**Woman A’s story**

A is a single mother originally from Nigeria who is now living in Leeds as a refused asylum seeker. A’s mother died whilst giving birth to her in their home in Nigeria. Nigeria has a shockingly high maternal death rate, with one in 13 mothers dying at the time of A’s birth. Birth in a hospital is rare, with only a third of births being attended by trained professionals. Most shockingly, the traditional belief within A’s community was that any baby born to a woman who died during childbirth was a witch and must be killed. The village community, including her own uncle, wanted to kill A from birth, but her grandmother protected and cared for her. From an early age, her grandmother sent her to a convent in a different community and was able to access to an education.

Later, A’s uncle found her and took from the convent; she was trafficked as a sex worker by her uncle who threatened to kill her if she tried to escape. A did manage to find an escape route from her life in Nigeria. She made contact with a man from the West Midlands, who offered A a new life as a house maid and carer for his wife. A accepted the offer and entered into the UK as a paid worker. She therefore did not claim asylum upon her arrival. Whilst in the West Midlands, A was used by the man to clean other people’s houses with no sign of the agreed job as a carer which she came to do. When asked where his wife was, the man made several excuses before moving A into his flat and keeping her under lock and key. Her freedom was denied and she was raped and violently abused by the man.

Whilst recounting her story, A poignantly states that this man told her not to trust any white people, as they would report her to the Home Office and send her back to Nigeria where she would be killed. Each white person that A saw walking on the street filled her with fear. She felt trapped; not able to leave the flat or call for help. Eventually, A was able to escape the man. Homeless and without immigration papers or status, she attended a local church where she met a supportive Vicar and did people’s hair to earn money. She found a partner who also secured a job. With no fixed accommodation A and her partner moved from house to house before being able to rent a small room in someone’s house for a high price. It was not long before A fell pregnant. This happy event rapidly turned problematic as A’s partner left her. Not being able to afford her rent, A found herself in an unstable living situation once again, sleeping in friend’s houses as a pregnant woman.

A’s pregnancy was difficult. As she is religious, she was riddled with guilt about having a child without a present father or marriage. So followed a long pregnancy of repeatedly fasting in order to repent and ask for forgiveness from God. Due to her fear of being deported back to Nigeria, A did not register with a GP surgery until she was 7 months pregnant as the surgeries required valid proof of identity, something that A did not have. After a long search she found a surgery that would enrol her as a new patient without any documents. Finally she was able to access maternity care with only 2 months left until her due date.

Upon meeting her midwife, who was white, A did not disclose the details of her immigration status or share her personal story, as she believed that all white people were associated with the Home Office and would deport her. Feeling frightened and apprehensive about who to trust, A hid the truth about her situation and made minimal conversation with the midwife at her appointments.

Later, A went into labour and she made her way to the hospital in the West Midlands. In Nigeria, birth in a hospital setting is a luxury, so A did not know what to expect. Despite feeling initially anxious, A has positive feelings towards her birth, describing the midwives as caring, sweet, and supportive. She was treated with respect, and she was surprised at how natural birth with minimal intervention is promoted. The word ‘choice’ resonated particularly with A, who was genuinely surprised at how much freedom and control she had over the birth of her baby boy.

A’s positive, empowered birth is very contrasting to the fear she faces in her everyday life as a refused asylum seeker. Although she is supported by a number of local charities and has many good friends, A is still uncertain as to whether she can put the past behind her and make a new life for her and her son here.