**Woman D story**

Originally from Eritrea, D is a single mother living in Leeds as a refused asylum seeker. She has a young daughter and is currently pregnant for the second time. Eritrea is a very poor country; at age 13, D was sent to Saudi Arabia to work as a house maid to make money for her family. Her employers withheld her wages and abused her contract, so D escaped whilst on holiday with them in London. With little knowledge of England or the language, D walked the streets until she came across an Eritrean man who led her to the Home Office in central London to apply for asylum. D was sent to Northern England where she was provided with accommodation and support whilst her asylum claim was being assessed. But when her claim was refused she was forced to vacate the temporary accommodation. No further support was available for D. She was left alone and destitute.

Like many other refused asylum seekers, D travelled to Leeds where there is often more support available. Upon arriving, D had no money left, nothing to eat, and nowhere to sleep. Once again she walked the streets until she found an Eritrean man, and asked for shelter. He was a complete stranger, but he agreed to let D stay with him. They became friends and after a very short period of time she fell pregnant to him. The pregnancy was unplanned; D still had no set accommodation or support. When the man learned she was pregnant, he decided she could not stay in his house.

D managed to access support from the British Red Cross who gave her food and referred her to another charity, PAFRAS, who provided her with temporary accommodation until she was able to move into more permanent lodgings. Here, D was given a small amount of money and her meals were provided every day. In addition, PAFRAS arranged legal representation for D so that she could make a fresh claim to remain in the UK and start claiming financial support. At this time the Refugee Council who arranged for D to access a midwife and antenatal classes aimed at asylum seeking women. Although this maternity care was beneficial to D in terms of forming friendships and preparing her for birth, the issue of financial support was distressing her.

She was receiving cashless section 4 support which meant that she was unable to pay for bus fares to her antenatal appointments. Past research has shown that when pregnant women don’t access maternity care, the risk of illness is much higher. As D was living far from her GP surgery and her antenatal classes, the teacher had to provide D with money to pay for her weekly bus passes. Without this support she would not have been able to attend any appointments.

Women on section 4 support are entitled to a card-based maternity bursary from 34 weeks gestation in order to buy essential items for their baby. However, this can only be used in major supermarkets. D did not receive this payment until she was 39 weeks pregnant, despite applying on time. It was around this time that D was given a 2 bedroom terraced house in Leeds, 3 miles walk away from her closest supermarket. Three days before giving birth and without cash for transport, D had to walk the 3 miles to the supermarket and back to buy supplies for the baby, carrying several heavy bags.

Three days later, D’s waters broke and she knew that she had to go the hospital. D was unable to afford transport and had no one to take her so she contacted a neighbouring friend to ask for money for the taxi. At the hospital, tests revealed that D was not yet in labour, and she was booked to be induced in a day’s time. D left the hospital feeling worried and anxious, not knowing if she would have enough money to make the journey back to labour ward the day after. D’s labour did not commence within the set 24 hours and she had to borrow money from her friend once again to get to hospital in the early the next morning.

The induction process was commenced and D was advised by the midwife to have an epidural to avoid becoming over exhausted and the baby’s heart rate being affected. D said she didn’t want an epidural, but consented after the midwife said that otherwise she would have to have a caesarean section. Although the midwife was kind and caring, she wasn’t always present despite D being a vulnerable woman.

D is now pregnant again, and faces the same problems living on limited cashless support. Distressingly, her cash card is temperamental and often she will reach the supermarket checkout to find that her card is not working, forcing her to leave without food for herself and her daughter. D has reported this problem to the Home Office, who told her to ‘just wait and try again tomorrow.’ These words form a common sentiment found throughout the asylum process in the UK as refused asylum seekers try to build themselves a life free from frustration and destitution.