

# When domestic violence

# HIT

# violence

Hundreds of women are abused and hurt in their own home. But help is at hand in Northampton...

Northampton's Women's Refuge offers victims of domestic violence the chance to escape from a life of misery and pain, to regain their self-confidence and self-esteem, and come out the other side.

Peggy Shilson of Northampton's Women's Aid says times have changed and women do not have to tolerate abuse.

"We are past the days when you had to put up and shut up. You don't have to do that any more," says Peggy. "Most people know it does go on – but they think it's not happening in their street – and it probably is."

"It can be financial, emotional, sexual, or psychological," she added. "It doesn't always involve being battered. The story involving Shelley and Charlie on Coronation Street was an example of this – she just couldn't see what was happening."

For some women, they are not even aware that they are victims.

"I don't think people realize the number of women out there who are suffering at the hands of someone they live with," added Peggy. "It takes a lot of courage for people to come out and talk about it. We have 29 units – they are rooms in houses with shared facilities and we are always all full." And it is believed that many more women are suffering and not seeking help.

"It takes about 35 incidents before a woman will leave," explained Peggy. "And the children suffer as much as the mother. They have seen their mother suffer and they take on the responsibility of the family sometimes and they can make themselves

a protective role over the mother."

And living in a domestic violence situation can be damaging for the children.

"It is still their childhood and they are losing it," she said. "Some women do not realize what's happening to them and they don't see what's happening to the children either."

"When the children go to bed and their mum thinks they are asleep, often they are not and they know that daddy is hurting mummy. They will hear it no matter how much the mother tries to keep the lid on it – they still know it."

But having children can make it even harder to leave.

"It is difficult – a woman may think where do I go? She will not want to move the children from their school and their friends. It takes a lot of courage."

"If a child lives with domestic violence they are often withdrawn and frightened when

they come to us," she added. "They are often possessive and clingy to their mother. Some will have seen their fathers do terrible things to their mothers."

And victims of domestic violence can be any age, class, or situation.

"We had one woman in who had been married 40-odd years and decided she had had enough," said Peggy, "and we've had young girls as young as 15 or 16. They are all so different – there is no such thing as a classic case of domestic violence."

"It doesn't stop women being battered because they are pregnant, we have had many babies born to women staying at a refuge."

The workers at the refuge help women build their confidence, find a home, fight for custody of their children, or offer support on family issues.

"We want to see women come out the other side and we work with them and their family so that they can move on," said Peggy. "They are not on their own. There is help out there and there are various organizations there that are there to help them. They have someone who can answer their questions."

And she added: "Women can phone, or call into the drop in centre and talk through their options. They will receive advice and information and it is all confidential."

"We have had many women here who have been beaten up very badly," added Peggy. "Some women have said to us that coming to us was the best choice they have ever made in their life."

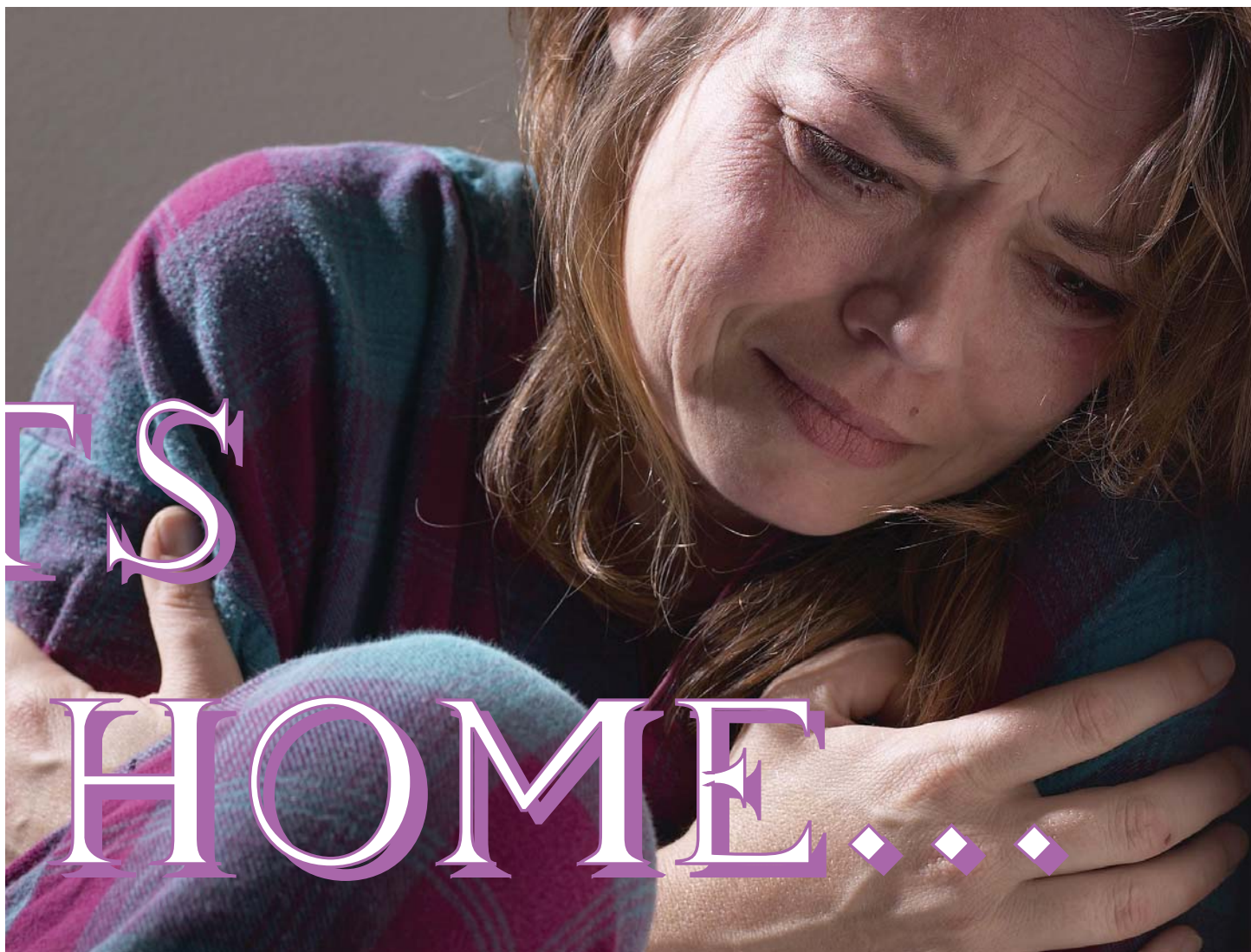
## NORTHAMPTON'S WOMEN'S AID

24 hour helpline  
0845 123 2311

Drop in 9am-5pm  
Monday – Friday

13 Guildhall Road  
Northampton





#### Case Study 1

Mia, 39, has four children, aged 20, 18, 16 and 10.

"I am a Muslim and was in an arranged marriage since the age of 16 and I was getting beaten up by my husband.

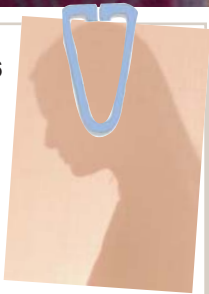
I left when one day he telephoned me and someone had said something to him and he blamed me. He threatened what he was going to do to me when he got home and he was so mad, I thought he was going to kill me. I left all the kids with my next-door neighbour. I took my passport but nothing else. I just went. I had nowhere to go and I lived on the streets for a while. I slept anywhere to get away from the cold and the people. I was still in my home town and I didn't want anyone to see me. I slept in bus shelters or subways. It was a nightmare. You don't go to sleep. Every tiny noise and you think you are going to get raped or killed.

I lived on the streets for a week or two and after that one of my husband's friends found me and beat me up. The police were called and they came and interviewed me. They put me into a women's refuge.

That was four years ago and I've been living in women's refuges ever since. I am so happy that there are refuges and I would say to other girls to not be scared and that you can leave and you can be safe, and there is help out there for you.

The women's refuge has helped me so much and there is a lot of help available – they fight for you and they fight for your children. I fought through the courts to get custody of my daughter and she now lives with me. I don't think I would ever have got my daughter if it wasn't for the help at the Women's Aid.

They have helped me with every single thing and I would be on the streets, a drunk or on drugs, and maybe even a prostitute, if it had not been for the help I was given."



#### Case Study 2

Janice is 34 and has three children aged 14, 6 and a 15 month old baby.

"My ex-husband is a control freak and he wanted to control everything I did. He would follow me when I went out and spy on me, and he would constantly check my phone, and my mileage. I had to check in with him all the time and tell him that I'd left home to drop the kids to school, that I'd dropped them off and was on my way to work, that I'd arrived at work, was going on my lunch break and so on. He did push me about but it was more mental and emotional abuse that I suffered than actually getting beaten up. I was a wreck. He told me I was fat and ugly and I lost any confidence I had. I believed it was my fault. I was breaking down at work. He was convinced I was having an affair with everyone - male or female - if he saw me talking to anyone he thought I was having an affair with them. I wasn't allowed to have any friends and he made me cut off all contact with my family. He told me the only way I was going to leave him was in a box - and he tried to get me to kill myself. Then he threw me out of the house and stopped me getting to see my children. I rented a house and he kept turning up on my doorstep. He was still stalking me and used to phone me up and tell me how many bags of shopping I'd come home with so I know he'd been watching me. He made himself unemployed and I had to pay him maintenance. I went into the refuge because I didn't feel safe. I gave birth to my baby while I was living in a refuge. It was hard living with other people and me and my three kids were sleeping in one room. I've got my own house now and the kids are with me. I wish I'd known about the women's refuge before - I would have gone there years ago. The people at the refuge were a great support - they didn't just put a roof over my head they helped me to sort out my benefits and helped with solicitors and getting a house. They were such a great support."

