

# **Pisgah Legal Services, Helpmate, Our VOICE, and The Mediation Center:** *Collaborating to meet the needs of domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault and human trafficking victims.*

**Vanessa's story is a composite example of how a family might use the continuum services from all four agencies in their pursuit of safety and healing:**

Vanessa is a mom of two, Tony (1) and Eva (14). After divorcing Eva's father, Vanessa met Alan. In the beginning, Vanessa and Alan had some good times together, but it wasn't long before Alan slapped Vanessa. Later, when she was pregnant with his child, Alan beat her badly, kicking her in the stomach while accusing her of cheating. Vanessa was terrified for herself, for her daughter Eva, and for her unborn son, Tony.

With encouragement from a friend, Vanessa reached out to **Helpmate**. A Helpmate advocate helped her create an escape plan, secure an emergency domestic violence protective order, join a support group, and get specialized services for her children. Throughout this several-month ordeal, Helpmate advocates safety planned with Vanessa as Alan continued to threaten and harass her.

During a Helpmate support group meeting, Vanessa confided that when she was the same age as Eva, her uncle had sexually abused her and that she'd recently started to suspect that Alan was abusing Eva. Helpmate connected both mother and daughter with **Our VOICE** and where they begin seeing a counselor with special training in sexual trauma. Vanessa worked through the shame and guilt she carried for herself and her daughter. Eva learned that the difficulties she was having at school might have been connected to the abuse. Both learned coping skills to start the healing process.

Knowing that Vanessa couldn't afford an attorney, the Helpmate advocate connected Vanessa with **Pisgah Legal Services** for free civil legal representation. An attorney with special training in representing domestic violence victims helped Vanessa obtain primary custody, file for child support, and regain possession of her home. At each court date, Helpmate provided accompaniment and childcare while Vanessa attended court.

During the custody proceedings, Pisgah Legal Services advocated for Alan's visits with Tony to be supervised at the **Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program**. Vanessa didn't have contact with Alan when using the program, and visits were monitored one-on-one in the program's secure facility. The professional supervisor's notes were used by the court as the custody matter was decided. Vanessa was relieved to be able to use the program because she knew that both she and Tony were safe.



*Helpmate provides safety, shelter and support to survivors of domestic violence in Buncombe County. Helpmate advocates provide critical services to survivors and their children who are fleeing violence and recovering from the trauma of abuse.*



*Our VOICE works with victims of sexual assault and human trafficking ages 13 to adult. People who have experienced sexual abuse are more likely to experience domestic violence, so the availability of sexual-assault-specific counseling is a critical part of the continuum.*



*Pisgah Legal Services provides holistic legal services to victims. In addition to support with protective orders and custody, Pisgah Legal can provide legal aid with health insurance, immigration matters, obtaining government benefits, and substandard housing.*



*The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program ensures safety during supervised visits, which are generally court-ordered in cases with domestic violence or sexual abuse. These families can't safely visit in public places or with informal supervisors and need professional, secure supervision.*