

Georgina, 56, from Zimbabwe.

Georgina presented at Praxis on a Friday. She had been referred to us by Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers as she needed accommodation. She was very fragile and emotional when explaining why she was in need.

Georgina had been staying at a man's house who she met through her church. The man's house where she stayed had in fact been recommended by the Pastor's wife and he offered to lodge her whilst her asylum claim was being resolved. The man abused her sexually repeatedly, but due to a long history of abuse back in Zimbabwe and her current homelessness, Georgina accepted her predicament tacitly. She became frightened when she discovered the man also slept with an axe and a hammer next to his bed and openly threatened her should she reject his demands or tell anyone about it. She stayed with what she calls herself 'that monster' for one month in total.

Praxis Advice Team researched the possibilities of getting her accommodated into a refuge but she didn't fit the criteria, as she was not in a relationship with that man. Other projects providing help for women who have been internally trafficked required intrusive assessment processes and contact with the Police, which Georgina was not prepared to do at that point. Her immigration situation barring her from having recourse to public funds was another stumbling block to access any mainstream women shelters. The few shelters which didn't require access to benefits were all full for the foreseeable future.

Praxis Advice Team decided to buy time by allowing an exceptional payment of B+B accommodation for Georgina, so that she could be safe over the weekend. On the Monday, more calls were made to various shelters without success. However, Praxis contacted one of its hosts, who accepted to lodge Georgina for one week. This would give us time to apply for Section 4 support, in the hope of accessing accommodation provided by UKBA, even though Georgina's immigration status was unclear due to a mix-up by the UKBA.

Within that one week, Georgina's new host decided that she could stay for as long as required so that she could stay safe until proper accommodation was found for her. Further complications with UKBA meant that application for Section 4 had to be re-submitted but after 5 weeks of legal dealings, a court of Appeal ruled in Georgina's favour so that UKBA had to support by providing her accommodation and financial support in the form of supermarket vouchers (i.e. Azure Card).