

Case Study from Latin American Women's Rights Service

Maria and her partner come from Colombia and have been living in the UK for more than 15 years. They have British Passports. Maria grew up without parents and was a street child who received no formal education on basic numeracy skills or reading and writing. She met and married a man, 27 years older than her. They had four children, two of which have the Down's syndrome (aged 8 and 6), and subsequently severe learning difficulties. Maria's husband is 66 years old and registered disabled.

Maria had to give up her job recently to look after her disabled children and her husband. This put the family in a difficult financial situation. The family had accrued around £30,000 of debt whilst Maria had been working in low-paid, unskilled jobs. They accumulated rent and council tax arrears. In addition, disability related expenses left them with a significant shortfall in income every month.

Maria approached LAWRS to request help with their financial problems. She has been unable to approach other organisations because she does not have a very good command of the English language. LAWRS specialists service on housing, homelessness and debts assisted in the negotiations with their creditors to agree manageable debt repayments. They also helped Maria to complete the forms and claim Disability Living Allowance for their two disabled children.

Furthermore, LAWRS contacted the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP&HMR&C) setting out Maria's husband's case. He was suffering from psychosomatic pain and general distress. The DWP&HMR&C allowed them to continue receiving the benefit which has considerably reduced the severe stress that Maria's husband was experiencing. With LAWRS' help Maria is also receiving counselling, which is helping her manage her stress and providing a positive outcomes to a very challenging situation.

The specialist services at LAWRS enabled Maria to get through their financial difficulties which were made worse by her illiteracy, and her inability to fill in forms and understand English. Without our specialist services, Maria, her husband and their children would have been left in a critical situation.