

## **CASE STUDY: Tilly\***

Tilly\* was five-years-old when she first wheeled her doll's pram to the local police station to tell them the family violence in her home had to stop.

"My father was extremely violent. He controlled our lives to the point that he'd only allow us four squares of toilet paper," Tilly says.

"He'd regularly threaten to take us into the bush and throw us into a mineshaft – he wanted us to know we were disposable. We were terrified to do anything wrong, and I watched my mother go through years of hell."

Tilly was 13-years-old when she and her mother left her father.

But, a cycle of family violence ensued. Tilly has since taken out intervention orders against her brother, son and ex-partner.

"It has been a cycle of domination, power, control, pressure and mind games. If someone else told me half of the things I'd been through, I probably wouldn't believe them. It can be quite difficult for other people to comprehend," she says.

Tilly's relationship with her ex-partner lasted for just over two years.

"When we first started dating, he was a beautiful and kind person. But, after I met his parents, the emotional abuse started. Perpetrators of family violence often gain your trust, learn your insecurities and then abuse them."

"He knew how much my pets meant to me and would often threaten to harm or kill my three dogs.

"I couldn't afford to put them in a kennel and didn't want to leave without them, because I knew what could have happened. When I was a teenager, I once returned home to find my pets dead – my father had just let them die. I vowed never to let that happen again. In the end, I had to have one of my dogs put down. It was an absolutely heart-breaking decision.

"I left him the first time in 2001. Eighteen months later, I let him back in my life as a friend. But, his power and controlling behaviour hadn't changed.

"I realised I'd had enough of living my life in fear. In 2003, after another assault, I made the decision to charge him and was given a 10-year intervention order.

"It was my mother who showed me that you can leave – it took a lot of courage for her to do it, but she proved it was possible."

In the past eight years, Tilly has undertaken a host of education and training courses, and recently hosted her first workshop for women suffering family violence.

"I want to help to make a better world for other people suffering in abusive relationships," Tilly says.

"My advice to others experiencing family violence is to think of yourself and be your own best friend. Take care of yourself and reach out to the services available to you. You can leave those relationships, and live a life without fear."

*\* Name has been changed.*