

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON CORPORATIONS AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

Financial Services Regulatory Framework in Relation to Financial Abuse
PUBLIC HEARING Friday 9 August 2024

CASE STUDY No 2

ANGLICARE FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICE

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Rebecca, (not her real name) came to see me at Young Crisis Accommodation Service, (a service that assists people experiencing homelessness and provides a safe haven for Women fleeing domestic and family violence). Rebecca, in her forties, explained that she had only recently moved to Young from her husband's family farm in another rural area some distance away and was now renting a small flat.

Rebecca told me she was trying to rebuild her life after leaving her husband and the family farm that she had married into, that had been her home for the past 15 years. She left with only whatever belongings she could fit into her car. Only the youngest of her 3 children (aged 6), came with her. The two eldest choosing to stay with their father.

Rebecca explained to me she had endured years of being financially abused by her husband who controlled all their finances which were paid from the farm's banking accounts. She was rarely given cash. It was humiliating she said to have to ask her husband's permission to buy anything personal she needed and to have to explain herself. The emotional toll this had on her was ultimately the reason why she finally left.

Rebecca asked me to help her rearrange her finances so she could survive on the sole source of income she was now receiving from Centrelink, income support paid to her and her child as she was receiving no financial support from her husband. She told me she felt he and his family were 'gaslighting her' by insisting she had no right to claim any stake against the family farming property, which was held in Trust. He also stated that she was not entitled to Child Support as he had the care of two of their three children. Instead, her husband offered her a cash "goodwill" settlement of \$70,000.00.

I explained that even as a layman, I could see many issues with the situation she now found herself in seemed extremely unfair and unjust. Rebecca told me she had spoken to a local solicitor who advised that it would cost many thousands of dollars to contest this in the Family Court, given the other party where unwilling to consent to an amicable and fair settlement. I suggested Rebecca speak to the Domestic Violence Legal Service (Women's Legal Service NSW) and seek advice on what her financial and legal rights were and advice on who to speak to about taking up her case.

I made a call to the Legal Service and referred Rebecca with her permission. I then helped her devise a budget with amounts set aside for her bills, and more importantly, money for herself.

This case study is an example of some of the complex issues people present with when seeking Financial Counselling support. Often they appear to be financial on the surface but are quite opposite in nature, as in this case of financial abuse where fundamentally legal support was the key driver in supporting this client against such an insidious type of Domestic and Financial Violence.

Financial Counsellors often find themselves in the frontline of a human crisis and are trained in identifying a broad range of underlying issues, such as problem gambling and DFV that are behind a financial problem and once detected, refer people onto experts in those fields who are able to provide assistance.

Chris Heckenberg
Senior Financial Counsellor

5th September 2024