

# Kellie's Story



I'm 23 and I live on the South Coast. I struggled a little with anxiety and depression through my teenage years as I got bullied a lot at school. I finished Year 10, and then started doing commercial cookery at TAFE. When I was 17 my mum got diagnosed with emphysema and I had to stop going so I could take care of her. When I was 20, dad got sick as well with lung cancer and emphysema. He had been sick for a long time, so by the time he was diagnosed there was pretty much nothing they could do to help him. He had also kept his diagnosis hidden for a while as he didn't want mum to worry. It made me very annoyed because we could have done something but by then it was too far-gone.

I was caring for mum, and she was struggling and having panic attacks really frequently. We would end up ringing an ambulance for her over and over again. Doctors would tell us she was going to die that night, and then she would bounce back. She ended up being taken to an early retirement centre that also took care of people who are sick. I became a full-time carer for dad when she went into the centre.

As he got worse everything fell apart. You're trapped in a waiting game you can't break out of. You are waiting to see which parent will go first. It was a really daunting thing, and because I was falling apart I didn't realise that my depression had escalated. I wasn't able to look after dad the way I wanted. I wouldn't leave the house, and I gained social phobia because I was terrified of leaving him. Both my parents got into a very depressed stage and got angry and bitter. I didn't get help for myself because I thought they were worse than me. I thought there is no real point going and talking about my problems when they need me the most.

My dad died then five days after we buried him, my mum died too. It just happened in one blow. Dad had been seeing a worker from a mental health organisation as he was struggling with having a terminal illness and she helped get me on the books. When my parents died, a couple of workers came around a few times and took me out of the house to make sure I was okay. I also spoke with a counsellor from the mental health team over the phone. I only had a few sessions every second week. I didn't see them for very long as I didn't want to talk. It was too much, so I asked to stop. Other than that I didn't go to get help for some time.

After mum and dad died I secluded myself. I would stay up all night with bad thoughts, and then sleep all day. I was so suicidal, and I was self-harming. It's like you're in a very dark hole and you don't necessarily want to get out. A lot of people do want to get out, but there's some times you think 'what's the point?' When my dad died, the only thing I could think of was I wanted to be with him. I was very close with my dad, and I didn't care about anybody else. I just wanted to be with him, even if that meant death. My sister-in-law realised something was wrong, and that I might be thinking of ending my life. Friends also noticed I was breaking down and crying a lot.

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I went to see my doctor in April who did a test with me and said I had major depression and anxiety. She put me on anti-depressants and gave me a mental health care plan to see a psychologist. My doctor did that all really well, and she knew straight away that I needed grief counselling first, and then to focus on stuff from my past that I haven't really gone into.

I had to go to six different psychologists as they all kept closing their books. I would go to someone to get an appointment and they would tell me they were closing their books. I was getting so frustrated; I just wanted to have one person to see me. I finally found a psychologist this October; otherwise I would have had to travel. I made an appointment with him, but cancelled because I didn't have the money. My doctor had told me it

would be \$150. My health worker told me after I wouldn't have had to pay, so I cancelled for nothing.

I think grief counselling will help, but it won't cure it. It's never going to go away, that pain, but to have better control of it is what I am aiming for. I have good and bad days. With bad days I pretty much sleep in, don't get motivated or anything, but good days I'm usually out and about doing stuff. I do a lot of activities with a mental health service including groups, art therapy, an anxiety workshop, and I also work with an exercise physiologist.

I see my GP every two weeks and we talk about my mental health and my physical health. He's my family doctor, who also sees my brothers. I have also got a female doctor just for women's business stuff, because I feel more comfortable.

My own journey with mental health has made me want to work with other people with mental illnesses. I had been a carer for so long with my parents and dealing with the stuff with mental health that I turned around and it's like 'I can do that.' I can actually help someone.

**Contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 if you are in need of immediate assistance, or talk to your GP, local health professional or someone you trust.**

*\*Names and photograph changed to protect privacy.*

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