

## Positive Life Stories: Julie

Parley met Julie when she was seventeen years old living at home with her parents. She was neither working nor attending school. Julie was referred to Parley Services for avoidance behaviours that hindered her social and vocational success.

Increasing distress and depressed mood greatly impacted her ability to participate in activities of daily living as well as community participation and social interactions.

When Julie was participating in a social interaction she was stressed, and when her time was free she was depressed. She was withdrawing from peers and all social activity. Julie expressed a lack of motivation regarding future planning and had no set daily schedule. She easily experienced apprehension about performance despite a history of competence in social, academic, and vocational settings. Worry about poor performance led to employing negative self-evaluations.

Julie had a history of hyper-vigilance regarding her fear of exposure or evaluation, and suppressing her prior confidence. Typical developmental milestones where she may have asserted her independence and taken risks to establish self-reliance appear to have been sublimated. Over time, fear of alienation and suppressing typical behaviours of self-efficacy and self-esteem, to serve the behaviour of others, dominated and undermined her actions, interactions and reactions despite recognized overall excellent performance and competent capacity in all areas. It appeared Julie became completely dependent on external unconditional support, and had not learned self-regulation, self-reliance and resilience. This caused her to over-estimate typical adolescent challenges, and miss some important developmental milestones for identity formation and asserting her independence.

A functional analysis of Julie's behaviour revealed that she was passively non-compliant with performance in all areas in the presence of aversive stimuli (an audience). This behaviour was reinforced externally by successfully avoiding or escaping actions, interactions or reactions, which could be evaluated by others.

A Positive Behaviour Support Plan was developed and provided to Julie's family targeting initiation and independent actions, assertive behaviours, self-monitoring and self-regulation. She was taught self-efficacy behaviours that increased her competence in life skills such as meal preparation, cleaning her bedroom, cleaning the house, walking the dog, etc.

Julie was able to develop reasonable self-care goals and demonstrated success in accomplishing them, e.g. adjusting her sleeping routine to wake up between 9-10am, include physical activity in her day, complete household chore responsibilities, etc. Her parents were taught to support her with specific strategies to build her behavioural activation, e.g. not doing things for her that she could do herself, asking her questions as opposed to telling her what to do, setting limits and

negotiating reasonable expectations that Julie could agree to, etc. She met with a behaviour consultant weekly in person or through Skype sessions to debrief interactions, personal data recording, and develop goals for increasing social and community participation, including making plans to attend activities of interest to her.

Contingency maps were developed, studied, and reviewed with Julie weekly to increase self-awareness of counterproductive behaviours and increase productive replacement behaviours. Julie practiced self-soothing actions, mindful behaviours and increased self-monitoring behaviours. She currently presents with no social anxiety.

Julie now enjoys a more positive relationship with her parents. Once she was demonstrating effective self-monitoring and resilience behaviours, all supporters systematically withdrew support for initiation. Julie began to independently initiate social interactions and opportunities.

Julie is now taking risks, asserting her independence and demonstrating self-reliance. Within the last month of our support work, she competently negotiated actions based on contingent reinforcement and successfully confronted her worries over performance and evaluation, by independently applying for, interviewing, and working in a new job at a café. She applies her learning to situational experiences to maintain and generalize contingent interactions. Her overall wellness greatly improved, such that she independently self-soothes and uses coping strategies during stressful situations.

Julie increased her acceptance of reinforcement from others. She recognizes the value of contingent reinforcement and learned to embrace the good feelings of encouragement from others to maintain resilience behaviours; further increasing positive self-esteem and reducing reactivity to problem behaviour.

In the year after her nine month therapy, Julie was back at school, working, socializing and travelling. Future planning is now happily being practiced.