

Case Study

Experience in a General Homelessness Refuge

The experience of a traumatised mother of 3 children in care, who had suffered abuse as a child and was in the process of escaping abuse at the hands of her partner.

Without a car, any family support and with only one low income friend, she tried to find supported accommodation. In order to continue to see her children, she was unable to accept referrals to refuges hundreds of kilometres away or with poor public transport access. She was put into a large hostel for the homeless, where men, women and families were housed in areas of the building. She was not allowed to stay in the hostel during the days she was not seeing her children, so she wandered around the town trying to find shelter during poor weather and quiet places among crowds. She was trying to save money to keep her things in storage, to pay for current accommodation, and to save for the costs of ongoing affordable accommodation.

In the hostel, she lived in a dormitory with 5 women, one having ongoing mental health problems and others with substance abuse problems as well as criminal backgrounds. In the other dormitories there were similar residents, men and women, and some made offers of alcohol, drugs and similar offers to be provided between each other.

She travelled weekly to see a counsellor to help her cope. Two months into her stay at the hostel, her counsellor became concerned at her appearance, seeming exhausted, ill and depressed. She told the counsellor everyone had been awoken by frightening sounds and the police attending an incident at the gate the previous night. The woman in her room who regularly woke them all with screaming nightmares, had a particularly bad night, waking them all 3 more times. Her counsellor had that day received a donation for a client to two nights paid accommodation at a retreat, and offered it to her for some rest and recovery. The woman said that all residents had to return every night or risk losing their accommodation. If they stayed out even on one occasion, they were deemed to not be homeless and therefore not in need of the accommodation. The counsellor offered to call the service however woman said she had witnessed that even this was not accepted by the service.



This homelessness service did not provide the safety, support, understanding, services or resources for the recovery required for a woman separating as a result of domestic violence. She had made her childhood history known to them too. A highly traumatised woman was put in a service with no capacity to provide for women affected by adult trauma or by childhood trauma.