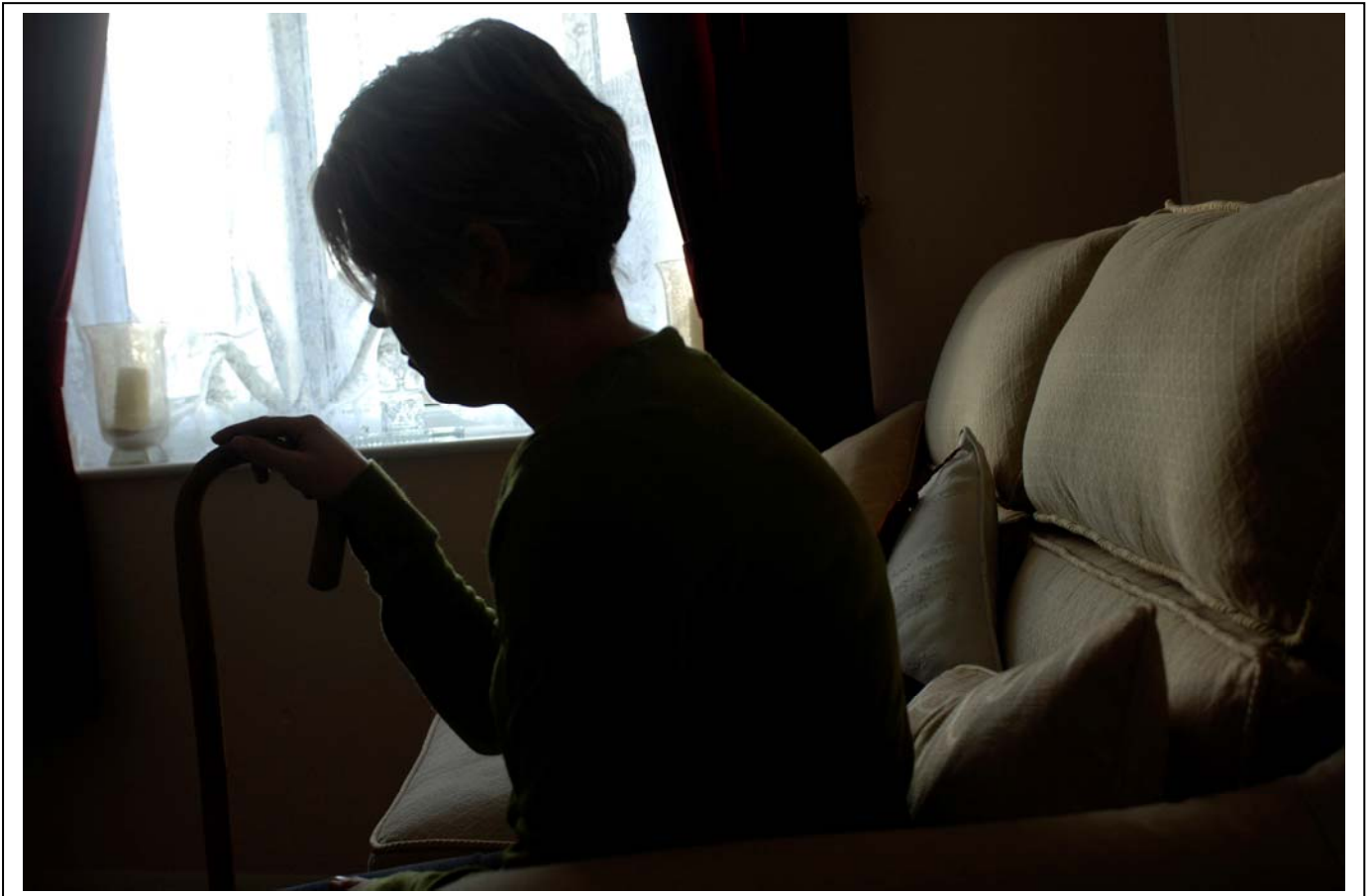


CASE STUDY

Aids & Adaptations



**Spire Homes' support and advice helped save a
Rutland tenant from domestic violence**

Member of the Longhurst Group of Companies

providing homes, **improving lives**



A Rutland woman with a chronic disease has praised staff at Spire Homes for their part in helping her to escape from the domestic violence she suffered at the hands of her partner.

The woman, who has children, wishes to remain anonymous, but she has spoken out about the “double whammy of disability and domestic violence”. She believes that it is harder for men and women with a disability like she has to break away from abusive relationships because many are unable to work, have no financial independence and worry they would not cope alone.

Commenting, she said “It took me a dozen attempts to pick up the phone and ask for help, I felt trapped and I couldn’t have done it without the help of agencies in Rutland like Women’s Aid and Spire Homes. If it hadn’t been for my Occupational Therapist giving me the Women’s Aid number, I would probably be dead because I would have ended my life myself!”

Spire Homes first became aware of the woman 18 months ago through a referral from Women’s Aid. In order to gain access to social housing, she had to declare herself homeless. “It was daunting to say I was homeless with children. I didn’t understand because homeless to me meant living on the streets, yet I still had a roof over my head.”

Typically in cases of domestic violence, a woman can leave and will be given emergency accommodation by Women’s Aid. For disabled people, this is not always possible because of the physical limitations they have. At the time, Women’s Aid could not offer accommodation that was suitably equipped with aids and adaptations. As a result, she was forced to return home to her partner while Spire Homes tried to find her a home.

“It was so stressful; I had to be so secretive. Spire knew not to post anything to me at home; I had to visit them secretly which was hard because of my mobility problems. I couldn’t even let my children know what was happening in case their father found out. Throughout this difficult time, I continued to get support from Women’s Aid and Spire Homes.”

Whilst she was a very high priority for social housing, properties in Rutland do not become available as often as in some areas. Staff at Spire continued to offer advice and support to Susan and she says she was surprised at how nice they were.

“I was expecting a cold, intimidating housing officer, but the Spire officer was exceptionally supportive. I felt empowered and more knowledgeable and started to believe I could actually take control of my own life. My housing officer was trustworthy, respected and understood my need for confidentiality and always took time to come and see me, she still does. It means a lot.”

Member of the Longhurst Group of Companies

providing homes, **improving lives**



Happily, the woman is now settled in her new home which has undergone extensive adaptation by Spire Homes to enable her to live independently. Since a single storey property was not available, a stairlift was required. There is also a new flat level shower and bathroom with handles and other aids to protect her from falling. Spire also fitted a new heating system, lever taps and a ramp to the front door.

Commenting on the difference her new home has made to her life, the woman said: "My home is my haven. I don't care if it had to be furnished with second hand furniture, I can lock the door and do what I want to do. I'm not being controlled by anyone anymore and I feel safe and happy."

She believes there needs to be more awareness among disabled people suffering domestic violence that there is support available. "It is a bad world, but there are some really good people," she said. "It is hard to find the courage to leave a situation where you are being ill treated. I hope that telling my story will help give courage to others in a similar position."

She also believes there are a number of issues that the Government should tackle nationally, including the need to invest in halfway houses for people with disability escaping domestic violence. Having had to remain in an abusive relationship for many months after deciding to leave, Susan believes that people with disabilities are at a greater disadvantage than able bodied people because there is not suitable accommodation for them. She also believes that more financial help should be given to all victims of domestic violence to help them start again.

"Being unable to work makes it difficult to move on and this is often one of the barriers that prevents people from taking the steps to leave. However, I get benefits and, although I have to be careful, I am able to live independently now and that's worth so much."

Spire Homes works with numerous agencies like Women's Aid to help support men and women suffering from domestic violence. Confidentiality is respected and there are extensive systems in place to protect sufferers while arrangements are being made to re-house them.

Ends

This case study is based on a true account of an interview with the woman in her new home. She does not wish to be named, but she does want her story to be told because she hopes it will help others in a similar situation to find the strength to get out of abusive relationships.