

Jackson's Story — A Survivor Composite Story
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Jackson, age 25

Jackson's father left and then died of an overdose before Jackson ever really got to know him. His mother struggled to make ends meet and had several abusive boyfriends who often abused Jackson too. When Jackson was twelve years old, his mother remarried. This man was abusive, too, like the others.

The violence increased over time, and there were often drugs around the house. Jackson's stepdad self-medicated chronic pain from years of untreated workplace injuries, and his mother tried to numb herself to her grief from years of abuse.

Jackson ran away at age fourteen when the stress of living at home became too much for him. While homeless, Jackson met a 32-year-old woman named Cheryl shortly after his fifteenth birthday who offered to let him stay at her home. Jackson learned that having a roof over his head with Cheryl was conditional. Cheryl denied him access to meals and other basic needs if he would say no to sleeping with her. This coercion grew to include some of her friends, and Jackson was also coerced into sleeping with them under the threat of being kicked out if he refused. Jackson was overwhelmed, and when Cheryl offered him drugs and alcohol to cope he accepted. After a few years of living with Cheryl, and years into struggling with substance use, Jackson couldn't take it anymore and ran away from her home as well. After being unable to find safe shelter due to his sporadic substance use, he ended up in the emergency room due to extreme dehydration. At the hospital, a doctor recognized the signs that he had been trafficked and helped him to enter a treatment program to get sober. Jackson has been working through his trauma in counseling and today does landscaping work.