

Adrienne grew up in a household blighted by her step-father's violence towards her mother, disruption which caused her to be in and out of care for most of her childhood. She ran away from home and played truant from school, so she did not achieve academically. She met her first husband when she was still very young and they had two children together. However, her husband subjected her to emotional abuse, repeating the pattern with which she was familiar from childhood. Eventually Adrienne had a mental breakdown and left the home, unable to take her daughters with her. She lived and worked in a hotel for a while and did volunteer work, meeting a man, Mark, with whom she formed a relationship. However, Adrienne had started drinking too much, a problem shared by her new partner. Despite this, she became pregnant with her son Jack. After he was born Adrienne tried hard to be a good mother, keeping a lovely home (she was always something of an obsessive when it came to cleaning) and looking after her son, but her drinking escalated to the point that she realised the environment was not safe for him. Adrienne took Jack to live with her mother when he was 4 months old.

Adrienne, whose mental health had always been fragile, struggled with the bleak fact that she was now unable to mother any of her three children. Her relationship with Mark descended into arguments and anger. One night Adrienne, drunk and alone in her flat, set light to her curtains. Immediately realising what she had done she called the Fire Brigade and admitted she had started the fire, which, by that time, she had also extinguished. She was charged with arson – her desperate and dangerous cry for help resulted in her first conviction for a criminal offence and a sentence of five years imprisonment, reduced on appeal to 18 months.

Gina (Anawim worker) met Adrienne in prison, visiting her regularly to help her prepare for release and resettlement. She wanted to live with and look after her son following her release but there were significant obstacles. She had been convicted of a very serious criminal offence, her relationship with her mother, Jack's main carer, was difficult, she had suffered from a drink problem and, on a practical level, she had nowhere to live. As is often the case, women's problems are often a complex tangle of practical and emotional issues. A common obstacle that women who have been separated from their children while in prison face is that a single woman will only be offered shared or one bedroom accommodation yet in order to have her children returned she needs the appropriate number of rooms. A program called Re-Unite has been developed deal with this 'catch 22 situation'. Provided the woman meets the criteria for the Re-Unite program (in particular that she is considered a fit mother), a local housing association (Midland Heart in Birmingham) will offer her accommodation suitable for her whole family so as to facilitate the children's return. Gina liaised with Social Services to ascertain that Jack could return to live with Adrienne under appropriate circumstances. Understanding Adrienne's complex relationship with her mother, Gina contacted her with the object of building bridges between mother and daughter and facilitating Adrienne's relationship with her son, Jack, who was now three. She also liaised with Probation. Gina organised temporary accommodation for Adrienne on leaving prison, Crowley House Bail hostel, and helped her deal with her drink problem by arranging for her to move to Timbers (a therapeutic residential rehabilitation centre for women with substance abuse issues). In Timbers women are drug tested every day and accompanied to the toilet. Adrienne spent six months there, also attending the Anawim Centre, while Jack came to the crèche. An application was made to Midland Heart for a two bed property and Adrienne moved into a beautiful newly-refurbished home in Small Heath. Gina liaised with Jack's solicitor and the court social worker and arranged for Jack to have regular visits. She dealt with financial issues by securing JSA and organised for a community

care grant so that Adrienne could furnish her home, as well as contacting the Boy's Brigade to find beds and sofas. She encouraged Adrienne to spend quality time with Jack, such as taking him to Dodford Farm for a weekend to help re-establish their relationship. The time that Jack spent in the crèche enabled staff to observe him and write a report for the family court. Jack went back to live with Adrienne just after Christmas 2012 and is doing well. Adrienne's relationship with her mother has improved and they meet regularly. She also maintains a positive relationship with Jack's father, Mark, who is, like Adrienne, abstinent from alcohol.

The names of the individuals mentioned in this case study have been changed to preserve confidentiality. The case is taken from the Re-unite Project, which is accommodation based and run in partnership with Midland Heart Housing Association.