

I have spent the last 4 years of my life trying to untangle myself and my children from an abuser. And I am still trying to untangle myself. I was emotionally, verbally, and financially abused by a man who made me feel unsafe in my own home every single day.

I know I would not be here without the services offered to survivors of domestic violence.

I hit rock bottom, then I kept falling, and thought my kids would be better without me around since they were caught in the middle of manipulation aimed at me by my abuser. My brain said, if I wasn't here, they wouldn't be in pain. That night, I called the Help Line. I cried for an hour with a complete stranger who could do nothing to help me, except listen. The 24/7 Crisis Help Line is a life line. For me, it felt like it was one of the first times I was really being listened to, and I barely said a thing.

I joined a domestic violence support group to help me make sense of the patterns of coercive control and oppression I was under. Learning to recognize the signs was critical to my emotional health and physical safety. Those patterns that had been borne down on me for years and years made me full of fear. Just about every Thursday I videoconference into a support group and commune with women in my shoes, walking the same road, trying to hold their families together through incomprehensible pain. We hold each other up.

It took me over three years to get my Independence from this person. It should have been a simple equitable division of property; he showed up at every mediation with a "take all" approach and told everyone he could he would "crush me financially for leaving him." I had a court advocate, as a domestic violence service, in my mediations and court cases. They were the glue that helped me hold myself together, so I could have the courage to once again be in the same room as the person I had tried so hard to escape.

I have learned from my domestic violence survivor community that I refuse to live any portion of my life where I feel unsafe in my own home. Next Step Domestic Violence Project, specifically, helped me get my life back with their services to those most in need. Supporting resources and funding for this work is vital to our Maine community. I have won back my right to parent my children from a loving safe space with an open heart...something I wish for all parents of children in Maine. Please support an increase in funding for life saving domestic violence services in the biennial budget.

Christie Anastasia, Mount Desert, Maine