

# The Journey Toward Improved Mental Health



“In my family, you’re not supposed to talk about your feelings. When I was a kid, if you were having an emotional moment, you were expected to go to your room, close the door, deal with it and come back out when you’re done,” shares Jennifer, an HFHT patient. “You had to solve your own problems.” Unfortunately, this method didn’t work so well for Jennifer. “I just went through my 20s and 30s trying to ignore how I was feeling ... but I could feel my feelings building up inside me.”

Later in her life, at the gentle urging of her family physician (whom Jennifer adores), she decided to see a mental health counsellor. Through HFHT supports available in her family doctor’s clinic, Jennifer met and felt an instant connection with mental health counsellor Cecelia, and felt she was able to really get at the root of her mental health concerns.

Seeing Jennifer and Cecelia together, it is evident that they have established a relationship of trust and support — they seem like old friends. However, in deeper conversation about Jennifer’s struggles, it is apparent that Cecelia is one of Jennifer’s biggest advocates, a guide who encourages Jennifer to embrace her feelings and to find resilience in them.

“What I like to do with people like Jennifer is help them recognize that they are ‘wired for struggle’ [a term taken from Dr. Brene Brown, a well-known researcher] and that they can go to places of deep emotion and not be overcome by them,” Cecelia says. “People can build resilience by experiencing their emotions.”

Jennifer nods, adding, “I had to learn to stand still and feel my emotions.”

Being the supportive counsellor she is, Cecelia is quick to challenge Jennifer’s comment in a friendly, supportive way: “You’re not standing still. You’re taking scope of what’s around you, how it’s impacting you and how you want to move forward.” It’s clear that this kind of interaction is typical of their visits together and has helped Jennifer to grow.

While Jennifer remains challenged by some of her emotions, her outlook is bright. She accepts that improving her mental health may be an ongoing journey that lasts a lifetime, and that at different times in her life, Cecelia may be more or less a part of her journey. Whatever comes next, she is ready for it, and she is happy that she took a chance to make herself vulnerable and talk to someone else about what she was feeling. She expresses gratitude for the resources that are available to her, and is ready to face the future, one day at a time.

