on the children, whereupon she would be assaulted in their presence. We managed to assist her in proceedings, and obtained injunctive orders. The Father objected to the return of the children and they were eventually made subject to care proceedings. Following protracted proceedings, all three children were eventually returned to her care, with limited contact to their Father. She divorced her husband and was able to get on with her life.

a young girl who was forced into hiding as a result of HBV and FM threat, we obtained a FMPO using legal aid and then obtained a certificate of approval to marry so she and father of baby could be married before baby born to stop her being at risk of further HBV in her new relocation area.

a young girl who was forced to marry and register the birth of her baby listing husband as father when in fact he was not the father! obtain declaration of parentage. prevented children from being forced to live with violent father by ensuring fact finding was held and findings acted on in our client's favour. she had been cast out of paternal home and sent 300 miles away and had not seen children for 12 months.

For the sake of balance, I have a story of a man who has been helped by legal aid. The matter was listed for a finding of fact hearing as the woman had made many serious allegations about domestic violence, including rape. She was prone to panic attacks and a medical report confirmed that she could give evidence in court but that the father should be outside of the court and listen in over a video link. He would not be able to see her over the video link. When it was the father's turn to give evidence, the mother watched his evidence via video link via a separate location. It was essential that the parties were both represented; if not then (i) the mother would have had to ask direct questions of the father and/or (ii) the father would have had to have asked direct questions of the mother. This would in all likelihood have resulted in the mother having a panic attack and the case would be unable to progress. Under the new system proposed this case would not have been able to proceed. The point of the fact finding was to determine whether the father should have contact with his child, and potentially whether the child had been given a false belief system by her mother that she had been abused. It was found that the mother was lying. The case is ongoing but the child should now have to opportunity to form a bond with her father, and be told that she was not abused. If the outcome had been the opposite one - that the mother was telling the truth - then this would never have been able to be established as whilst she may be granted legal aid under the new system (there was an ex-parte injunction in place), the father would have had to represent himself, and cross exam her directly, and this would simply have been too much for the mother to cope with. There is a complete failure in the green paper to understand that women not only need their own lawyer, they need their ex to have the benefit of a lawyer, and otherwise they will face being directly questioned by them in court.

Over thirty years I have acted for countless women who have been given the courage to act by virtue of having legal aid. Often they did not realise that they could be protected from domestic violence and have had their lives transformed. I had one client who was stabbed by her partner in front of her two children. With the benefit of legal aid she was able to obtain an injunction and also orders protecting the children, including changing their names. Without legal aid she would not have been able to get the protection she and her children needed.

There are so many - not able to disclose particular details.

I have seen a lady from the Philippines who was married to someone from the UK for

10 + years. She worked as a nurse. Her husband became disabled and required extensive care; although she continued to work she also took care of him and injured her back whilst attending to him. At some point, her husband stated that she needed a break and sent her home to the Philippines for a short holiday. On her return, her husband had changed the locks and refused to talk to her. A friend had moved into help. He provided no explanation for wanting to separate and told her to pay him back the ticket for the Philippines. She was a devoted wife and in fact the inference was that he was in a relationship with the male friend who was at the property when she returned from holiday. She had nowhere to go, little money, and a few debts. When I saw her she'd already been separated from her husband for over 1.5 years but she was still distraught and shocked at what had happened despite the love and kindness she had shown him. Without legal aid, she would not have any representation at ancillary relief proceedings and she was not in a position to represent herself as she was emotional, did not have any money and could not understand the system, including the law and procedure.

I have represented many victims of domestic violence. One woman who remains clear in my mind was somebody who sought injunctive relief after her Husband smashed her face into a tile floor causing serious injury. She followed through a prosecution although in the end a plea was accepted to common assault. The Husband hotly pursued contact with the party's son through contact proceedings. He acted in person. The Husband terrorised the Wife by damaging her car, standing outside her home, sending unpleasant messages to her and her friends on facebook and driving by to make threats as she collected the son from school. The child who was 7 desperately wanted contact with his father. There were many Court hearings at which the Wife remained extremely scared of the Husband. I cannot imagine how she would have coped had she had to act in person.

I specialise in domestic violence - in private family proceedings, immigration, housing and welfare benefits. without legal aid, all of my clients would still be in abusive relationships, with their children unsafe and harmed as well as themselves. Many of them would eventually have been killed by their abusive partners. These cuts will not just make the situation a little more difficult for those already suffering - it puts people in immediate danger of their lives.

Client was here as a dependant of an EU Worker. She herself was a non-EU national. She had dependent children. At the time of death her husband was receiving Jobseekers' Allowance. He died abroad. She applied for Income Support and was refused due to the Right to Reside test. The decision was appealed and successful at the First Tier Tribunal. The DWP did not accept the decision and appealed the matter to the Upper Tribunal. Representations were made and the Upper Tribunal found in her favour. She has now received arrears but was without any payment for nearly three years.

Having been working in a large family law department for three years, there are many stories. One particular case involved a woman whose ex partner was serving a second custodial sentence for assaulting her. He clearly had no regard for her wishes to be left alone and when due to be released from prison began contacting her to again issues threats to her safety. As a result we issued an urgent application for a Non Molestation Order. The client was not working due to having two young children and was in receipt of benefits, therefore there was no way that she would have been able to afford to instruct us to issue proceedings on a privately paying basis, nor would she have been able to write her own affidavit in support of the application. The protection was clearly needed and the Order was obtained without any difficulty, the District Judge being horrified by the nature of the attacks on our client. The order was

served on the Respondent and the police and lasted for a year, which was essential for our client's protection. Without this our client was in doubt she could have been killed, taking legal representation away for these vulnerable people could well result in more fatalities.

I was helped by legal aid when my husband walked out on myself and our two young children. He gave no support (despite being well paid) and stopped paying the mortgage immediately. My legal aid solicitor saved me literally. Matters were so bad I could not have taken anymore without that support.

My situation (along with the help of tax credits) allowed me to re-train and study, whilst my children slept and I am now a qualified Associate Legal Executive. I have in turn been able to help others in the same situation that would otherwise have resulted in long term unemployment and possible public law child proceedings.

Where to begin - I have so many ! Women who have hesitated whilst I patiently advise them but then take action and are freed of living in an abusive environment. To see them re-empowered after many years of abuse is rewarding. And to see their children blossom outside of the shadow of divorce. One particular woman I saw was grossly underweight and lacking in self esteem, and her children were anxious and confused. After working through the domestic abuse issues with injunctions (with the benefit of immediate legal aid through devolved powers), and then resolving the financial and children issues, which were coloured by the spectre of the abuse, I am happy to say she is healthier, back to a proper weight, back to work in her capacity of midwife (thus again providing a much valued skill to society), her children are growing in confidence and again doing well at school, and she has recently got re married and is expecting another child. (And I was invited to her wedding !) None of this would have been possible without legal aid financing all aspects, but the state will recoup the money through the statutory charge as there was a property, but also through her reintroduction into the work market, and through the children's better adjustment. not in my current incarnation - countless when i worked in legal aid practice, I have many cases of women helped by access to legal aid. Many of my clients cannot speak English and would not be able to speak represent themselves at court. If they have been victims of domestic violence and due to family pressure or fear they have not reported it to the police, they would be too frightened to face the perpetrator by themselves.

It is difficult to pin down one story. Our firm helps thousands of women in all kinds of family cases. There are so many people who are going to be affected if the proposals are implemented. It is a frightening prospect that vulnerable people won't have access to justice.

The majority of the women I act for have the benefit of legal aid. I assist them with all aspects of post-separation issues, including injunctive relief, housing, divorce/ancillary relief, residence and contact. I also work with women whose children are in the care system and women within the mental health arena. Most are to some level dysfunctional, be that as a result of years of abuse (DV, drug, alcohol or the long-term effects of childhood abuse)- if they were not it is unlikely they would be in legal proceedings. They struggle to understand how they have ended up in the situation they are in, they are often scared and overwhelmed and do not know what to do for the best. Many are not capable of reading or understanding all documents presented to them due to being of low intellect or poor education. I often find myself advising on matters beyond those immediately before the court- I can feel like a relationship counsellor. I have to deliver bad news, such as a baby is going to be removed shortly after birth and may never return. This is not easy work, but often the court expresses gratitude for the sensible advice given to the client and the way the case has been

presented to the court- I consider my job is often to make a very painful process as painless as possible.

I cannot comprehend how many of my clients would have fared in the legal system without someone on hand to guide them through both the legal process and help them through the emotional fallout of mess they are in. There are other occasions where the future has looked bleak at the beginning of the case, but through advice, referrals to appropriate support services and robust representation of the client in court the outcome has been far more favourable than could ever have been predicted at the beginning. If there had been no lawyer fighting for the client, helping them through each step, the outcome may have been very different. The outcomes of these cases effect generations of people. The children who are subject to legal proceedings or affected by decisions today are the parents of tomorrow and the decisions of the court have profound effects on who they end up being.

I have helped numerous women over the years in relation to getting protection from domestic violence and I have watched them, through the legal process, blossom from people with no self confidence into strong independent women - all thanks to legal advice and assistance through the legal aid system. One lady in particular sticks in my mind. When she first came to me she had no self confidence and was letting her former partner walk all over her, he was emotionally harming the children and was constantly stalking the client and the children. A non-molestation order was obtained and it was breached on numerous occasions and committal proceedings following in the County Court due to the Police failing to enforce the non-molestation order. Findings were made against her former partner on more than one occasion and the eldest child gave evidence via a DVD that was done by the Police. This was compelling evidence in the county court and admissions were made in relation to the breaches which resulted in a suspended sentence. Contact was stopped by the court and psychological assessments obtain on both the adults and the two children. The perpetrator was identified as a risk of carrying out further violence towards the client and of emotional harming the children. The children also spoke to CAFCASS and they made it very clear they did not want any further contact with their father due to his behaviour towards their mother and towards them. They had witnessed domestic violence during the party's relationship. I truly believe that if it was not for legal aid and the court system stepping in, this lady and her children would still be subjected to what can only be described as serious domestic abuse.

I have been representing a client for years, who initially so implacably hostile to the idea of the father of the child having contact, that no contact took place for the 1st 5 years of the child's life. The hostility came about because of DV the mother had experienced at the hands of the father, however, mother's attitude to contact meant that the court had little sympathy for the mother. Mother initially had different solicitors, but having transferred to my firm, she was put in touch with various charities such as Women's Aid, where she was provided with Counselling and a key worker who have provided the mother with support in the area of her continued dealings with her ex partner, as the father of her child. In addition, the law in this area was clearly outlined to the mother who was advised that contact would happen, either on her terms, or the Courts - hence mother started making suggestions for practical ways that contact could take place, and contact gradually moved on. The case is still ongoing, however the father now has fortnightly contact with the child on Fridays and Saturdays, and there is an order for overnight contact if the child wishes to stay. The child, now 11, chooses not to. Father continues to approach the case in an aggressive and belligerent manner, having issued an application for a residence order which was dismissed, we are currently involved in enforcement proceedings, where the father has been advised by a judge, who had to recuse herself from the case for voicing her

opinion to strenuously, that he has no prospect of succeeding in his application as the mother is clearly making the child available for reasonable contact, and his application is seriously flawed. The father, who pays privately for representation refuses to drop it, continuing his abuse against the mother, Although the DV was reported to the police, the father was never charged with an offence, and mother never sought an injunction. This mother would not be entitled to legal aid under the new proposals, and had mother not had access to a solicitor, the father would never have had contact. At the start of this case mother would have gone to prison rather than allow contact, which would have had a devastating effect on the child, and the relationship between the father and the child, as the child would have seen her father not only as the perpetrator of violence, but as the reason for her mother being sent to prison.

Many years ago I acted for a client who had suffered in silence for years from domestic violence. She was very upset and took ages to build trust and gain full info about what had been experienced. Allied for injunction/committal/divorce/finances and her whole life/future was transformed as she had protection and support from agencies for dv and also legal support she relied on and trusted.

father wrongfully alleged M had abducted children to UK after she fled from DV. F sought contact, children opposed contact. F alleged M was hostile. Cafcass raised serious concerns if contact were to be ordered and a 'no order' was made to protect children. F lied on Form E about assets leaving M and children on state benefits while he had almost £million - constant applications to court for interlocutory orders necessary with eventual award enabling M to purchase home for children and able to maintain her children without need for state benefits.

many many women who have been able to live safely with children as a result of obtaining PSO, NMO and OO, with transfer of tenancies or property adjustment orders in properties to which they have rights.