Trisha was born overseas and English is not her first language. Initially, Trisha required an interpreter for other than basic conversational English, however over time her skills and understanding have improved somewhat. Trisha and Jarrod met over the internet, made contact with each other a number of times overseas, and subsequently married in Australia. Trisha came to Australia on a prospective marriage visa and, when married, was issued a temporary spousal visa. Trisha completed high school and was previously in unskilled employment. Jarrod was born in Australia and completed a trade following high school. Jarrod has two children from a previous marriage: an adult who lives independently, and a younger teenager who came to live with Trisha and Jarrod, together with Jarrod’s mother. Trisha and Jarrod have a young child who was aged two at the time the four-year relationship broke down.

Jarrod was in employment and told Trisha that he was happy to support her while she studied English and looked after the household. Trisha noticed early in the relationship that Jarrod’s behaviour was secretive and suspicious. He told her not to disclose their living circumstances to Centrelink, and often asked Trisha what her plans were. He also helped her apply for permanent residency, but insisted when completing the forms that they not fully disclose their financial position. Jarrod held a joint bank account with his mother and household and living expenses were also incurred jointly. Trisha was excluded from these arrangements and felt unable to open Jarrod’s mail because it was also addressed to his mother. Over time, this became more concerning to Trisha and caused arguments between the couple.

Jarrod became increasingly abusive towards Trisha through the relationship, yelling and swearing at her, refusing to give her money, not allowing her to make phone calls, demanding that he know her whereabouts.

Jarrod’s children and mother made Trisha feel unwelcome in the family. Trisha recalls reading a text from the teenaged child on Jarrod’s phone making insulting personal comments about Trisha and her culture. On discovering that Trisha was pregnant the teenaged child became angry towards Trisha, damaged her personal belongings, burned her clothes and pushed her down the stairs. Jarrod and Trisha lived in the car for five days, all the while Jarrod repeatedly urging her to go back to her home country because he couldn’t manage the teenager’s reactions. Trisha agreed to go, but felt resentful, questioning why she was being made to leave.

Trisha returned to Australia after six weeks in her home country. Jarrod told her he was lonely, so she resumed living with the family and the child was born. Jarrod’s abuse continued. Having not allowed Trisha a phone, Jarrod was aware that Trisha’s laptop was her only means of communicating with her own family. On one occasion, Jarrod grabbed the laptop from Trisha and she ran after him to retrieve it. Jarrod held Trisha’s throat hard in one hand and grabbed her shirt with his other hand and pushed her backwards. Trisha fell and hit her head on the floor; she felt dizzy, and when trying to get up from the floor, Jarrod spat on her face and pointed with his finger at her chest calling her a “fucking Asian” and accusing her of coming to Australia to get money from the government.

Trisha decided that she could not live with Jarrod’s domestic and family violence any longer. She contacted her friend who called the police for her. Concerned for Trisha’s safety, the police told her to go to her friend’s house so they could interview her. Trisha was extremely distressed; she showed the police the broken laptop and marks on her neck, and gave a statement. Trisha can’t explain what happened next, but became aware that the police obtained a protection order on her behalf against Jarrod. She has the paper order in her possession, but isn’t certain of the conditions as it was not translated in her first language. She believes the duration of the order is two years.

While Trisha was not required to attend court for the protection order hearing, to make arrangements regarding parental care and responsibility for their child, she and Jarrod had to attend phone mediation and then, failing agreement, the court. The Family Court made an order, effective until the child reaches pre-school age, that (among a number of other conditions) the child would reside each week with Trisha for four nights and with Jarrod for three nights. Trisha received legal aid representation and interpreter support for part of this process, however given her limited understanding of English and the legal system, Trisha feels that she didn’t have enough time to consider the family report, and was pressured into consenting to the orders without being satisfied they were in the child’s best interests and not knowing what her rights would be as the child gets older.

Trisha believes the protection order has been important in reducing her fear of Jarrod, and her concerns about him harming the child. She says however that Jarrod does not respect her as a mother; and she continues to worry about the child being in the presence of Jarrod’s children both of whom are drug users and have police records. She also believes that Jarrod does not share her expectations for high standards of education for the child, and is worried about having to return to the court before the child reaches pre-school age to make fresh arrangements for the child’s care and responsibility. Trisha and Jarrod have been unable to reach a property settlement; Jarrod asserts without grounds that Trisha should pay off all his debts. Trisha receives a Centrelink single-parent benefit, which she is doing her best to spend carefully so she can save for the child’s future. She is concerned however that, despite her phoning Centrelink to advise of the care arrangements (as set out in the Family Court order), she is receiving too much money and may be forced to repay. At times, Trisha has felt so overwhelmed by these anxieties that she has had suicidal thoughts. Counselling offered through a local domestic and family violence service has helped and supported her through these very difficult times.

Trisha is now a permanent resident; she has a driver’s licence, and has purchased a car with her modest savings. Her English has improved considerably, and she has commenced studies so that in time she can secure stable and rewarding employment. While Jarrod is no longer a direct physical threat to Trisha and contact changeovers occur without problems, he continues to send her abusive texts, and his mother and children stalk her periodically.