



Quiet courage and strength in the face of long-term abuse

Now in her early fifties and a grandmother, Meryl had been in a relationship for ten years with a younger partner, Gerald. Initially he had been an absolute charmer, a “soul-mate”, but after moving in with her, he gradually became more and more controlling. He wanted to know everything that she did – where she was going, who she was seeing, what was talked about. He would “spot check” her phone, and if she was not in the house when he came back from going out, there would be “hell to pay”. She felt he even controlled her in his sleep, as she feared his waking up while she was gone: the hassle was not worth the pain that would follow. There were a number of physical incidents, but for Meryl it was the verbal aggression that was having the biggest impact: worst of all was the threat that if she left him, he would take it out on her grandchildren.

As far as Meryl was concerned, she loved Gerald and she just wanted him to relax, and to feel secure: she had always been faithful to him. She described the situation matter of factly and without any selfpity, blaming his extremely unhappy childhood for his adult behaviour. He would sob continuously after an incident and plead to be given another chance, that it would never happen again. There would follow a quiet period for a short time, before it all started up again

Meryl was referred for support via the local MARAC, a multi agency risk assessment conference. A Hafan Cymru support worker arranged to meet with her at a time it could be confirmed that Gerald was elsewhere. Together they looked at what was needed: safety measures such as having a mobile phone from the local Public Protection Unit, to be kept hidden for use in an emergency; a written plan of action in the event of another incident brewing; the availability of the Freedom Programme run by Hafan Cymru facilitators, to help re-build her self-esteem; and a range of numbers and internet sites that could be accessed 24 hours, whenever Meryl could safely make contact.

It made a huge difference to Meryl to know that so many people were quietly there in the background to support her. Over the next few months she managed to attend a few sessions of the Freedom Programme, and grew in understanding that however much Gerald had suffered as a child, that was no excuse for treating her the way he did. Contact with others who had experienced domestic abuse also helped, building her confidence and giving her the strength finally to separate. She now wants to support others herself, in a voluntary capacity.