

Case Study 4

Domestic violence



While delivering the 'It's Your Child's Life' programme to a group in another deprived inner city area, we met a very young, vulnerable mum whose child, according to the head teacher, had very poor attendance and punctuality. Our programme had been recommended to her as her child was struggling in all areas of school life both academically and emotionally.

During one of our sessions mum came in quite late. She was clearly shaken and was clutching her injured hand. At the end of the session she told us that she had been injured when her violent ex-partner was trying to get access to her son. This man habitually turned up at her door at school time demanding to see her child. On these occasions she would shut him safely in the house until he left. Sometimes he would hang around so they stay in the house and not leave until she was sure he had gone. On this particular morning she had been injured in the process of protecting her son.

Her son's poor punctuality, poor attendance and his inability to focus and stay calm were a direct result of the threats of violence against the mum and the threat to take her son. We spoke to her about the help available for those suffering from domestic violence but she was reluctant to access help 'again'. She told us she felt ashamed using the service again as she had been in more than one abusive relationship. Somehow she had grown to believe it was her own fault.

Eventually she agreed that she did need help but did not have the confidence to ask for it so she allowed me to contact the local Domestic Violence Service with her in attendance and to make an appointment on her behalf. She also understood the need for us to speak with the school's Safeguarding Officer so that they could gain further support for both her and her child. This was the first step on her road to getting an injunction taken out against her violent ex-partner.

'It's Your Child's Life' was aware of another programme where they offered short-stay holidays and residentials for struggling families in the local area. We informed the school of this excellent opportunity and, later that year, we were told that a holiday had been offered to this mum and son as a reward for much improved attendance, punctuality and general all-round improvement. It was clearly evident that dealing effectively with their domestic violence struggles was a massive achievement and the catalyst needed for providing a calm and happy environment in which they could both thrive.