



Christine's Story

You don't truly understand the full effects of domestic abuse until you are finally free from it and able to discover what it means to truly thrive. When my children were young, I lived with an abusive husband for several years. Leaving wasn't easy, but with the support of the YWCA, I was able to walk away for good and start a new life chapter for myself and my kids.

This is my story of healing—but to begin, it's a story about violence.

For a time, my ex-husband's growing alcoholism shaped every part of my life. After the birth of our second child, the abuse escalated into physical violence—he would choke me until my neck was ringed with bruises. His violent behaviour—and the constant threat of it—eroded my relationships with my children, siblings, and friends. I eventually had to take time off work as my home life shattered my confidence and the way I saw myself.

Before receiving the life-changing support of the YWCA, I often described that period as feeling like I was trapped at the bottom of a deep, black hole—desperately searching for a ladder that wasn't there.

When my children reached the age where I could no longer shield them from witnessing the violent outbursts at home, I knew I couldn't allow our lives to continue in a household defined by fear. I reached out to the police. The second time officers came to investigate, my ex-husband was arrested.

If you've never experienced an abusive relationship, you might assume that his arrest solved everything. But with his financial resources, my ex-husband was able to immediately hire lawyers in both Criminal and Family Courts. Not long after being charged with assault, he served me with custody papers for our children.

I had never navigated the court system before. My ex-husband had control of all our assets, and when I left him, I suddenly had no financial resources of my own. He then deliberately stopped paying the mortgage, and within months, I was served with an eviction notice from the bank. Not only were my children and I threatened with having nowhere to live, but I was also at risk of losing custody of them to a violent person. I was physically and emotionally fragile and had no idea where to begin.

That's when the YWCA entered our lives—and set me and my children on a path toward healing.

If I had not been connected to the YWCA by the police, I would not have had the emotional and mental strength to manage Criminal and Family Court. With YWCA's help, I gained access to both one-on-one and group counselling sessions, as well as legal advice and vital resources. For the first time since the violence began—four years earlier, when I knew deep down my children and I were in serious danger—I found a community that truly understood the fear, stress, and risk we were living under.

At the YWCA, I felt an immediate sense of safety. Sometimes, after a long day in Family Court, I would stand on YWCA's porch just to feel the assurance that I could step inside and someone would help me—no appointment necessary, no need to explain.

Because I had these foundational supports as I was recovering, I found the confidence to go back to school. With our home and custody secured, YWCA's services helped me navigate the education system, register for college and eventually go on to university—the first in my family to do so. As a result, we never had to rely on social assistance. The YWCA's help taught me more than how to live free from violence; it taught me how to truly live again, and how to face life's challenges without reverting to survival mode.

I am deeply grateful that the YWCA not only helped me leave an abusive and violent environment, but also gave me the tools and strength to remain free from it. With their support, I was able to raise my children in a safe, nurturing home, using positive parenting skills without the constant threat of chaos and harm.

I'm sharing my story with you now because I believe it is critical for the YWCA's vital services to continue to be supported. My young family of three was once trapped in a cage dominated by domestic violence. With the help of the YWCA, we broke free. Today, all three of us are gainfully employed and building meaningful, successful careers. We stand as living proof of what is possible—no longer statistics of abuse, but examples of resilience, hope, and lasting change.

We are now ready to pay it forward. I hope my story shows you how your support can turn trauma into resilience, and resilience into health and happiness—with the power to change lives for generations to come.

Please make a special gift today; for the women like me, their children and all those after, a single donation has the power to create a ripple effect of healing for generations.

With all my gratitude,

Christine

***Note** Christine is a real woman who has benefited from YWCA's services. Her name has been changed to protect her safety and the anonymity of her children.

P.S. Did you know that YWCA relies on donor support to fund up to 1/3rd of their program and service costs? With violence against women becoming even more common in Peterborough and Haliburton, it has never been more important to support our safe spaces. **Thank you for your generosity!**