Risk Assessment – High Risk

Cassy and Glen were in a relationship for five years and during that time had five children together aged between four and near newborn at separation. They are both Indigenous, and neither has been in employment or received any post-secondary training or education. Their income during the relationship was in the form of various welfare benefits. Cassy used cannabis regularly from the age of 13, but has been clean since soon after the birth of their fifth child. Glen is a long-term speed and ice user; his drug taking increased during the relationship and made him more violent particularly when he was ‘coming down’ or when he couldn’t access the drugs readily. Cassy was abused during her childhood by a family friend who was imprisoned briefly as a result, and later, by a close family member. Growing up, Cassy was also significantly involved in the care of a disabled relative.

Glen’s violence towards Cassy started several months after their first child was born. Glen punched Cassy in the nose causing severe pain and bleeding. A passerby called the police and an ambulance took her to the hospital. A police-initiated protection order was issued allowing Cassy and Glen to continue living together on the condition that Glen maintained good behaviour towards Cassy. At that stage, Cassy felt committed to the relationship and hoped that she could influence Glen to stop his violence and drug taking. At Cassy’s request, Glen was not charged with assault.

During Cassy’s second pregnancy, despite the protection order, Glen’s violence became more frequent and aggressive, though not as physically severe as previously. Cassy describes the violence as ‘blow outs’ now and then, rather than an exercise of ongoing control. This continued through to Cassy’s third pregnancy when, at six months, Glen beat Cassy badly one afternoon before travelling together on a train with their two children, and again at home the following morning. Cassy was taken by ambulance to the hospital and afterwards, with the children, went to stay with her sister for a week before returning to live with Glen. Again, police asked if Cassy wanted Glen charged with assault, and she declined and he was not charged. Cassy reasoned to herself that the violence was the price she was prepared to pay for having ‘beautiful children’ with someone who ‘had his good sides, and wasn’t always an arsehole’.

After their third child was born, when Glen’s ice-use was escalating, Cassy started using ice occasionally, hoping that it might bring them closer together. Cassy felt she loved Glen and wanted the relationship to work; she also believed he was a great father and, despite his violence towards her, he would never harm the children. However, the violence continued. When Cassy found out she was pregnant with their fourth child, Glen seriously bashed her nose after an angry verbal exchange between the two of them, and when Glen was ‘coming down’ from an ice hit. Once again, the police were called and Cassy went to hospital for treatment.

Despite not having been charged for any of his assaults on Cassy, Glen had by that stage been convicted of a breach of the protection order, and received a two-year probationary order with a good behaviour bond and no conviction recorded. He was then convicted of drug possession and received an extended probationary period before being charged with the assault and rape of a relative and a relative’s girlfriend respectively. Child protection was alerted and began visiting the home every week to check on the wellbeing of the children and how Cassy was coping. Cassy thought the situation was stable and manageable until child protection acted on a report from a third party claiming that Glen had harmed their son. Cassy does not believe that Glen would have done that, and observed that the child was happy and unharmed on the day in question. Child protection removed all the children from Cassy and Glen’s care and resettled them with some of Cassy’s relatives.

When Cassy was pregnant with their last child, Glen went into custody on remand awaiting trial of the assault and rape charges. Two days after the birth, child protection removed the child, again to one of Cassy’s relatives. Given that Glen was now in custody, Cassy couldn’t understand why the infant, or any of the other children, were deemed to be at ongoing risk. She accepted however that they needed to be protected from the violent relationship and believed that the children were being well cared for by her relatives. With the assistance of a lawyer, Cassy was able to ensure the child protection order was made for only 12 months rather than the longer period sought by the child protection department. She commenced supervised contact with all of the couple’s children each week, and attended counselling sessions and a parenting program in preparation for their return. She also stopped using illegal drugs.

While Cassy feels she had little support and understanding from police and child protection, she believes that she has benefited a great deal from the advice she received from her lawyers and counsellors. It is critically important to her that the children return to her care, happy and healthy, and she believes she understands the damaging effects of her violent relationship with Glen. When Glen is out of prison she is adamant that she does not want to continue the relationship, and that she will be careful to make proper, safe arrangements for him to have contact with the children.