Written submission from a member of the public (ANI0310)

I’m the proud mother to [0-5] year old [name], and I am writing to submit evidence as an individual - my own personal testimony. I want to share how choosing life for my baby even in the most difficult of circumstances, was the best decision I have ever made. I am concerned that if abortion is brought into Northern Ireland, women like me, in really tough circumstances, will end up being coerced or pressured into abortion.

Executive Summary:

- In [year], I found myself homeless, unemployed and pregnant
- I had very little support from the people around me; both family and friends told me I should have an abortion
- I was studying a masters at the time I found out I was pregnant, and many people told me a baby would ruin my career and my dreams
- Having my daughter was the best decision I have ever made, and I can’t imagine my life without her now
- If it wasn’t for our pro-life laws then I could easily have made the worst mistake of my life. So many people told me to abort, so I fear that if abortion were legal here, I could easily have been coerced or pressured into having an abortion.

Brief introduction:

In [year], I found myself homeless, unemployed and pregnant. I was pressured by everyone around me, because of my dire situation, to have an abortion. If abortion was legal here, I could easily have been coerced into abortion, believing it to be the only feasible choice, and my beautiful little girl would not be here today.

Testimony: At the time I became pregnant, I was living with my [relative] whilst trying to self-fund my masters. [Their] abuse made me miserable. At the same time, I had found deep affection and love from a man that made my heart leap inside. At the beginning, when we had thought there was a risk I was pregnant, the university nurse did a test and it came back negative. Our initial reaction was, “Phew!”, and I put my late period down to stress. Then a couple of weeks had gone by and my [relative] began to get suspicious... especially after a dirty nappy from my [relative] made me vomit! So off we had gone to Tesco’s, I had said to her that she
was wasting her time, and my money! But there it was... a clear blue test with the word ‘pregnant’ in the screen. My [relative] asked me the result... and I didn’t want to admit it at first. Then I tried to suggest that it says pregnant, but maybe it will change when the timer stops. Strange logic!

It didn’t, instead it guessed 3-4 weeks and I went into a strange form of shock. I remember my other [relative] then trying to calm me, she suggested that we watch a movie and relax tonight and then work out what to do in the morning once I’d come to terms with the news a little more. I have to say that one of the best things about my [relative] is her sense of humour, for the movie she put on for us was ‘knocked up.’ It was through this movie that I discovered just how early a baby’s heart starts to beat... and I realised that I too had another beating heart inside me.

To keep things brief I will tell you that I promptly left my [relative]’s house to escape abuse, and when I got my things returned from his house they were mostly destroyed, though I’m glad he took his anger out on them and not me. The next problem was that students aren’t entitled to any benefits and no employers want to hire a pregnant woman. Trust me I applied for every job going and out of all the jobs, four promised me work, only to go silent on me or give me an explanation as to why I was suddenly unsuitable, e.g. “you can’t be lifting heavy weights” or “we can’t train you up only for you to go on maternity leave” or “what about all the time you’ll need off for appointments?”.

Things became dire. I ended up in a homeless shelter living on super noodles. I was abandoned by the man I once thought was a blessing to me. Next thing was my ex and his ex, tried to persuade me to get an abortion, and when I took to online I was bombarded by people telling me to do the same. Then the friends I opened up to also encouraged abortion, my family rejected me (though came round later in the pregnancy) and I had never felt more hurt and disappointed at the world around me. I wasn’t allowed any visitors in the homeless shelter, nor could I leave without reporting to a support worker where I was going and the contact details of who I was going to see. Every time I went for a medical check-up I would be asked if I was drinking/doing drugs/self-harming, then they would check! I felt constantly judged and completely powerless, and everyone’s solution was to abort, but in my mind, no part of my situation that could justify killing my baby. So instead of giving up, I decided that my baby is the reason to be strong, [my child] was now my mission.
I had contacted Precious Life and they put me in touch with Stanton Healthcare. Stanton helped me buy the first vegetables in over a month (food banks don’t really do nutrition), they also helped me get accommodation with an amazing woman who didn’t even know me but took me in, all of this, and then Kiara from Stanton helped me get to [recruitment company] where I managed to get three temporary jobs! Without these jobs I would not have had a home secured for my baby before [they were] born. Stanton also helped me collect all the things I needed for baby’s arrival. Ultimately, without Stanton I would not like to think about where I would be today. Against everyone else’s advice I kept my baby and I get to wake up to [them] smiling at me every morning. [They are] without doubt the best thing to ever happen to me and the reason for me to keep trying in life! As for my masters, my [baby] got to enjoy my graduation with me when [they were] [0-12 weeks] old.

Sometimes I feel that parenthood is unfairly deemed as the ‘end of all fun’ or ‘end of happiness’ and that children will ‘ruin your dreams’ or even ‘ruin your life’. I’m here to say that is simply not the case. My [child] is a different kind of happiness, but an incredible kind I wouldn’t trade for anything. The way [they] looks at me with such innocent and pure love leaves me feeling honoured to be her mum, and I can’t wait to enjoy living my dreams with [them] by my side.

**Recommendations for action by the Government:** Without the help of Stanton, I truly don’t know where I would be today. People often say that abortion is needed here in cases where a mother may not be able to support her baby; where a woman isn’t ready to be a mother; where a partner is unsupportive - at the time I became pregnant, I could have fitted into all of these boxes. Yet, I know that I deserved better than abortion and that what I needed was real care, support and love, that helped get to the root of my problems and begin fixing them. Abortion would not have lifted me out of my situation - truth be told, I know it would have exacerbated the problems I was facing and made things so much worse. The British Government should acknowledge the fact that for many, many women, our pro-life laws in Northern Ireland are a hugely positive thing that we are very grateful for. Many women like me, through lived experience, can testify that abortion is not pro-woman, but would have hurt a woman like me and made my situation so much worse. I would recommend that the government takes stories like mine into account, and that they consider funding services like Stanton Belfast.
that help women like me financially, emotionally and psychologically in such practical ways to do better than abortion by supporting both them and their children.

December 2018