

You can Raise the Roof for Survivors of Modern Slavery

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Modern Slavery Survivor Case studies

Karim



Karim* came to Australia expecting an exciting job opportunity – he had been offered a well-paid role as the private driver for a diplomat from his home country, who would be stationed in Canberra.

Karim agreed to take the offer to work as a driver for a 12-month period, even though this meant a year apart from his family and new fiancée. It appeared a lucrative way to send money home to prepare for the wedding and a new life with his soon-to-be wife.

When Karim arrived in Canberra, he was surprised to learn that he was not to work as a driver, but as the household help for the diplomat and his family. In

fact, Karim was not allowed in the car, or even to go outside the grounds of the diplomatic compound, unless he was accompanied by the diplomat's wife to complete shopping tasks.

Karim was given a storage room as his bedroom, and forced to work long days as a cleaner, kitchen hand and general assistant. Even if he was sick, Karim was expected to work until after the household went to sleep, and worked long nights whenever the diplomat hosted events at his home.

Karim did not receive his pay directly, but instead a small amount of money, far below the minimum wage, was transferred into an account overseas. Karim's passport and travel papers were taken, and he was not allowed to spend time on the phone with his family or fiancée.

A year passed. Karim asked his employer when he would be able to return home, but these questions were dismissed, and Karim was threatened. Without his ID and travel documents, speaking no English and with no understanding of Australian laws and systems, Karim felt trapped by his powerful employer.

After 18 months, and suffering a workplace injury, Karim was allowed to attend the hospital for treatment. Fortunately while at hospital, he met a worker who spoke his language, who informed him that his employer's treatment was not normal, and illegal in Australia.

Karim was assisted to contact a legal service, who referred him to The Salvation Army's Trafficking and Slavery Safe House for support. Karim was assisted to leave Canberra and relocate to Sydney, where he engaged with the Australian Federal Police to report his conditions of servitude.

Without his passport and in fear of repercussions from the diplomat in his home country, Karim remained in Australia, unable to return home. He was eventually offered a permanent visa to remain in Australia in acknowledgment of his work with law enforcement and the danger he faced if he returned.

Karim struggled to complete educational qualifications due to his low literacy, but learnt English and gained work as a kitchen hand and delivery driver. He eventually saved enough money to assist his fiancée to come to Australia, where they were finally married after several years apart.

Karim was able to buy his own car and find work as a driver as he had originally planned. Thanks to the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program, he and his expecting wife were able to move out of a crowded share house and into their own affordable two-bedroom home. At the time, Karim reported that he felt happy and was enjoying his new place, saying the best thing about it was more independence and privacy. He was pleased about the convenient location, close to everything he needed.

After about a year Karim and his wife welcomed their second baby. The family's first apartment wasn't quite suitable for two children so Karim used his exemplary rental history and newfound knowledge of the Australian rental market to apply for a bigger place closer to friends. The whole time he received targeted support from case workers, although his confidence and ability to navigate Australian systems had improved dramatically.

Eventually, Karim was able to achieve complete independence.

Rose



Growing up, Rose* knew that her family expected her to marry a distant relation overseas. Rose had been promised to marry this man since before she was even born.

As she reached her teenage years, she knew she was not comfortable with this and began to feel sick with worry. She tried to raise the issue with her family many times, however they told her that the promise had been made, and that she did not have any choice.

As Rose felt more and more controlled and hopeless, her mental health declined.

Her friends recognised that she was suffering and prompted Rose to share that she was feeling fearful of the impending marriage. The friends recognised the signs of forced marriage and helped her find out about available support. Rose decided she needed to leave home because she couldn't go ahead with the marriage.

“The plan originally was to leave home by myself, but I was a bit worried about how I could actually do that and I knew might need support with the mental impact,” she explained. Her friends told her about organisations like The Salvation Army which could help young people at risk of forced marriage.

She called The Salvation Army’s Trafficking and Slavery Safe House to talk about her situation. “I wasn’t sure if the support was real,” she admitted. The social worker on the phone assured her that if she needed to leave home to avoid the marriage proceeding, she would be supported.

Next Rose was connected with the Australian Federal Police for safety planning. “Meeting with the AFP made me realise a lot of things about my rights which I hadn’t been sure about before,” she said. “It made me feel safer.”

Despite feeling a lot of sadness, guilt and anxiety about leaving home, Rose realised she needed to put herself first. The Red Cross Support for Trafficked People Program supported her with emergency accommodation after she left home. The initial period after leaving was particularly difficult, but with the support of close friends and her case workers, Rose started to realise she had to focus on the future.

“For the first few weeks I felt really wrong, uncomfortable and not knowing where I belonged,” Rose described. “Then I had a lightbulb moment where I realised I had to change my life and be more independent. I didn’t want to keep feeling mentally unwell like how I had been at home before.

“I wanted to go out and go to work, I wanted to get my own place. Culturally, I had seen women have to rely on men, so I wanted to make sure I was an independent woman. It felt good to have independence.”

After securing a new job, Rose entered the Sisters of Charity Foundation’s Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program. Her new home is close to work and her friends. Rose’s favourite thing about living in her own apartment is having freedom.

“I have control over how things look, what I want to watch on TV, when I do things – doing what I want to do when I want to,” she said. “I like to host my friends and enjoy having them over. I don’t have to live by anyone else’s expectations.”

Rose has learnt all about her tenancy rights and responsibilities thanks to the MSTHP, and even enjoys managing her bills. “I was so happy when I got my first electricity bill because it had my own name on it,” she said.

“I had a proud moment. This time last year I didn’t think that I would be here. It just kind of shows me – look you are independent.”

Rose’s advice to any young people going through a life change is to have patience and compassion for themselves. “One thing I’ve learnt is to be patient with myself. I used to be scared that I wouldn’t overcome this feeling, and not get better mentally,” she explained. “Then I let myself feel what I had to feel, didn’t try to push it aside. I learnt to cope. Once I gave myself time, I felt happier than ever.”

Sara



When Sara* moved to Australia to live with her husband, she did not know his personality would change and she would be subjected to severe violence and control.

After she managed to escape from what had become a slavery-like relationship, she was referred to The Salvation Army's Trafficking and Slavery Safe House for support and accommodation. Sara lived at the Safe House for nine months while working toward her health, legal, education and employment goals. Slowly she began to focus on her future.

"I had to let go of the pain and leave it in my past," she explained. "I had new motivation. I had to start to dream... I could focus on study and work, and I wanted to have my own home. I wanted to live in my own home. Now nobody could control me and my life like before. I would control my home, my future and my life, my new life."

As Sara healed from her traumatic experience she became excited to live independently. With the help of the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program she moved into a one-bedroom apartment, with her rent subsidised. She chose an apartment very close to the train station so she could easily commute to the city where she works as a cleaner. The apartment is also close to a TAFE where Sara studies English two days a week, and local community centres she regularly visits. She loves hosting friends at her home.

"I love having my caseworker to help me," she affirmed. "My caseworker supports me to look for the new house, gives me emotional support, explains things to me and helps me to save money."

Since entering the program Sara has found a new job, got her driver's licence and is learning how to manage her finances. Her work hours have fluctuated – although she was expecting to work full time, she sometimes has shorter shifts. The program's flexible rental subsidy has ensured she still has enough money for all her expenses.

"Without the support it would not have been easy," she says. "If I was working full time it would be ok, but right now it would be very difficult to pay all the rent. I want to work more so I have savings for emergencies and my future."

Sara is grateful to be in control, and in her own home.

"Now everything is changing. Now I can face everything more by myself. Sometimes I have some money, sometimes not enough, but I don't blame myself. I know I can manage it and I can be independent."

**All names have been changed, and stock images used, to protect survivors' privacy.*