



EMPOWER

Women

# We all need a Role Model sometimes

## Chapter 3



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Originally from Zimbabwe, Ray<sup>1</sup> was trafficked to South-Africa. She managed to escape and arrived in the UK in 2015. Through the Red Cross, that helped her with shelter, bus tickets and appointments at the Home Office she got in touch with Sheffield-based organisation Ashiana, who helped her start up her new life in the UK. Ashiana offers high quality, accessible services, tailored to meet the needs of women who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence and abuse.



As Ray wasn't ready to live on her own when she first came to Sheffield, Ashiana offered her a place in their refuge where she was able to live with other women, to access all the support and therapy she needed, and to step by step build up her confidence. After a year she was ready to take the next step and moved to Home Office accommodation.

When asked what was her biggest challenge in the UK, Ray mentioned that due to what she had been through she was not in the best mental state when she arrived in the UK. Combined with the completely new environment and culture that Sheffield had to offer this was a very daunting experience. 'One day I went to the shops and on my way back home I got lost. I ended up panicking and calling the police, but they calmed me down and helped me get home'. It's situations like this, and the support organisations surrounding her (like Ashiana and Home-Start, an organisation that supports parents who are dealing with issues such as isolation, sickness, disability, mental health, domestic abuse, twins/triplets, or difficult

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<sup>1</sup> This is a fake name used for privacy purposes.



relationships) that made her realise that support is always around you. ‘Everything is so different when you come to a new place and it’s about getting used to it’. Home-Start for example helped her with day-to-day activities, accompanied her to appointments and helped her plan her days in order to adopt a more efficient routine. The support Ray received from many different outlets helped her to see a way out, and is a firm believer that even though you can never change your past, there is always a way forward.

Ray also spoke very fondly about Sheffield as a city, mentioning that everyone is so friendly and that it has a very lively environment. The broad range of activities offered by Ashiana also made it a lot easier to get connected with other people.



When given the chance to offer advice to any other women who find themselves in a similar position, she would like to urge them to never give up. When she came to the UK, she felt utterly distressed and thought that things would never be okay again. But she slowly started believing again that it will be, and even though she still has bad days the faith in her own abilities and goals make it possible for her to keep on going. ‘Envisage where you want to be and make sure that everything you do is building towards that goal. It takes a lot of work, but don’t give up and use all the support that you can get, because it is there. My therapist once told me to print out photos of what I want to achieve and hang it up on the wall’. This visualisation of her goals and objectives helped her stay strong even when things were very bleak.



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Because things did at times. When entering the UK as an asylum seeker, you are very restricted in what you can do. When Ray started to feel better again and wanted to go back to college to finish her GCSEs she was not allowed to. She was however not ready to give up again, and instead she got all the books she needed from the library to make sure that when she would be able to go to college she would be well prepared and ready to go. ‘When having asylum status, you find yourself very in between and limited, but I did not want to give up so tried to find other ways to learn and prepare myself’.

In 2017, Ray finally received ‘Leave to Remain’ and is now in college finalising her GCSEs combined with an access course for university. When she applied to start a university degree after finishing college, she was rejected based on her lack of work experience in her field of study. ‘I was devastated. I felt so motivated, and this rejection felt like everything came crashing down again’. Again, she refused to give up and decided to appeal her case. Subsequently she was invited to an interview at the university and in September 2018 she will be starting her course after all.

Ray’s story is one to admire and be inspired by. She has a passion in her eyes that I will never forget, and I would therefore like to end this story with one last thing she added: ‘You will be challenged and tested in so many ways, but don’t give up. Think about what you want and ask for help.’

