

Profiles of Family Reconnect Clients

Managing family tensions in an immigrant household

Lisa immigrated to Canada from Asia with her parents at age ten. The move transformed their lives. In a story that is all too familiar with immigrants, Lisa felt disconnected from her parents who clung to traditional values, and alienated from her peers. She felt that her parents didn't recognize her achievements or validate her as a person. In what she describes as "a misguided act of rebellion that lasted over five years", Lisa formed ties with other youth who were headed for delinquency. Luckily, she realized that she had to make changes in her life and sought the help of Eva's Family Reconnect Program. She tells her story in the *Family Matters* report:

"I didn't start living with my parents until I was six years old, because both my parents had to work, so I lived with my grandmother...The main struggle when I was 13 or 14, really with my father, was a cultural clash. It was really difficult for me and even though I had really high grades at school they were so hard on me.

The conflict started getting physical and I actually got involved with child services...My dad was charged with, I guess, 'assault', but later the charges were withdrawn because I retracted my statement. My parents were just typical Asian parents and...they were just destroying me.

When I was in grade 11, I realized I just couldn't be at home. I started researching shelters and Eva's was the only one that was really helpful...I left a message with a counselor and she took me in the next day. The situation at home was really hostile and we worked out strategies of how to deal with it. So like instead of retaliating, I retreated to my room and chilled out. My parents aren't really big believers in counseling. Being Asian, family matters are private, you don't wash your dirty laundry in public...so I did the counseling myself but learned how to deal with a situation that I knew was headed for the street. I learned that although I can't live with them ever...I'm letting go of the ego and the anger and realizing that sometimes they may have been right and I'm not always the victim."

During two years of counseling and with support from Eva's staff, Lisa turned her life around. She re-discovered her love of art and began painting using an ink brush. With this renewed confidence, her academics excelled. She graduated high school with honours and received a major national scholarship to attend any university in Canada. She is currently studying Psychology in a different province and hopes to become a Clinical Psychologist. She always credits Eva's for her success saying, "all it takes is one person to believe that you can be something."

Jesse: “Eva’s saved my life”

Jesse left a home characterized by physical and emotional abuse. He was the eldest child and his mother directed most of her anger towards him. She too had been abused as a child and was repeating what she knew. She always told him that he should leave home when he turned 16, so he did:

“I remember that moment. I guess I just snapped and started crying and pounding the crap out of my pillow. The whole idea about leaving home wasn’t my idea. It came from my mum. I lost scholarships, lost support from coaches — I lost it because I lost my mind.

I was a really good kid, a nerd who was into sports. But coming home was hell. The girl I was dating at the time, my first real girlfriend, influenced me. Her family life was totally different. She kept saying: ‘I don’t want you to live there anymore.’ So I lived on friends’ couches, some of their parents gave me rooms. But after a couple of months I was always told to find somewhere else to stay. I had a job and was trying to make money and trying to go to school. I didn’t realize that I needed to go out of my way to show appreciation to them for having me.

Eventually I stopped going to class and worked at a hotel. I had a basement apartment and paid rent but I blew through money faster than I was making it. I didn’t really know how to manage money or how to take care of myself. Then I quit my job — a terrible decision — and spent some time without a home. I slept in the library, in washrooms, sometimes I stayed up all night.

Eventually I found out about Eva’s Place and I stayed there for two years. Eva’s place saved my life. In a world where I couldn’t find love, suddenly it was there. Before I didn’t really open up to anybody but Nancy [a Family Reconnect counselor] eventually built a rapport with me. We started talking a lot. I trusted her judgment. Today she’s like my second mother.

Nancy asked if I wanted to discuss getting connected to my family again. My initial answer was ‘hell no’, but when my mum had another baby I gave Nancy permission to tell them where I was. She took me to the hospital when my brother was born. She talked to my mum and stepfather on the phone and relayed messages between us. That was helpful.

My sister and I are really tight. She’s getting married this summer. I’m extremely tight with all my siblings. I love them to death. They all sleep over once a month. Mum is OK with that. I’m sure she feels left out, but she’s happy that I have good relations with them. I thought I had a rough upbringing, but she had it really rough. I can’t expect her to be different. She did the best she could.”

Jesse came two credits short of finishing high school. After that, he worked in a restaurant and was a successful player of poker for many years, but realized there were no good role models and it wasn’t a good lifestyle for him. He recently started working as a day trader and feels that it’s a good fit for him. He lives in a condo with a high school friend and turns 28 this month.

A mother's struggle to help her son

Sally noticed that her son had trouble processing information from the time he was very young. Sam had difficulty following lessons at school, but it wasn't until grade 5 that he was tested and diagnosed with ADD. At home, his father tried to discipline his uncooperative son through punishment and often through public humiliation. This created a lot of tension in Sally's marriage because she vehemently disagreed with her husband's tactics. While her husband viewed Sam as a "bad boy", Sally knew the problem ran much deeper:

"My son is not a social person. He has difficulty forming relationships and school wasn't easy for him. This has carried on into his adult life. He has difficulty maintaining jobs and interacting with people. I always knew there was something else and I refused to give up until I got the answer.

My husband didn't believe in seeking professional help. We had two ways of parenting and this caused a lot of conflict between us. Eventually, my son got older and started defending himself. The problems between them went on for years and years. Sam skipped school, missed his curfew, had a relationship with a girl who my husband didn't approve of... Then, my husband kicked him out of the house. I never forgave my husband for doing what he did.

Sam knew where I was working so he would come by in the morning and I would give him breakfast, let him wash up, and sometimes I would give him money. I was afraid to bring him home. If my husband found him, he would have beaten him and that would spill over into him emotionally abusing me and my daughter. I knew I had to find an alternative to help Sam.

My son was feeling resentful towards me because I didn't prevent this situation from happening. But I'm a resourceful parent, so I looked around for the best place to stay for him. I was referred to Eva's and I met Nancy [Family Reconnect counselor]. She provided me with so much support and Sam and I started counseling – separately and together. The psychiatrist at Eva's diagnosed Sam with severe learning and comprehension problems. The diagnosis gave me reassurance... I finally understood my son's anger. It wasn't that he wanted to hurt someone, it's that he didn't have control over it. Through Nancy's support, Sam gained confidence to stay in school and get his life back.

Sam moved back home and my marriage ended. My husband made me choose between him and my son. I chose my son and I don't regret my choice. I lost just about everything, but I don't begrudge it. Without Eva's I don't know how successful I would have been in keeping it all together. After experiencing something so horrible, it remains the most positive thing in our lives. Eva's was a gift that was given to me. Not everyone has this type of gift in their back pocket."

Sam married the same girlfriend he was dating when he was kicked out of the house and they have two kids. Sally works as an educational assistant for children with special needs and is the sole provider for her teenage daughter.