

## Haven Counselling and Support Groups: A Safe Space for Healing

When Susan came to her first group at Haven, she felt welcomed by the other women. She was invited to make tea for herself and chose where she felt comfortable to sit in the circle. Although she was a bit uncertain about what to expect, when the group began with the agenda and the guidelines, she started to feel more comfortable.

She didn't feel like saying anything and was encouraged to do what felt right for her. She listened intently to everything the other women shared. She admired their courage and strength.

The next week, Susan told her Haven counsellor how supportive it had been to be with a group of women who had experiences similar to her own. For most of her life, no one had talked about the violence or abuse in her family, and she felt totally alone.

Over the years, she did what she had to do to survive, including restricting her eating, cutting herself, and drinking to manage nightmares. In the last few years, she started to feel shame about those behaviours. Her friends and family did not understand what was happening to her, contributing to her sense of shame and isolation. She thought that no one would ever understand her experience.

*"My internal compass is stronger. I have finally begun accepting the me I am right now, knowing I am always becoming. I want women to know that it takes courage to walk in the door, but Haven is a place where they will be safe and their experience will be honoured."*



Then, a friend told Susan about Haven Society, so she looked them up on Facebook and decided to give them a call.

Through counselling, Susan came to realize that she had used these coping mechanisms to resist the violence. Wetting the bed into her pre-teens was her way of resisting the sexual abuse. Escaping into her head was how she survived.

With the support of the Haven counsellor and the other women in her group, Susan was able to normalize—to understand—these coping strategies, which helped to dispel the shame that had for years been so deeply buried.

As Susan reflected on her life over the weeks, her strength and resistance became clearer to her, transforming how she felt about her story and about herself.

The other women in the group reminded Susan that they had made it and that hope was possible. They could walk into the future together.

\* While this story speaks to the experiences of our clients, for privacy reasons, this story and all names are fictional and the images and photos are stock.