

BAN Homelessness Case Studies

Case study 1

Melida arrived from Ecuador to the UK in 1997 as an asylum seeker. The Home office rejected her claim for asylum, but as it would still be perilous for her to return to her country of origin she appealed the Home Office's decision several times and was unsuccessful. Unable to return to her country, Melida made the difficult choice to stay in the UK.

Based on her immigration situation and her inability to speak English, Melida was only able to get low-paid cleaning jobs, which inevitably led her to work for unscrupulous bosses and supervisors who taking advantage of her situation ended up abusing her. She continued with this situation for up to 14 years. During most of this time she relied on charity and the help of friends to find places to sleep. She was also suffering from health and emotional problems compounded by the feelings of hopelessness and depression caused by her previous traumatic situation and missing her family.

Melida was very tired of never having a stable home situation, and having to rely on her few friends to offer her a sofa or a mattress to rest for the night before embarking on her daily cleaning jobs. Being the house guest sleeping in the common areas meant that she was unable to sleep through the night, had no privacy and also had to adapt to her hosts timetable and household routines which usually meant having to go to bed after everybody else finished using the common areas. Melida's homelessness situation went on for a long time; it reached the stage where her friends could no longer have her in their homes. When she had a fall out with a friend she ended up sleeping rough in the streets.

LAWRS helped Melida by arranging for her to meet with an immigration lawyer who was able to secure her Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. Furthermore, LAWRS helped Melida to register with a GP so that she could get help with her health problems and helped her to add her name to the waiting list for social housing.

Because of Melida's improved legal status in the UK, LAWRS helped her obtain a job legally where she is contributing to taxes and national insurance. As a result of LAWRS' efforts Melida was eventually

successful following an interview with Women's Pioneer Housing Association. Now, she lives in her own studio flat which she can afford to pay for with her own money.

Melida does not speak much English and does not know how to navigate the system in the UK. She was scared of approaching mainstream organisations as a result of her language and cultural barriers and her immigration status in the UK. If it had not been for LAWRS' intervention Melida will still be sleeping rough in the streets.

Case Study 2

Background

Client is in her early 30's now, long history of ill health, suffers from severe mental health conditions including hallucinations, personality disorder, Depression with history of suicide attempts, also has TB, chest pain, breathing difficulty and mobility problems. She had arrived from Bangladesh some years ago to join her husband in UK. However he could not cope with her mental health and abandoned her and left her on the streets with no one to turn to. She was assisted by a stranger who found her after a few days and has now become her sole friend and carer and she now lives alone in private rented accommodation.

Advice

She was referred to us by her support worker after she had been found fit for work by Employment and Support Allowance and after appeal process, obtaining and presenting medical evidence, she won her appeal at Tribunal hearing and was awarded ESA. During this time we had to assist her with rent and council tax issues as housing and council benefit were affected by non payment of ESA. We also identified that she was eligible for Disability Living Allowance, assisted her to claim and am currently in the appeal process for this as it has been refused.

Her housing situation was not much better as she is on the 3rd floor unlifted property with very poor mobility. Inside her home, the bedroom is in the loft accessed by a step ladder and she simply cannot access the bedroom and has to sleep on living room floor. In addition to this, the changes in local housing allowances which came into affect earlier this year meant that as someone under 35 her benefit was capped and there was now a shortfall in her benefit which she could not afford to pay and her landlord was harassing her to leave.

We assisted her in making a 'homeless from home' application on grounds of affordability and unsuitable accommodation on health grounds and this is being processed. The exemptions for the benefit cap could not be met until she was awarded DLA so we applied for Discretionary housing payment to cover shortfall in her housing benefit, and she been awarded this until April 2013.

The outcome to these issues was

Clients DLA appeal was heard by a Tribunal and allowed at high rate mobility and middle rate care. This means that the benefits cap will not apply to her so she is ok in terms of affordability, however still needs to move on medical grounds. The homeless application was refused and we asked for a review and made full representations and still awaiting a decision on review.