

The continuing saga of a JCS Shalom Bayit client

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Laura came to JCS Shalom Bayit, the domestic abuse program of Jewish Community Services of South Florida (JCS), in desperation. She had arrived in Miami two years earlier with her husband and a baby. All her “friends” were her husband’s, so when she could not take the violence and unrelenting emotional threats from him any longer, she found herself alone.

As Laura fell deeper and deeper into a black hole of hopelessness, her case manager tried to find a pro bono attorney to represent her in court to gain a divorce. Until now, her abuser had been smart enough to make it appear as if he were the victim. Not only did he know how to present himself in a positive light within both the legal and religious community, he denied her and their child the financial support she needed. Laura, an immigrant, did not understand the American judicial system. With no money, no support, no skills, no job, no legal status and no one to count on, Laura clung to the hope and support from her case manager.

Through contacts in the community, the case manager was easily able to find her an attorney to help her with her legal status who helped her to obtain a Green Card, but it was not as easy to find an attorney who would volunteer to take on the arduous task of representing her in court. After months of searching, a good hearted attorney offered his services to help her.

Over the next year, the attorney was successful in attaining a divorce and a settlement agreement.

With the assistance of JCS’ vocational counselor, Laura found a job and with it, the hope that she would not be homeless and without her child as her abuser had threatened her. He promised her that “he would do whatever it takes to destroy her.”

Laura started working with a therapist and continued to work with the case manager. Still, even civilly divorced, the road continues to be a rocky, uphill one. The abuse has not stopped. Her abuser does not respect the parenting agreement; he does whatever he wants with the timeshare, and he is not allowing the client to have telephone communication during his time with their child.

Her abuser refuses to give her a get, the religious divorce decree, which is so important to her. The rabbi, who is a close friend of her ex-husband, will not intercede. Laura feels her life is on standby. She continues to feel that her ex-husband has power over her; as if any little mistake she makes will be exaggerated; that he can get whatever he wants and no one will be able to stop him.

Although there is improvement in her daily life, Laura feels that her soul is not free, and many days, she feels too tired, too sad and too overwhelmed to go on. Still she tries to maintain hope that her life will change and she will be free at last...

She knows it is a long and full of obstacles road... and hope.