

Family & Children's

SERVICE OF ITHACA

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December, 2021

Dear Friends,

This will be the first holiday season for Sherri without her mother.

Two years ago, Sherri's mother was struggling with day-to-day tasks, and had begun to have accidents that worried her family. Her mom was living in another state, and Sherri couldn't leave her kids and family to visit as much as she wanted to check in on her. She and her brother made the decision to get their mother into a senior residential program. Then Covid hit.

Planned trips to grandma had to be put on hold because of lockdown. Sherri wasn't able to travel to visit her mother, even as her health declined. She talked to her mother over the holidays, but in March of this year, her mother passed away.

Sherri experienced immense grief, resentment, and guilt over her mother's death. She blamed herself for not insisting her mother come to live with her, and felt robbed of what little time they might have had because of the pandemic. When she looked at her children, Sherri could only think about how they would never get to know their grandmother. She found she was struggling to keep up with work, and people began to notice. She was irritable, not sleeping well, knew she was drinking more than was healthy, and recognized that her relationship with her brother was deteriorating. She knew she needed help.

Because of you, she had a place to turn. She reached out and made the call to Family & Children's Services.

With the help of her therapist, Sherri realized that she was experiencing major depression, and that the grief of losing her mother was only a part of what she was going through. Through the virtual therapy program you helped support during the pandemic, Sherri was able to schedule remote therapy sessions without having to find a babysitter.

Over the following months, Sherri took a leave of absence from her job while her therapist worked with her to help begin to process her grief, and her feelings of guilt. It really *wasn't* fair that Sherri hadn't been able to see her mother again before she passed—but that wasn't Sherri's fault. And she realized it wasn't her brother's fault either. In time, Sherri was able to return to work, feeling confident in her abilities to balance life and work stress.

Sherri is still in therapy, but she is turning to healthier coping techniques when things get tough. With the holidays coming up, her grief began to creep back in but she was determined to utilize her newly learned coping skills to manage. Sherri has learned to talk

more to her friends and family when she struggles, and even invited her brother to come visit this winter. She is looking forward to repairing their relationship and remembering their mother together this year.

All across Tompkins County, people are struggling with grief, anxiety, and stress. So many have lost loved ones, whether to the pandemic, or to the turbulence of life. And as we head into another pandemic holiday season many are struggling to process their anxiety. It is more than any of us should have to bear on our own.

Your gift today truly makes a difference. You give them a place to find the support they need to be able to cope.

Access to mental health care can change the course of someone's life. Your gift this year can support a child trying to make sense of a changing world, a grieving family to mourn, or someone who lost their job during the pandemic get their life back in order. And crucially, accessible mental health care can help keep people out of the hospital when life becomes overwhelming. With your help, F&CS can provide counseling and psychiatry to those who are struggling in the most fundamental way.

Sherri wants you to know one thing: she's going to be ok. Her grief comes in waves, and some days are worse than others. Sherri doesn't know what Christmas will be like without her mother for the first time, but she knows she has her family to support her, and F&CS to turn to when she feels overwhelmed. That's an incredible gift to give someone.

Thank you for making a difference in the lives of those we support. Wherever you may find yourself this holiday, in the words of author Connie Shultz, "May the day land gently."

Sincerely,



Alicia Kenaley
Executive Director

P.S. Your gift to F&CS can help people like Sherri begin to heal from the stress and trauma that has disrupted their lives, and to find a path forward. Thank you for contributing to the resilience and mental health of our entire community.

**Sherri's name and some of the details of her story have been changed to protect her healing process and to respect her right to privacy. F&CS never shares the details of a client's testimonial without their permission.*