



Our Stories

We invite you to share in the stories and poems of some people we have worked with.

These are stories about the people and families we work with. All of the names and any identifying characteristics have been changed.

Learning to thrive

A young survivor of childhood abuse who has been connected with Pacific Center for a number of years faced many challenges on their road to healing.

During an extremely difficult time in their life, they found themselves homeless and living out of a tent for an extended period. Despite the barriers they faced daily – no food, no safety, no shower, no money for the bus, they managed to find their way to weekly counselling sessions at our agency. I'm happy to report that this youth has now managed to find stable housing and is working to complete high school.

Recovering from addiction and gang life

I began working with "Michael" (not his real name) about a year ago. I had heard his name for a few months but had not been able to connect with him. I randomly ran into him and introduced myself, explained my role and that I knew who he was and would like to meet with him sometime. He agreed.

When I first came to know who he was I knew he was dealing drugs. As I got to know him better, I realized how entrenched he was and that he was dealing for a local gang. This street gang is primarily made up of adults and are involved in dealing drugs, dial-a-dope, sexual exploitation of youth and the sex trade. They are a low-level street gang but extremely violent and have ties to other gangs on the mainland.

"Michael" was also using drugs including crystal meth and heroin. He came from what we refer to as a non-traditional home, meaning both his parents are professionals, finances are not an issue, he went to a good school, played sports and grew up in a middle to upper middle-class neighbourhood.

"Michael" was engaged in working with me and trusted me. He eventually agreed to go to Youth Detox which is an up to 10 days sobering house for youth. He completed it and was doing well however, he continued to have the same peer group, and the adults who wanted him to continue selling for them continued to pressure him until he relented and began using and selling for them. He did continue to meet with me one to three times a week. Given my caseload I really didn't have the time to see him that much, but I knew he was at a crossroads and his positive interactions would need to match the aggressiveness of those trying to recruit him.

He once again agreed to attend Youth Detox. In the background I was also supporting his parents with strategies and insight into what was going on for him. His parents and I found a treatment centre that would take him, and he agreed to go attend. He completed treatment and is now 8 months clean, has a job, and is looking into college. His family say they finally have their son back and "Michael" reports that he feels healthy and good about himself.

A letter from a women in the Stopping the Violence women's group.

As I sit back and reflect on the woman I was when I began attending this group about a year and a half ago, I remember her as being a "lost soul". I felt so alone and so confused. I remember my first night attending the group, I was very quiet, did not want to talk. I listened to the facilitators and to the other women and I knew in an instant that I was right where I belonged. I wasn't alone anymore, on this "roller coaster of hell" that I was on.

I can't find the words to express how invaluable this program is. The women that facilitate the group each week are not only knowledgeable but are caring, understanding and compassionate. They listened, they validated, they UNDERSTOOD! My journey through this healing process was probably one of the most difficult challenges I have ever had to face. I was in a deep dark hole and attending the weekly group helped me climb out of that hole. There were many times that I fell back to the bottom and with the help from [the PCFSA workers] I was able to make it to the top! I hate to think of where I would be right now if it wasn't for these amazing women and the Stopping the Violence program. I take comfort in knowing that I can continue to attend the group as needed as I continue to heal and I also will attend so that I can provide comfort and hope to new women attending the group and to reassure them that they are exactly in the place where they belong and that they too will reach the top.

While I was attending the weekly women's group I was also receiving one to one counselling from my counsellor. Today, as I write this I am getting ready to meet with my counsellor for my last appointment. I am not the same woman I was before. The work that my counsellor did with me, (and it was work!) has provided me with the strength and knowledge to live my life the way it should be. I have changed, I have grown and I have finally been able to feel happiness in my life, and more importantly, happiness within "me". My counsellor has gone far beyond the call of duty, I know, for myself and for others. She has been there every step of the way. I can not thank her enough. She is an Angel and I was blessed to have met her and to have had her as my counsellor. How do I thank someone who has provided me with the tools and given me a new outlook that has changed my life? I will forever be indebted to this incredible person.

Thank you.

Joe's story

Joe is a 15 year old boy who has faced multiple challenges and tragedies in his life, including being internationally adopted from Guatemala into a family of a different race, experiencing the suicide of his adoptive father, living within a new blended family, and being diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. When Joe came to the COPE program it was due to parental and school staff concerns about behavioural issues he was presenting such as significant stealing incidents, alcohol and drug use, and escalating fighting with his family members. Joe also has a history of sexually harassing a neighbour's daughter and his mother reported that he has no respect for women in general. When all of Joe's issues and concerns were accumulated, his needs seemed beyond the scope of the COPE program. However, he was refusing all other forms of voluntary help, and his mother stating feeling desperate for some help. A COPE worker, who is female, agreed to meet with Joe and his mother to discuss options within the community. It was decided at this intake that services beyond those of the COPE program were needed and the COPE worker referred Joe to Child and Youth Mental Health. However, due to a 3 month waitlist, this writer agreed to meet with Joe in the meantime.

Although Joe was at first opposed to any form of participation with COPE, his worker convinced him to meet just once individually, then decide from there. Joe reported that the voluntary, confidential, flexible and casual aspects of the COPE program were what made him agree to the meeting. This one meeting turned into three months of regular weekly individual sessions. During these three months, Joe identified and openly discussed some of his concerns, such as peer pressure, his relationship with his step-father, academic difficulties and transitioning to an alternative school, and some unresolved issues of grief and loss. We also discussed such things as self-esteem, healthy relationships, drug and alcohol use, respect for others, and personal responsibility.

During the time that Joe was involved in the COPE program, he had no involvement with the police, he transitioned from the regular school system to an alternative school and attended regularly, and he acquired a job.

Joe was very resistant to ending his involvement with COPE in order to transition to seeing a Child and Youth Mental Health therapist. His COPE worker maintained a connection for a few extra weeks in order to attend his first appointment with him, to follow up to ensure he continued his involvement, and to provide some stability during the transition between services. Joe reported that he did feel that it was helpful to have someone confidential to talk to about his concerns, and that a positive experience with the COPE program made it easier to commit to further counselling.

Lily's story

Lily is a 14 year old girl who was struggling with some family relationships, and with the changes happening within her family. Such changes included an affair leading to the divorce of her parents, her father's move to Egypt, his country of origin, her mother's boyfriend moving in immediately, and a forced connection with his daughter, both of whom Lily did not get along with. Lily also stated concerns about an emotionally hurtful relationship with her sister. She expressed concerns of low self-esteem, depression, and isolation.

Lily tried other forms of counselling, but felt uncomfortable with a clinical setting. She reported feeling more comfortable with the fact that she had ultimate control over what she discussed with her COPE worker, how long she had to commit to the program, and the fact that her COPE worker was someone completely removed from her family who would hear her concerns in confidence and without judgement. She also reported feeling much more comfortable with the outreach aspect of the program, which allowed Lily and her COPE worker to talk while hiking a trail or going to the beach rather than sitting in an office.

Lily and her COPE worker discussed differences in how people communicate and practiced strategies for effectively communicating with people she felt conflict with. Lily expressed feeling overwhelmed at times with her obligations and responsibilities, and therefore asked to learn about stress-relieving strategies. She also requested time to just tell her story and how everyone reacted in her family. She reported feeling relief just having someone to tell, when she felt that no one in her life could find out. Lily expressed concerns about not having quality time with her mother anymore, and worrying that her father didn't care about her. Lily's parents both contacted this writer to express their devotion to Lily's wellbeing, and Lily openly agreed to allow her COPE worker to tell what they want to know. After doing so, Lily reported more consistent communication with her father, and had set up regular quality time with her mother.

Lily stated feeling that she did not need to continue with the COPE program after 9 weeks, as she felt much better about her situation and had acquired some skills to use in the future. It was not felt that she needed any referrals on, and she agreed with this, while consenting to a COPE follow-up in a few months to check-in on her situation.

John's story

John is a 16 years old Caucasian male, has switched schools six times in the last three years, and is currently living with his grandmother so that he can be close to his current school and avoid the conflicts he has been having with his parents. John has been struggling with his mood swings, impulsive verbal and physical taunts to his family, and consequent confusion for not understanding his feelings and behaviours. John came to COPE seeking support for his low self-esteem and his behaviours that have been causing a lot of tension and conflict between himself and his family.

John has been committed to seeing his COPE worker on a weekly basis, has come up with realistic goals (which he has putting a lot of effort towards work on), and said that having someone like his COPE worker is part of what he needs to fulfill his goals and understand why he acts the way he does. With his worker, John has been able to identify stress as one of the main triggers for his impulsive reactions towards his family. Consequently, the COPE worker and John have been focussing on developing coping strategies that reduce his stress and help him to calm down, such as going for walks, playing the drums, and "taking a breather" from the situation. The COPE worker has been working on John's perceptions of stressful situations, and getting him to reframe situations as a learning experience rather than something that he "screwed up" on. Through the conversations with his COPE worker, John has also identified that he has been feeling overwhelmed with upcoming decisions of becoming older and feeling like he doesn't have enough direction in his future. He said that he doesn't feel like he can talk with his friends or family about these questions and was glad to have someone removed from his personal life to talk about these things. John has currently attended 8 one-on-one sessions and he and his COPE

worker have been continuing to work using his strengths to help his concerns and ways he could cope with his stress.

Dana's Story

Dana is a 13 year old Caucasian girl who was removed from living with her mother while her mother dealt with recovering from her cocaine addiction. Dana is currently living with her father, has been engaging in high risk behaviours, has been having anger management issues at school, and is frustrated with not being able to return to live with her mother. Dana's parents are concerned that her behaviours may escalate to become more dangerous and wanted her to be supported in the COPE program as a preventative measure. Dana was willing to see a COPE worker as "someone to talk to besides her parents" and to have "something to do".

Dana and the COPE worker have spent most of their time going for hot chocolate and chatting as a means for Dana exploring the issues she is facing. Dana has expressed her enjoyment in having a female worker to talk to, as she has found it sometimes difficult to relate to her dad. Dana and her COPE worker's relationship have provided Dana with a safe place to ask questions, discuss her concerns, and develop strategies for handling her temper. Because it is likely that Dana will return to live with her mother, much of their discussions have been based around Dana's expectations of returning home and "safety plans" that she could use for taking care of herself.

As an alternative to her sometimes risky behaviours, the COPE worker has help Dana brainstorm activities that she could engage in to occupy her time after school. Based on Dana's interests, the COPE worker informed her of available programs and activities to and encouraged Dana's involvement in several recreation-based programs. Her involvement in a dance class has since led to a volunteer position in a local community facility and her desire to pursue more activities. Because of the family's financial position, the COPE worker has provided them with information about L.I.F.E., a subsidized leisure pass to increase Dana's further involvement with healthy extracurricular activities. Dana has expressed a sense of pride in reaching one of her goals of becoming more involved in activities outside of school.

Here are two poems written by **Heather Stones** who participated in one of our programs and is pleased to share these with you.

Mother where'd you go, I've needed you so long.
I've watched you die away, and they tell me to be strong.
Mother where'd you go, time has flown right by.
But the pain still lingers on, as I watch you slowly die.
The blue in your eyes is gone, speckled now with grey.
Tell me what to do, to make this go away.
I feel so alone sometimes, I wish that you were near.
Now when I see you, my mind fills up with fear.
You're always on my mind, I think of you every day.
As I walk out this room, I'll wonder if I should've stayed.
It's hard to walk away from you, not knowing what will come.
I wonder if I've tried enough, what I could have done.
Two babies of my own now, I watch them grow with pride.
What happened to your love for us, don't tell me that it died.
I'm not here to blame you, to tell you what you've done.
I just want to know, will I ever get back my Mom.
The past is far behind us, memories of hurt and pain.
I work every day to get rid of the buried shame.
I just want to forget it, to move forward from here.
I'm tired of living a life that's full of fear.
It's been years of watching, watching you slowly die.
I'm here to tell you, I don't want to say goodbye.
This is not who you are, a fragile woman lying in a bed.
You're a strong woman, and you can beat it before you're dead.
I can no longer watch you, waste yourself away.
So I wrote this poem with hope that you'll listen to what I say.
I love you and I need you, but I need you to be strong.
I don't want to hear it's too late, that you're already gone.
I refuse to take it in, to accept what has become.

By Heather Stones

How was it so, that I was fooled.
My mind was so consumed.
All that I wanted, and all lies.
A sickened man in a slick disguise.
He saw weakness and I was his prey.
And because of him I'm stronger today.
And how was it so that I stayed for so long?

My mind didn't want my heart to be wrong.
Courage took a while, and finally I was free.
He sits in a jail cell and it's not because of me.
They go on to the next insecurity is their tool.
It took some time, but I am no longer the fool.
Too smart for him, and too strong for me.
Time is all it takes for the truth to be seen.
The scars will fade upon your broken heart.
You must let go of denial and the healing can start.
The bruises they fade, but the words stay a while.
It's a cycle; a pattern of love, hate, and denial.
Don't doubt yourself, never settle for less.
We can make it on our own, even if it's a big mess.
Live your life without the pain and no more tears.
Don't waste your years, let go of your fears.
You'll wonder if it was for the best, you wonder what was true.
In time you'll see he will destroy someone else if he doesn't have you.
He now beats on her from the inside and out.
I wonder why she stays, but he's filled her up with doubt.

By Heather Stones