

Maria's Story

Poverty to Possibility



"I'm actually pretty strong. I'm pretty brave, and the bracelets started coming off and my self started coming out..."

Maria Estrada spent the first years of her life living happily in Peru. When she was six, her mother moved them to Canada with the hope of living a better life. They arrived in Canada speaking no English and having left behind the family supports they needed to establish their lives.

Within months of arriving in Canada, Maria taught herself English as a way to stop from being bullied in school. With her mother still struggling with the new language, Maria became her mother's translator and found herself doing the talking in very adult situations such as at the food bank when they needed food, and at the shelter when they needed beds. At 7 years old, Maria was taking care of herself while her mother worked odd hours to pay the rent and began her struggle with anxiety and mental health issues.

After a failed suicide attempt at the age of 12 and with the insight of a person twice her age, Maria knew she needed help. She walked herself into a doctor's office

and told them she wanted to kill herself. She was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, was given anti-anxiety medication and was recommended to a counsellor.

She had her third suicide attempt that at the end of grade 12 and spent several months bouncing between hospitals before she was diagnosed with PTSD, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety and OCD.

With further support from both United Way and her high school she managed to graduate with honours and even received a scholarship to college.

She had been hiding both her mental health issues and the physical scars on her arms from years of self-harm, covering her wrists with bracelets. As she began to understand herself and get the support she needed she began to think "I'm actually pretty strong. I'm pretty brave, and the bracelets started coming off and my self started coming out..."