Ever since I was a kid, I experienced severe anxiety, and it negatively affected my daily life. I worried excessively. I often had trouble sleeping, eating, and concentrating. I got headaches and experienced severe acid reflux. Through all of this pain, I refused to seek medical help because of stigma. Mental health issues carry significant social stigma in my Chinese culture. I did not want to be seen as crazy or insane. In my late 20s, I was admitted to a hospital after a very severe panic attack. The hospital doctor diagnosed my condition as General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). For the next few years, I worked closely with my therapist to learn different techniques to manage my symptoms. Now, I exercise regularly, meditate daily, and eat and live much healthier. I also take anxiety medication to complement my other coping mechanisms. Initially, the toughest part was explaining and educating my family and friends, who had a lot of misconceptions and misinformation about mental illness. They now understand that mental health illnesses are no different from other bodily illnesses, such as diabetes. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Now, I am very open about my GAD, and have many people coming to me, revealing their own mental illnesses. Just like me, they learn that the key is to accept the existence of their anxiety as inevitable, but transitory. Just like me, they learn that the going can get tough, but it gets better! I am now very peaceful and happy.

-Sunny, San Mateo