

## **Academics aren't Everything**

*Suh, like many youths was hit hard by the pressures of doing well in school and could not cope with the stress, forcing herself to re-think her life.*

“You need to do better. We want the best for you. We know what is best for you. We work hard so you can have a better future. How can you only get these marks?”

These remarks and requests are pretty much ingrained in the Korean culture; on the one hand, we can make fun of these demands as stereotypical Asian expectations. On the other hand, these comments can weigh heavily on the mind of children as they are unsure about their lives and are afraid of disappointing their parents. Pressure starts building up, arguments flare up and lackluster results start showing.

It all began when I was eighteen. I was a first-year university student, a new chapter that promised education, hope, and opportunity. All those years of preparation had pushed me in to this direction, but it slowly began to unfold. After midterms, I realized I was unprepared for the different academic standards. Taking an overwhelming number of difficult courses without any proper guidance, being unable to communicate with professors or connect with my peers, and an immense workload led to the worst academic performance in my entire life.

I began to panic, thinking of ways of to increase my grades so that everything would be ‘normal’ again; I pulled all-nighters and pushed myself to the limit. What else could I do? All the time I had invested into school seemed like a waste as I teetered on failing courses. I did not realize at first, but I was sinking into depression. I started skipping classes. I would stay at home, eat and sleep excessively, avoid school work, desperately attempting to relieve my stress.

I felt I had nobody to talk to about my problems. My parents definitely would not understand. As I continued to skip classes and tests, I could no longer meet the academic requirements, hence, I was put on academic probation. I tried to make things ‘right’ by taking summer courses to bring my GPA up, but since I had lost my confidence and life pattern, I failed again. I felt I was worthless, and there was no point in even trying.

In the end, I was caught in a cycle of being absent from school and re-registering. After failing to pass the first year of university, I decided to drop out for some time. I could no longer pretend I was okay. My parents found out, and explosive arguments ensued, resulting in separation from family, friends and happiness. I was frustrated about everything around me, including myself.

Finally, a university counsellor outlined that I may have been suffering from mental health disorders, which I was recommended to speak to my parents about. With the help from my parents, this led to a number of mental health professionals entering my life; some of them were welcomed, others not so much. I was not sure about Hong Fook at first, as I was listed in their waiting list for two years. However, my views changed quickly.

Under their Case Management program, I have been working with a mental health worker that have weekly counselling sessions and if necessary, provided daily check-ins. I formed a bond with my case worker, revealing details about my feelings and life in a free and comfortable

manner; I started to feel as if a weight was taken off my shoulders. I cannot emphasize enough how difficult it was for me to tell someone my problems; the stigma, the inability to speak, the idea of not knowing what I am saying, were all limitations that prevented me from seeking help and living a healthier life.

Moreover, they had Korean Family Initiative Group sessions that allowed my parents to participate and gain more information about mental health. My parents and I are working together; there is a goal for me to get better and that path took some time, but they are willing to join me in my recovery.

Now, I do not hide or avoid the problem. The coping strategies I learned not only encouraged positive thinking but action as well. Talking about issues I have on my mind with my parents became easier, which was something that I never dreamt possible. Now I am always trying to think critically about situations and work with those close to me about my concerns. I am now trying to re-enter and obtain my post-secondary education degree. I am confident that I will achieve this goal with the support of my friends, family, and Hong Fook.

*Suh has tried numerous times to complete a post-secondary education; she is still finding her way to finishing this goal. She continues to gain guidance from our Case Management Team.*