



**Red Shield
Appeal**

“We were a happy couple. We were young parents in our early twenties, but we were determined!”

Gemma's story

Becoming a first-time parent is life changing, confusing and exciting in equal measure. But for Gemma* those heady days with her growing family and dreams of a bright future were quickly shattered when her partner started using ICE and became violent.

“Fast forward two months, he was someone I no longer knew and was very afraid of. He'd physically and verbally abuse and intimidate me and threaten to run off with the baby constantly.”

But from that moment they became homeless. Gemma had nowhere to go. No family nearby. No friends who could take her in. And all this was happening in the middle of a COVID-19 lockdown. Gemma and Lily spent night after night sleeping in the car with the windows blocked out.

“I wasn't feeling any bit of safety – emotionally and physically. I was sleeping so poorly, or not really at all,” says Gemma. “I would check every window, every door, every corner for my ex's face. I couldn't walk down the street or into a store without breaking down in panic.”

The one thing that grounded her was attending to the needs of her baby. “Lily never went without. I always made sure she had food and something comfy and cosy. That's what we do as parents, isn't it? We go without a thousand times over to make sure they're looked after.”

When Gemma finally sought help, she was placed in the care of Salvation Army support worker, Sandy, who supported her to draw up a safety plan. She also helped Gemma find secure long-term housing.

Gemma says getting a home for her and her baby after spending almost five months homeless was “pretty miraculous” and felt “meant-to-be”. When she moved in, the Salvos helped her with furniture and many other items to get set up.

Then began the deeper, long-term work of helping Gemma and Lily build a new life. This involved trauma counselling, life skills training to tackle the challenges of suddenly becoming a single mum, and work skills training to set Gemma on a stable path to independence.

Gemma says the generosity of donors really did save her and her baby's life. “You gave us a second chance at a safe and happy future, and we couldn't feel more blessed and grateful. I'm sure there are so many other people feeling the same way. Thank you so much!”

Your support for the Salvos through Workplace Giving, means more women, like Gemma, can look forward to a life free from violence. With at least 67 women forced to leave their homes due to domestic abuse each day, such generosity has a significant impact on their ability to find safety and stability.

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