

# SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT:

## Sophia's Story

Here at Present Age, we often refer to the work we do as “planting seeds.” In other words, we strive to plant seeds of hope and love in the lives of each girl we have the privilege of working with. However, it is essential to know that we do not “plant these seeds” with the expectation that we are guaranteed to see the harvest – the fruits of our labor. We have signed up to do God’s work of justice and to love the girls entrusted to our care regardless of the outcome. We do not always get to see the full picture of transformation in a girl’s life; sometimes we do not get to run alongside them to victory. Still, we continue to plant seeds, knowing in the depths of our core that there is purpose in every experience, because each girl that walks through our doors is worth fighting for.

With that being said, God, in His infinite mercy and grace, often gives us the privilege of witnessing life-changing transformation. This transformation comes in all shapes and sizes; but for Sophia, it has been an increased understanding of her self-worth and the profound realization that it is, in fact, okay to feel and hope and dream.

When Sophia first stepped foot in our office a year and a half ago she perfectly fit the description of “too cool for school.” She was jaded and guarded, and it was clear that her trust had been broken too many times to count. She had built up walls and defenses within her heart to protect herself, but instead they left her feeling cold and numb.

“Sophia can have a hard-outward exterior. She is strong, and she wants the world to view her that way. For a long time being strong meant hiding her emotions and swallowing her feelings. She believed that her emotions made her appear vulnerable and weak. However, over the past few months Sophia has been realizing that the opposite is actually true,” a Present Age staff member close to Sophia said.

*After over a year in our program, Sophia recently had a major breakthrough. For the first time since she started receiving services, she truly began to value herself. With every passing month the Present Age team has witnessed her perception of herself gradually shift. She is so much lighter now, as if she finally released a heavy burden from her shoulders. She has transformed from the girl who never smiled, into the girl who can't stop laughing. She no longer feels the need to hide her feelings or emotions. In fact, when asked how she would describe Sophia, one Present Age staff member said, “unapologetically honest.”*

“She has always been very independent, driven, and mature. However, a crippling lack of self-confidence and self-esteem has consistently overshadowed those qualities. Throughout the past few months, the way she views herself has radically shifted. Those positive traits she already possessed are now being coupled with increased self-worth, and propelling her into life-giving freedom,” a Present Age staff member said.

For Sophia, there was an initial disconnect between her trauma and her own emotions. Rather than confronting painful situations and memories head-on, this numbness acted as a temporary solution. She believed that if she guarded herself from feeling things or having expectations then no-one could let her down.

“Time after time we see what a crucial role consistency plays when working with our girls. If they don’t believe they can count on us – then they will never trust us enough to work through the hard stuff with them. They come in expecting us to break our promises or somehow let them down. So, it means something to them when we actually show up when we say we’re going to. This gives us an incredible opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus and show these girls a beautiful glimpse of God’s relentless love for them,” a Present Age staff member said.

Today, Sophia is growing into a young woman who is willing to experience the full range of her emotions. She is no longer numb to her feelings – even the hard and scary ones. She now allows herself to experience joy, pain, disappointment, excitement, and even hope. She is finally realizing that her feelings do not make her weak, they simply make her human. This might not seem like a momentous breakthrough – but here at Present Age, it is the very definition of victory.

\* Sophia is NOT the real name of the survivor in this story, it is a pseudonym.

