The Linker Service

Case Study: The Zahra Foundation

August 2026

WYATT

Emma, Linker Peer Worker

Emma, who has lived experience of family and domestic violence, became the Linker Network's first Peer Worker in June 2025.

"I see my role as walking alongside our clients and helping with practical support. I always say the difference between my role and Lauren's role as Linker is that Lauren helps set the goals with the clients, and I get the fun part of helping them achieve the goals, however that looks.

Each client is different and the support is different too. Sometimes it's going along to appointments or sitting with them while they make a phone call, or it might be me making a phone call while they're there, so they can talk, but have confidence that someone's there to help if needed. Other times it could be helping them write a letter for something, or advocating in an appointment, or helping source different support services and resources.

Lauren and I are very lucky - we work really well together. We have similar styles when it comes to communicating with each other and with clients - our communication is always very clear. We always debrief about what's happening and make sure our case notes are clear and concise, so that I can jump in if Lauren's seen a client and I'm seeing them the next week and we haven't had a chance to chat yet. I can see exactly what's happening, where they're at, and the same goes for Lauren - she'll know exactly what's happened and where we're at.

If I'm in an appointment with a client and they start identifying goals, I'll say, 'Hold on to that one for your next appointment with Lauren', and I'll pop it in the notes too, so that Lauren can revisit it later. I make sure that the boundary is clear, and that our roles complement each other. It's important that clients understand we have different roles. We don't do the same thing.

The most rewarding thing is seeing the change in the women we work with. I know from my own lived experience how hard it is some days just to get out of bed and attend appointments.

'Trauma doesn't go in a straight line – it's like a cyclone that goes here, there and everywhere.'

So, to see women, who in the beginning were too scared to meet at a coffee shop and now they're sourcing their own job network provider and starting employment training, is just amazing. When they get to the point where they can see the light at the end of the tunnel getting closer and they say, 'I've got this – I don't need you guys' it's a really special feeling. We tell them we're always here if they need to re-engage, but that they've graduated.

I'd like to see other organisations come together and create their own Linker Network based on what we've done, and for it to expand to have more partner agencies with more Linkers and peers to support more women and parents and single parents or carers. Even though the peer workforce isn't where it should be yet, the Linker program is special, and it's doing kind of groundbreaking work, helping women who really were forgotten about before."

Kathleen's experience of the Linker Service

"I'm Greek Orthodox, I'm a DV survivor and 57-years old. The help I was looking for was financial stability and support, help with understanding the policies around DV laws and support in everyday life.

I found the Linker Service when I called the Zahra Foundation for support. I was in the bank asking for help due to DV and an older man and his wife stopped me and said, 'We overheard your conversation and you remind us of our daughter who escaped DV. She went to the Zahra Foundation and they changed her life. Here is their number.' I called them and they put me through to the Linker program.

The goals we first set were to feel safe leaving the house, be able to manage financially and get support for staying in my house safely. I also asked for help to write a letter to MPs and the police commissioner about how the DV services and system failed to protect me.

These changed over time and included getting an intervention order in place and looking for a course to study.

If it wasn't for Emma and Lauren helping me turn things around and guide me through how to speak up and on my behalf to get the invention order, to get the security on the door replacement and help with security cameras, I wouldn't have known what to do, let alone how to do it. It helped make me safe in my own home and is helping me be less jumpy and scared all the time.

The most valuable thing I've received from being part of the Linker Service is hope. There have been many services that let me down but not the Zahra Foundation and the Linker Service. From the start I could see a little bit of a shining star, shining light through the door. There was hope.

They've referred me to other services like Zahra Foundation's Pathways to Empowerment program and financial counselling, Safe at Home, WDVCA (Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance) to get the intervention order. And then supplying me with a laptop so I could start studying. It's more than I could have hoped and asked for.

It's opened doors I wouldn't have opened - I would have given up a long time ago. Before it was like, 'Where do I go? What do I do?'

> ***'Now, there are doors being opened and I can now say for myself that I'm not a victim, I'm a survivor, and little by little taking steps I can actually get through.'***

It was Emma and Lauren that turned things around and gave me the hope to do it. You know, all their positive feedback, 'You can do it'. It's not easy waking up and being scared to keep going but Lauren and Emma have given me back the hope and confidence to keep going."

Lauren, Linker

Lauren has been a Linker since March 2025. With postgraduate qualifications in criminology, she is passionate about helping women who have experienced family violence overcome the barriers they face when rebuilding their lives.

“Each client is different, but every one of them is resilient. When you see them rebuild their lives despite everything that’s happened, there’s almost a sense of vicarious resilience – you sit in that resilience with them, and that can be empowering for both of you to achieve those goals, and to put exciting future plans in place. Being a Linker and helping them set goals and achieve those tangible outcomes as they become more independent and regain their life back is so inspiring.

One of our clients who recently graduated from the service shared a beautiful message about how the support and education we’d provided on a range of topics had empowered her to moved forward and protect herself from repeated patterns.

‘She said it had helped her break the cycle – and that’s an incredible thing to hear.’

Working together with Emma as Peer Worker has made the service better for our clients. The work that we do is different, so she has a different relationship with clients than I do, but we’ve really honed our communication with each other and with the clients, and the service we provide is stronger for it. For instance, Emma will be able to pick up on different things, because of the nature of her appointment with a client and also because of her lived experience. She'll pick up on other goals that maybe I can then help explore with the client and then work out how we can achieve that end goal.

And the benefits go both ways. If I’m working with a client who has something big coming up, I know I can rely on Emma and have the client benefit from some of her lived experience. Sometimes that might mean that we both attend an appointment together, so that the client feels like they've also got a peer there with them too, rather than myself identifying and being a bit more clinical in a sense. Emma once mentioned that she wants to be the worker that she wished she had, so I think living by those principles and having that service available for our clients is so incredible.

Emma and I both of have a passion for systems change and social justice, and we love being able to share our insights and rely on the other Linkers and the whole network for their insights. Everyone brings something so unique and their own lived experience, however that looks, so it's a very special network to be a part of.

Working with Wyatt feels like a very safe space where we can adapt our practice and grow without having rigid KPIs or requirements. We can see those really positive outcomes and not be worried to fail because there's no wrong door, there's no wrong answer. We're all learning, we're all experimenting to try and be the best we can, and I think that's really exciting. I do feel very lucky to be a part of the Linker service – it’s an incredible program.”