

Citizens Advice: The Beginning of a Lifeline for those Experiencing Domestic Abuse

When we think of Citizens Advice, images of benefit and debt advice often spring to mind. Yet, for many, it's more than a source of support; it's the beginning of a lifeline.

For many people affected by domestic abuse, the fear of retaliation or societal judgment keeps them silent, bearing the weight of trauma alone. But, for one such individual, Citizens Advice emerged as the lifeline that helped her take back control of her life.

Lara's Story of Silent Suffering

Lara (name changed for privacy) had been enduring emotional and physical abuse from her partner for years. Like many in her situation, Lara believed she had no way out and feared the repercussions of seeking help. In addition, her partner had run up unmanageable debts in her name.

Initially, Lara approached Citizens Advice for financial advice. Yet, as she spoke with the advisor, she soon realised her predicament was about more than just money. What happened next was pivotal. Our advisers recognised the tell-tale signs of abuse. They heard Lara's story and acknowledged her fears – they did not judge her. Recognising how difficult her circumstances were, our advisers promptly referred Lara to a specialist organisation dedicated to supporting survivors of domestic abuse.

With their help, Lara received tailored counselling, guidance about her legal options, and even assistance with finding safe housing. She was no longer alone, and the road to recovery

began to unveil itself.

Citizens Advice advisers continued to support Lara. They guided her on how to gain financial independence, including advice on managing debts her partner had accumulated in her name, accessing welfare benefits, and setting up her own bank account.

Looking back, Lara expressed her only regret: "I wish I had sought advice sooner. I started to see a way out the moment I spoke with Citizens Advice."

Citizens Advice and Community Partners

Lara's situation is not unique. Many women and men who experience domestic abuse are reluctant to speak out due to fear or a lack of information. Citizens Advice provides essential support, not only through advice but also by connecting with community organisations. Beyond merely giving advice, local Citizens Advice offices symbolise hope, empowerment, and a fresh start. They bridge the gap between those suffering in silence and the help they need. Lara's experience highlights the availability of help, emphasising that the challenging first step towards seeking advice can pave the way for a brighter and safer future.

If you or someone you know is in a similar situation, remember Lara's words and consider seeking advice sooner rather than later. It might just be the lifeline you're looking for.

We provide free, confidential, and impartial advice. See our national Citizens Advice website for online information www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/gender-violence/domestic-violence-and-abuse/.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN DIFFICULTIES, PLEASE CONTACT US AT YOUR LOCAL OFFICE

CITIZENS ADVICE SOUTH WEST SURREY

Adviceline contact by phone (free)

Tel 0808 278 7980 for those living in **Waverley**

Tel 0808 278 7888 for those living in **Guildford and Ash**

All offices and outreaches will be open as usual and you can use the new website www.casws.org.uk to check opening times, use the on-line message (e-mail) enquiry form and get self-help.

South West Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach Service: T: 01483 898884 (Monday-Friday 9am-4pm)

Email: swr@swsda.org.uk

www.swsda.org.uk