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The following is the story of Tina, a client of The Center for Women and Families. Tina received services from CWF's Domestic Violence Advocates, FVOP Case Manager, Clinician, Trauma Specialist and Housing Specialist as well as actively participating with the DV 101 Support Group. Tina is a wonderful success story, and had touched the hearts of many staff members at CWF.

My name is Tina. I am a Caucasian mother of a three year old son. I went to college and was raised in a blue collar family. I always loved to dance. I started dancing school when I was four.

I consider myself to be a well-rounded individual, who is likable and intelligent. Let me tell you, none of this meant anything. It could happen to anyone. It happened to me, it happened to others that I knew. There is no race involved, no socioeconomics involved, no level of education, nothing seems to matter it could touch any life.

One day I found myself dialing a hot line number for victims of domestic violence. I told them that I had gotten arrested after I called the police on my abusive boyfriend. The police made a dual arrest. My abuser had taken my cell phone away from me, therefore I could not contact any of my friends or family members to come and take my son. As a result, the Department of Children and Families took my son, who had witnessed the abuse, into custody.

The next day, a Saturday, I was released from jail. I now had to wait until Monday to recover my son. I was living in my car with all of my belongings. I couldn't stay with family or friends because my abuser was harassing them at home and at work. It wouldn't be safe for any of us. It was then that I was accepted at Kathie's Place (the domestic violence shelter from The Center for Women and Families.) The case manager at Kathie's Place listened to my desperation; they tried to ease my worried mind. They told me that they could transport me to court and be of my support.

On Monday the first thing that I did was to call The Department of Children and Families to find out how I could recover my son. They told me that my baby had to be placed in a foster home because more than 21 hours had gone by since they initially took him into custody. They told me that we had to wait for a court hearing in order for me to recover my son.

I didn't know who could relate to what I was going through. Sometimes I wished that I never called the police. My abuser was asking for custody of our son (in order to control me more). He was so manipulative, creating an image of me as "crazy", and an unsuitable mother. I was so scared, I did not know how I was going to be able to go through court with no money and to meet head-on a person who was so charming in front of everyone else and who had abused me for so long.

Advocates and Case Managers from The Center for Women and Families transported me, and stood by my side in every court appearance. They modeled behaviors that could help me deal with The Department of Children and Families. They listened to my desperate cries, to my frustrations, to my efforts, to my broken heart over not having my baby with me.

My son remained in DCF custody for over three months. The case manager for the Family Violence Outreach Program helped me in every way possible, to focus, to refocus, to hope, to be realistic, to understand the system, to stand by my side when my abuser was trying to intimidate me with "the look" every time we went to court. Many times he told me that if we went back together we were more likely to regain custody of my child. I was so confused. I almost went back. But, I was educated by The Center for Women and Families Advocates, Case Manager, and Clinician about "power and control".

Kathie's Place kept me safe. They gave me food and provided me with safe transportation. The Family Violence Outreach Program Case Manager started to work with me in order to secure a job and an apartment in order to prove to The Department of Children and Families that I was able to provide for my son. I went to support groups at The Center for Women Families where I met other women who were going through similar situations of abuse. I worked for an after shelter program from The Center for Women and Families. I started to see a clinician at The Center for Women and Families in order to help me deal with all of the stress. I was also connected to a child clinician who I met with at The Center for Women and Families in order to brain storm in ways that I could help my son when he was returned to me. I knew he was also going to be affected by all of this.

The Case Manager from the Family Service Outreach Program went with me to court, when the judge ordered The Department for Children and Families to give my baby back to me. We drove to a parking lot, where we waited for the Social Worker from DCF to bring my son to me. When I hugged my son after those three months, he looked confused, depressed and uncertain.

The Center for Women and Families continued to give us many services, such as, shelter, clinical services, advocacy, transportation, and case management. I was then referred to a transitional housing program. That is where I am right now. I have recently graduated from Human Service Academy, work in the Human Services industry and my son and I are doing well. I did not have to go back to my abuser. I could make it on my own. I thank God that The Center for Women and Families was there for us, otherwise I do not know what I would have done. I know they helped me find the strength that was hidden by the abuse. I know that my son and I will make it.