

## The story of Anna - a client of ACORUS Counselling Centre

Anna, 55 years old, is a foreigner. She is married for the second time to a Czech man and has 2 adult children from her first marriage. She came to the Czech Republic to find work so that she could support her children back home.

Anna first contacted ACORUS in 2009. She asked for help because her second husband had been abusive to her for a few years already. He was aggressive and often shouted at her. There was humiliation, physical assaults and threats to kill her. He also checked up on her schedule and her contacts with other people. On top of that, Anna had to finance most of their cost of living.

Anna was afraid of her husband. She was mentally exhausted and was taking antidepressants. She started to think about the possibility of divorce. The ACORUS social worker gave her all the information about the process of divorce. Because she was afraid of losing her permanent residency in the Czech Republic following a divorce, she wanted more time to think about and consider it.

In 2010 Anna reported her abuse to a police officer and they detained her husband in jail. In following two years, we helped her to get through two criminal processes. In 2011 the husband got the first sentence of 2 years, for which he served a supervised probation. Finally, in 2012, he was punished for continuing in abusive behaviour against her and served 10 months jail.

While he was in prison Anna asked for divorce. ACORUS helped her to write a court proposal and accompanied her to a court hearing. In addition, our psychologist help her to cope and manage her feelings about being guilty (the husband being in jail because of her). Guilt is a typical feeling of victims of domestic violence as a consequence of long-term abuse. We also helped Anna to get a restraining order against her husband, as he continued to contact her even from prison, accusing her of cheating, infidelity etc.

After coming back from prison, Anna's husband behaved normally for a while. She had to let him come back home because they were still officially married - he appealed against the sentence of divorce. After the President's general amnesty in 2013, the husband started to abuse Anna again. He was very aggressive, he blamed her for his time in prison, and he threatened to kill her again. She called the police many times, but the police didn't intervene. ACORUS also called the police and they declared that Anna was hysterical and there was only a problem with them living together after a divorce, not with domestic violence. Anna's mental state got worse. The police didn't help her and her ex-husband got more abusive. ACORUS officially complained to the police for their improper intervention but it was not successful.

In December 2014, Anna finally agreed to ask the court for a restraining order against her husband once again. It was successful and thanks to that Anna had a relaxed Christmas without fear and abuse. She wrote to us: *"Thank you for all you did for me, thank you for helping me, I wouldn't ever be able to manage it without your help"*. Nowadays, Anna is still going to consultations with her ACORUS social worker and therapist.

*The story was written in January 2015 and is based on real facts.*