

Cat's Testimonial

LLTF and Peer Support

Hi my name is Catherine (Cat), I am 58 years old and I was born blind. Last summer I got a call from my brother who said: *you need to come and say goodbye to our dad*. It was a frightening experience, to go up and see him right on death's door. Fortunately, he pulled through, but was not the same as he was before- he's thoroughly disabled and in a lot of pain.

Before attending Living Life to the Full (LLTF) courses, I was struggling as a caregiver for my father, encountering resistance and not knowing how to handle it. He is suffering from cognitive decline, and I find myself constantly grieving him. I took his pushback very personally- feeling like I was rejected from the family because of my disabilities; and feeling depressed and anxious.

Through LLTF and Peer Support in Mental Health Training programs, I have learned many useful techniques to approach my caregiving duties. When I am in a triggering situation with my dad, I now step back and think of how I could have handled it better. Every time I'm stressed, I remember my toolkit from LLTF so I can behave in a way that will lead to more positive results. I change my direction and find myself interrupting what can be a vicious cycle. I no longer feel like I am making matters worse through my reactions. I have more inner strength now, because I am able to trust myself- rather than let myself get overwhelmed.

Because of LLTF, I realize that I have started to listen to my parents without judgement. I can put my own biases aside- letting go of what I think they need or should do and instead respond. I find that our relationship is much more peaceful and less stressful because of it.

Before I attended the course, I was dealing with my caregiving in isolation. This year, however, I have developed great coping skills through the course. I am also more involved with the community and in supporting other caregivers. The self-care component of LLTF has pushed me to seek assistance for my own health, becoming more productive and improving my quality of life. I've also realized that I am not alone in these experiences. Strangely enough, by facing my limitations, I have discovered how confident and capable I am. I am now a Peer Supporter, working within my community to support others with similar struggles. I was delighted to be offered such an opportunity- to be able to be a facilitator and share what I found to be a powerful learning experience.

If the answers to my struggles were easy, I would have found them on my own. Having a group of peers around me offers the opportunity to listen, figure things out and learn together. And that's more comforting than doing it alone. I am empowered to *live my truth*, and from that I can help others find their strength- just as I have.

From this experience, I have gained confidence in my own abilities and resilience. I know that as my dad nears the end of his life, that I will need to practice all the skills I have learned in the LLTF program. By being a peer support group facilitator, I can help others as well as learn from them. I have gained the confidence to engage with the larger community over caregiving and health care issues. I volunteered to be a patient representative on my local Ontario Health Team and hope to contribute towards making positive changes, now that I have been empowered and can cope with stress in a positive and healthy way.