



**United Way**



## **A journey to wellness**

**United Way’s mental health resources helped change Laura’s life—and gave her hope and a new outlook**

“When I found United Way, I was suffering from depression and anxiety. Every night, I was going to bed praying that I would not wake up the next day. But even when my depression was at its worst, I knew there must be a different life.

I am originally from Romania and back home we just don’t talk about mental health and seeking support is seen as weakness. For years, I struggled alone and in silence. When I came to Canada, my degree was not accredited, and I had to retrain to continue my career. I am a perfectionist and I put so much pressure on myself to succeed that I lost sight of the harm I was doing to my mental health.

I started looking for a support group for people who were going through what I was going through. But I felt like the services I found were a little bit disempowering. They were only talking about my weaknesses. Yes, I have depression and I have anxiety, but I’m not the label and I think I’m capable of being much more.



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The approach at the United Way funded agency was so different. Those classes are facilitated by people with lived experience. I felt like they were saying, 'I know what you're going through. I'm not here to teach you a lesson. I'm here to tell you that you can find your way back.'

My 'aha moment' came during one of the classes. One day, I was listening to someone's story, and they were sharing their feelings of worthlessness. But I was like, 'How can you think are worthless. You are such a wonderful person!' I didn't verbalize that; I thought it. But then I realized, maybe I'm just like this person. I'm beating myself instead of looking at the other side.

Going through United Way supported classes showed me how powerful it could be to navigate your challenges. Mental health is not something that you achieve and then you forget it—it's something that you have to maintain.

Today, I am in a much better place. I know that mental health issues are nothing to be ashamed of. Recovery is possible and there is hope for a better, happier life.

## **Building on a family tradition**

**Bertha's parents taught her the importance of helping others. Now, she's doing just that with United Way.**

"Like a lot of people, the reason I got involved with United Way was my family. I was born in India, but we moved to Saudi Arabia when I was four, then moved to Calgary when I was 10.

Regardless of where we were, my parents have always been philanthropic—my dad is the first one to step up when new families move here, and my mom set a great example too. Giving back was just something my family did.

Growing up, I could see the impact my parents were having and how they supported each other in making a difference. Even now, we'll be out, and people will come up to say how much my family has helped them. That inspired me and I started to get more involved, too.

That's why I jumped at the chance to get involved in a United Way campaign. My company has a long relationship with United Way, so a few years ago, I started working on our end-of-year fundraiser. That allowed me to meet more people in the organization and inspired me to keep volunteering even after our office fundraiser wrapped up. I love



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that United Way brings people together so they can pool resources and knowledge and make the best use of our donations.

That sense of connection is what most attracted me to United Way. Honestly, I feel like some of the people that I've met through volunteering are actual friends, not just the work colleagues we may have started as. I feel like I'm slowly starting to build connections the same way my dad always has. And it's not just within Calgary or within my industry. It's more wide-reaching than that.

During the pandemic, I thought a lot about my skills and my purpose. I realized I am a people connector—I love making connections, I love interacting with people. Soft skills are my strength. I began to feel like everything that I've been doing so far has led me to this work.”