

CASE STUDY (1) LOUISE* - ENGLAND

LOUISE'S STORY

I am 18 years old and I have been working in the sex industry since I was 15. My childhood was unhappy and I was raped by my father when I was 11 years old. My Mum stood by him and refused to believe me, so I was taken into care. I felt very alone. When Mum and Dad split up, I returned home. My Mum had got a new boyfriend by now. When Mum was out of the house he would give me cannabis, and as time passed he gave me stronger drugs like cocaine. He also gave me presents- jewellery, nice under wear. Stuff like that. For the first time in my life I felt loved. Soon we started to have sex and when I got pregnant and my Mum found out she threw me and him out of the house.

By now I was dependent on him and I was also taking cocaine daily. He asked me to sleep with some men as a favour one weekend- he said he owed them money and this would clear his debt. For him I did it. Next time he asked me to do the same I had to go to Birmingham and spend a week in someone's house. He disappeared and left me there. He didn't come back for two whole weeks.

This became the pattern – I would get taken to a place somewhere in the UK for a period of time, usually a private house and he was paid when I had sex with men, and then we would come and collect me and take me on to the next place.

By this time he had become argumentative and critical of me, telling me that I was an ugly bitch and threatening to leave me. This terrified me as by now I was dependent on heroin supplied by him. All my confidence had gone.

I had to do things that I'm not proud of such as being filmed having sex with a number of men at the same time, which went onto the internet and other men paid to watch it live.

I wanted out of this life, but I didn't know where to go for help, or even who could help me. I wasn't in any one place long enough to make friends. I did try once and I was caught. He told me that if I tried it again I was dead. I knew he had a gun.

I was in a private house in Leeds, and one night he beat me so badly because I had refused a punter. He took me to A & E. They kept me in hospital for a few days as I had injuries to my head. During this time Leeds Women's Aid contacted (at the request of a lovely nurse) and told me what help was available.

They offered me a space in their refuge. I was too scared to go straight away and too worried about my heroin needs being met. And being killed.

They gave me a mobile phone to contact them on (which I kept secret) and from time to time I contacted them on their 24 hour helpline. They arranged a methadone programme for me, a place in their refuge and transport to be taken to the refuge safely. It took months of planning.

I know I've come a long way and it's been hard. But it is worth it.

*** This is not her real name.**