

## **To Disconnect and Reconnect**

*Ivy, currently an eighteen-year-old whose sense of loss prompted further self-inflicted pain; her mental health journey continues today.*

“I’m sorry for your loss, are you okay?” These are the things I had often heard when my father passed away. I was angry that nobody understood what I was going through. Yeah, I have friends, and they are part of my life, but when I told them about my loss their words never measured up to what I wanted to hear; I didn’t know exactly what I wanted from my friends, but I knew that the answers and comments I was receiving at the time had not been enough.

At seventeen years of age, being in a country that I didn’t know well or where I didn’t speak the language well created anxiety. In this foreign land, I found plenty of time and space to feel frustrated, irritated, and outright depressed. I didn’t know how to express myself to my friends and simply didn’t know what to do. So, in the end, I did what other teenagers did: skipped school. I didn’t want to attend a school where I was feeling out of place and had to struggle to communicate and connect with others. I found myself pushing my friends away and them pushing me away. A huge disconnect began to occur between me and others as I started to dislike meeting new people, exploring places, and even just caring. I was beginning to feel lonely.

Suicide was always on my mind. I attempted the task a couple of times by starving myself. I thought that if nobody could understand me then what is the point? It would probably be easier to end my life and eliminate these painful memories and feelings that were pulling, pressing, and punching me down all the time. Albeit there was something inside me that made me want to survive. Perhaps I was scared of dying. Afraid of physical pain. Nonetheless, these suicidal thoughts were affected by my irregular sleeping habits and feelings of lack of purpose. These outlooks quickly compounded into something that made me feel as though I needed to separate myself from everyone in all aspects of life.

I remember I would skip school regularly, and sometimes for two straight weeks I would hang out anywhere but school. One day, the school social worker managed to get me in a meeting and I remember her asking, “If you had a full happy family (with both your mom and your dad), would you not come to school?” I couldn’t hold it against her for not knowing, but I found the question hitting me harder than I expected. The direct answer I gave her was simple, “No.” Eventually, through a tug of war of words and emotions though, the social worker was able to get the answer out of me. Shortly after I was introduced to a Chinese Youth Outreach Worker at Hong Fook.

I am still going through the process of healing, but I am glad I am on this path. Hong Fook connected me with doctors, counsellors, and their own Youth Outreach Worker. I tried medication and counselling for a while, but neither was right for me. They were ineffective, but my outreach worker continued to stay with me. Gradually, I learned how to express my emotions, recognized my mental illness, and more importantly, how to manage it.

Admitting I have depression is not easy, let alone admitting I need help. My outreach worker never judged me and worked tirelessly to promote *help-seeking behaviour*. When feelings of depression start to overwhelm me, I now step back, think, and ask for help. With guidance, I am happy to say I am back at school now. Although I still skip certain classes occasionally, I try my best to stay on campus and attend classes. I am part of something again, reconnected in some way.

Reflecting back on these several months, I have grown to see these experiences as a learning opportunity; I know I still have work to do in making sure I apply myself at school, but without the help of Hong Fook I would never, and I emphasize, never, have decided to go back to school and share this experience with you. My father's passing was painful, the continual lack of academic success just dug the hole deeper, but now I have climbed out and am on a path that I can say will lead me somewhere. It might be bumpy, dirty, and dark at times, but at least it is moving forward. I don't know how my story will end, but at least I have one to share.

*Ivy continues to manage her anxiety and depression with the help of Hong Fook Youth Outreach Worker and hopes her story can help those who may be suffering as well.*