

My name is Irina, I am 36 years old and I am from Russia. I am now a single Mum and I have three children aged four, nine and eleven years. In 2013 I came to Ireland with my husband for work reasons. One year later I had my third child and two months after his birth my husband left us. In the last six months before he left, my husband was very violent to me and our children. At that time I was living in a country town, but shortly after I moved to Dublin and stayed with friends. After my husband left us, I was upset and got very depressed. My children were upset too and I know they were affected by all that had happened. It was at this time that I came in contact with TUSLA.



In 2015 I moved to a private rented flat with my three children and shortly after my children started to attend local schools and the local crèche. At that time I was very worried about what would happen my children as I was unwell myself, I was on my own and finding it difficult to cope. My two eldest children started attending Aosog Child & Family Project and it was like opening up a window for them! I started to attend the parents group, doing different activities and this was like a fresh breeze for me, and step by step I came back to normal life.

In Aosog they told me about Meitheal, and though I knew this could support us, I was worried that more people would know my situation and I was unsure what would happen. When the Meitheal group meetings started I began to see the difference and how this way of working helped us. I was not able to do this on my own and the support I got helped me to do what I needed to do. It's all about the simple stuff and helping me to manage to things like sorting out a GP, arranging and keeping appointments that the children and I had with Doctors and hospitals, and arranging activities for my children. My English was very poor and I needed help to understand lots of forms and documents. Also at times I needed letters of support and the Meitheal group arranged this with me.

In February 2017, a fire broke out in the house where our flat was. At 3.00am that morning we had to leave immediately. This is when we became homeless and since then we have been living in emergency accommodation. It has been a very hard time for all of us, but the Meitheal group has supported me and my children – travelling to and from school, to make and get to appointments that the children have to attend. Most importantly, it gives us the emotional support we need to get through this.

I now have sole custody of my three children. I had to go to Court to get this and there was a lot of things to do, but the Meitheal group helped me. I have just started Community Employment training and my dream is that one day I will have a professional art qualification. My big dream is that very soon we will have a home with a garden and flowers where my children can play. I am very appreciative of everyone in the Meitheal group and I think anyone who needs support should just give it a try. It could change your family life!

*Irina*