



## **The Willows: Dawn's Story**

A Rural Media Charity film about one woman's  
escape from rural domestic abuse.



**Client:**

Rural Action Derbyshire (RAD)  
[www.ruralactionderbyshire.org.uk](http://www.ruralactionderbyshire.org.uk)

**The Need:**

To raise awareness about the concerning increase in rural domestic abuse. To empower victims to seek help and encourage witnesses to take action to support them.

**The Response:**

A real-to-life dramatisation of a victim's experience of rural domestic abuse and how they escaped their abuser. Created as a 20-minute film that can also be viewed as 4 x 5-minute episodes online or as part of Rural Action Derbyshire's Training resources.



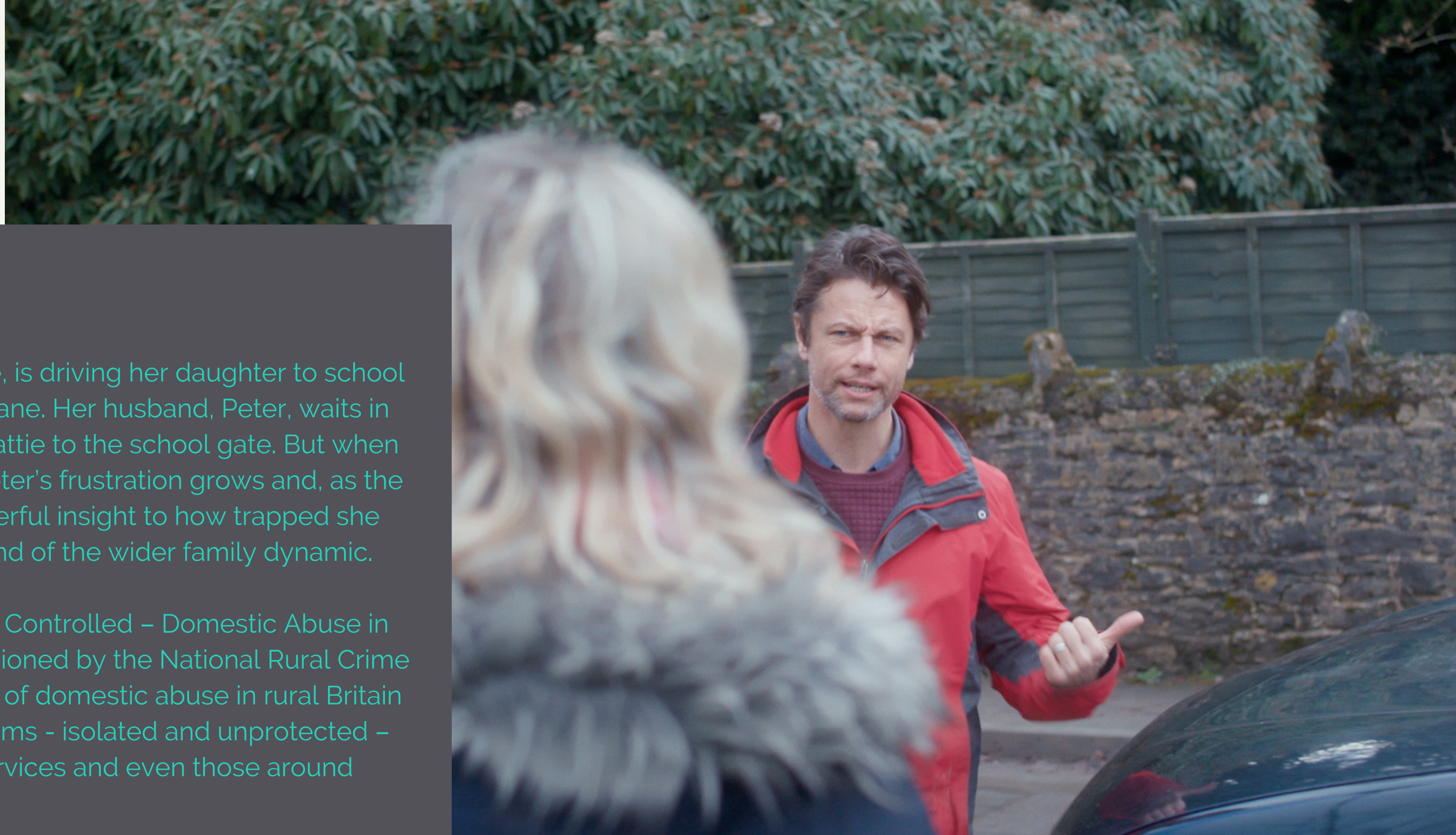
## Story:

Dawn, a young farmer's wife, is driving her daughter to school along a remote Derbyshire lane. Her husband, Peter, waits in the car while Dawn walks Hattie to the school gate. But when Dawn's return is delayed, Peter's frustration grows and, as the story unfolds, we get a powerful insight to how trapped she feels, how unhappy she is and of the wider family dynamic.

Drawing upon the Captive & Controlled – Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas report, commissioned by the National Rural Crime Network, a shocking picture of domestic abuse in rural Britain is revealed, with hidden victims - isolated and unprotected – being failed by a system, services and even those around them.

Rural life can be hard, but it shouldn't be this hard.

**[Watch the film here.](#)**





"The film was absolutely, overwhelmingly true to life. I still can't watch it without getting emotional. The actors, the production, the script, the locations – we were completely blown away. From feedback from audiences, we know that people experience a strong emotional reaction to the piece. People say that it makes them think about how damaging emotional abuse can be, and how coercion and control can effectively isolate people, particularly in rural communities where there are fewer opportunities to seek support or even to flee. This is exactly what we hoped to achieve. Thank you, Rural Media, for bringing our project to life in this way and giving us such a powerful tool for campaigning, educating and challenging attitudes."

Beverley Parker  
Chief Executive, Rural Action Derbyshire







### Audience Reached:

10 million+

"The Willows" featured on BBC's Countryfile, the UK's most popular weekly factual series and prompted a large segment on rural domestic abuse.

Countryfile has an average audience of 6 million people.

### Influence:

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs, has showcased "The Willows" at national policy level to raise the profile of rural domestic abuse to government.

### Awards:

3 Royal Television Society nominations in 2021

- Best Writer
- Best Acting Performance
- Best Breakthrough Director

Winner

- Best Breakthrough Director





### Process:

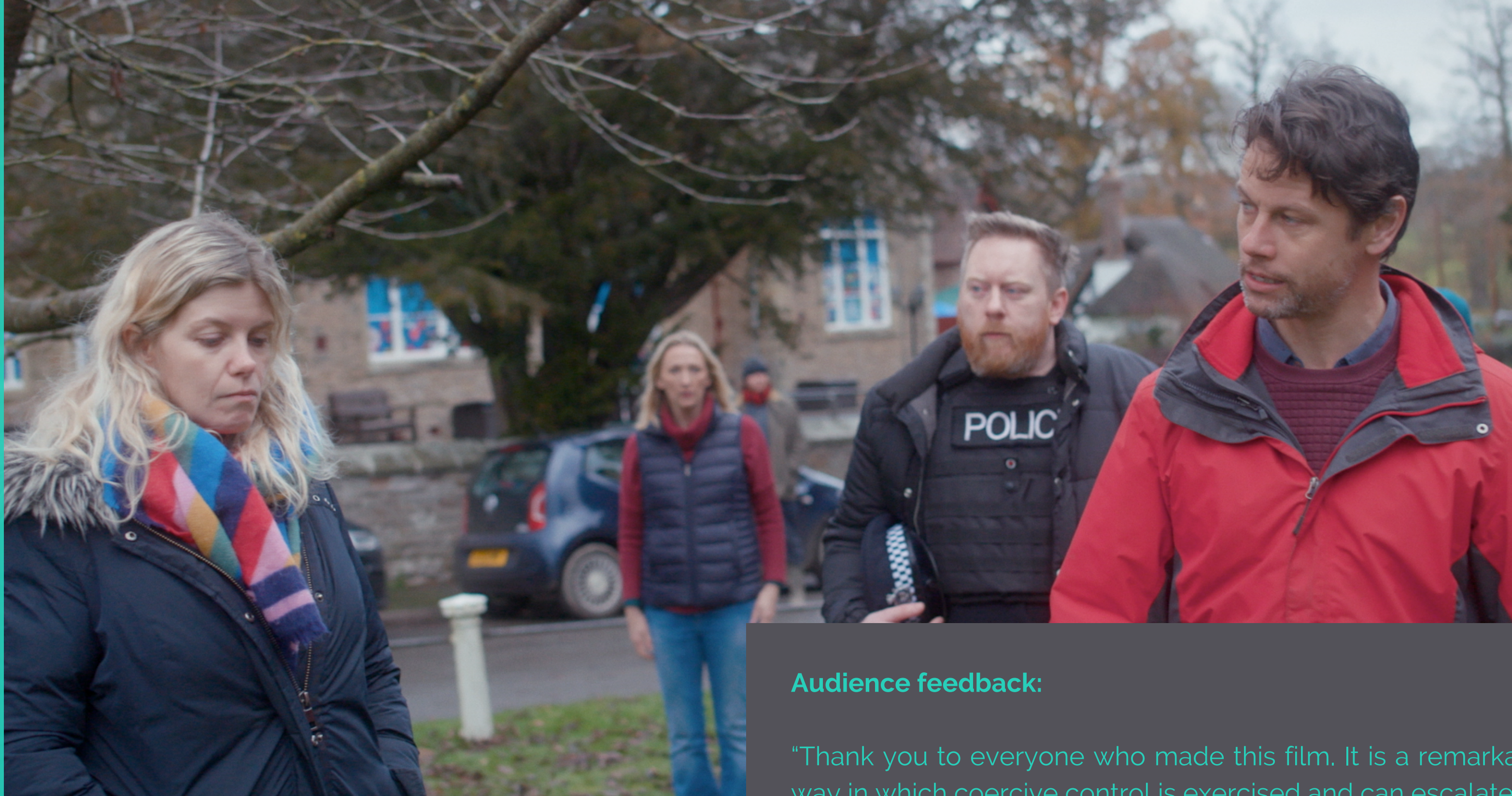
Our team worked with Royal Action Derbyshire (RAD) and their communities to gather testimonies and stories that could be used as the basis for a fictionalised story – this both protects those who were brave enough to come forward and allows a more focused emotional connection with the audience, which can often increase both reach and impact for a film of this sensitive nature.

The writing process happened in close consultation with RAD which resulted in an authentic and compelling final product. Once the film was produced, we worked collaboratively with Rural Action Derbyshire on a joint distribution and communications strategy to maximise engagement and reach local and national press.

"Right from the outset we had complete confidence in the creative and production team who worked closely with key people providing support to victims in Derbyshire. They were inclusive, insightful and clearly understood the brief. What emerged was a powerful and carefully researched script which we felt would resonate with many in rural communities, particularly farming women."

- Beverley Parker, Rural Action Derbyshire





### **Audience feedback:**

"Thank you to everyone who made this film. It is a remarkable telling of the way in which coercive control is exercised and can escalate into violence."

"The messages are more subtle than the obvious physical violence that is often used to portray domestic abuse, which is refreshing and a good springboard for discussion around the subject of coercion and control."



**Rural Media Charity** works with communities, schools, groups and individuals to create issue-driven films, heritage and digital arts projects that raise awareness, influence change and celebrate rural life.

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