Sara and Victor were born and married overseas, and had a child together before coming to Australia, initially on refugee visas. It was a 12-year relationship that ended around a year after their resettlement, when their child was in primary school, and they’d been granted permanent residency. Sara worked as a qualified professional overseas and plans to study in Australia to have her qualifications recognised here. However, she must first study to improve her English proficiency as she currently needs an interpreter for other than basic communications. Sara believes that Victor was not educated beyond primary school. Neither has worked in Australia, however both have commenced studies.

Before their move to Australia, Sara was supporting the family financially and running the household while Victor refused to contribute his welfare benefits (received while in their country of origin). Victor became suspicious and jealous of Sara and the child’s interactions with Sara’s work colleagues and friends. Sara felt that Victor would improve once they came to Australia, however the situation worsened. When Sara was at home, Victor would lock the house and watch her from the outside; and when she went out, he would follow her. When Victor began hurting their child with household objects, Sara feared for his and her own safety, and took steps to end the relationship. Victor would send members of the local cultural community to which the family belonged around to their house. They would tell her that Victor felt sad and rejected, which she found very distressing given Victor’s behaviour towards her and the child.

After a couple of attempts, Sara and the child left the house, and, with the help of local support services, they relocated and Sara was given advice about her legal options. She obtained the necessary forms from police. The police were not willing to assist Sara to obtain a protection order and she was not successful in obtaining legal aid. Despite this, with the assistance of a local non-legal support agency she represented herself and successfully applied to the Magistrates’ Court for a protection order against Victor with the child named as a protected party (after a series of adjournments over three months). Victor has not attempted to follow or make any contact with Sara since, and she has been careful to ensure that her address is not disclosed to anyone who may be in contact with Victor. Sara received Legal Aid and interpreter assistance to apply to the Family Court for child residence and contact orders, which she obtained following a mediation process. Victor is only allowed restricted weekly telephone contact with their child, however he does this less and less often.

Sara struggles financially as she is unable to work until she completes her studies, and a significant portion of her welfare benefits is spent on private rent as she is currently not able to access public housing. She reports however that Centrelink and the local support services have been very helpful. While, importantly, Sara feels that she and the child are safe, she also feels very isolated and somewhat concerned about the conduct of some members of the local cultural community who she believes continue to convey misleading messages to Victor on her behalf without her consent.