

INSIGHT

THE CHILDREN AND FAMILY NEWSLETTER



CASE STUDY

Bereavement counselling, making a difference.



I first met A last March 2024, she is a girl of 17 and had to face the difficulty of facing the loss of her mother at such a young age. A is the youngest child of three. She has two older brothers. Her main interest is Art.

A, lives with her father, and she often has visits from her older siblings, which gives her some light relief.

A, was referred to me by her family as they felt she needed some outside support to help her through this difficult time and give her an outlet with a therapist. The family shared that she is unable to share her feelings with them and has shut down. I made an appointment for the following week, and the family very quickly accepted and felt encouraged that A would be receiving external support.

My first impression was of a young girl filled with extreme anxiety and feeling unsure of what our service meant for her. To help create a safe and calming environment I set up the room with a variety of art materials to help A focus on materials that give her interest and help divert some of her anxiety.

We agreed on meeting once a week at a regular time and day. A, soon settled into the routine of coming to see me. Through using the art materials,

it enabled her to have a comfortable dialogue between us, as it gave her a shield, she slowly shared her sorrow and was open in allowing therapeutic support to guide her through, step-by-step.

As the months went on, I noticed how this shy and anxious girl was gaining more confidence and recognising that she needed an outlet from the way she was living her life. A explored the loneliness she is experiencing as she has no outside life. I guided her to start thinking about returning to education? We explored her interest in art, and she felt this was one area that might be a possibility for her.

A, asked if I could help her with information on how and where she could begin her search. I promptly did some research and gathered information for her from various educational colleges that provide art in their syllabus.

I shared what I found and encouraged her to think about what might be possible.

Her eyes shone with excitement, "do you really think I can do this"? I gave her the time to think it through for herself and decide whether this was the right time to return to education and where she might decide is the best place for her.

A shared her anxiety and fear of whether she can manage to interact with the other students, but I

could see the other side of her need to get back with younger people and to find an outlet for her personal development.

I was very encouraging and positive with the prospect of A having something that was for herself and the opportunity of making friends. A commented on my encouragement and I felt this gave her the courage to ask her sibling to go with her and find the right course that suited her needs.

When we met in September, A, had a broad smile and confirmed that she had found the correct college and course for the 24/25 academic year.

This course is based around many aspects of Art & Design. Through the last few weeks, I feel that A, has developed immensely, she is more confident in herself and her ability to reach out to other students and is delighted that she has now found a new group of friends.

As her life has improved, she has now asked to meet once or twice a month as she feels she can venture out without my weekly support.

We can now start to think of our ending as A, goes on to broaden her life.

Stella

Oh, what a Year.

Another busy year for all at the Children and Families support team.

We took the kids this year to Bedford's Park on a field trip

The children played in the woods and learned about the insects, visited and fed the reindeer, then toasted marshmallows around the campfire. Time to have fun and enjoy the space.

We visited Laser Mayhem

The kids went into teams with the adults and competed and worked as a team, rolled around in the mud and bonded with parents and children alike.

Our new Children's room opened

It was great for the team to open our seaside room, a room packed full of seaside memories, with sand and shells and kites. The room is full of games and books and crafts which allows us to work where the child needs to work in a safe, and colorful fun place.



We started our new Children's group

The group lasts for 6 months, and we are now on our second group which began in October with the children carving pumpkins and generally getting to know each other. The group is a great opportunity for children to do what they want and need to do, from walking and playing and creating within a safe and fun environment.

School visits

We attended sessions to help teachers with bereavement issues at their schools, bespoke sessions put together to help understand what children are going through, what signs to look out for and generally understand what grief is and how it affects people.

Memory Walk

The hospice held its first memory walk, a time to walk and reflect on those loved ones, raise vital funds for the hospice and have a fun day. Stalls, singers, marching bands, food and drink and all set in the beautiful Raphael's park. Over 300 people walked including myself and some of our children.

Our children's support partner City Bridge

We are now in the second year of our partnership with City Bridge, this has allowed us to do all of the above, not including the memory walk.

We have seen and worked this year with Children and their families

Age 4 and under	5
Aged 5-9	22
Aged 10-15	30
Aged 16-18	12
Aged 19 and over	3
Total seen.	72



Support during Christmas period

Useful tips for bereaved relatives

We thought it might be useful at this meaningful time of year to add a few tips. We know that not all families celebrate Christmas, but it is a time for many when families come together. When a family member is no longer with us, it hits homes how great the loss is for us. These suggestions have been taken from us and other sources for you to use yourself or to pass onto those that you feel might need them.

- Stick to some of your normal Christmas/festive traditions to pay tribute to the person that has died. It's ok to set up a space for that person.
- Do what's right for you and try not to feel pressured into doing things you are not comfortable with.
- If you are alone, make your own new Christmas/festive traditions.
- Spend the day somewhere else.
- Go for a drive.
- Get out in the great outdoors.
- Visit some events, museums etc.
- Put on Christmas PJs and have a lazy day.

Useful tips for bereaved children

- Any reaction to Christmas is normal, ok and healthy.
- Children need permission to feel angry, sad, guilty or frightened about celebrating Christmas after a death.
- Christmas can rekindle feelings of grief for children.
- Involve your children in Christmas planning.
- Many children benefit from predictable routines, normal Christmas routines.
- Many children have a strong desire to share stories of the person that has died.
- It can help reading children's books about grief as they can approach it in a more general way.

A few suggestions are:

- The invisible string.
- When Dinosaurs Die.

MEET THE TEAM



STELLA
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My work with Saint Francis Hospice started 14 years ago, as a volunteer counsellor and then moving on to working with families and children. I use creative ways to help our children and families open and talk through their individual experiences of grief, and loss. Time given is of essence for our young clients to process the change to their lives.



PETER
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I joined the Family and Individual Support Services Team at Saint Francis Hospice September 2023 as a Child and Family Therapist. Prior to my role, I was their Volunteer Bereavement Counsellor for 4 years. I have previously worked as a counsellor in schools, colleges, with the NSPCC and Childline.

Plans for December and year 2024

We will be taking our children and their family to Harrow Lodge Christmas Light display on the 11th December, sponsored by MIND as part of our children's group activities, a great way to enjoy Christmas festivities and spend time together as a family. We are very grateful to our supporters and City Bridge our sponsors for the funding to allow us to do this.



We thought it would be fitting to end this edition with a peaceful and reflective poem. If you would like to make any suggestions regarding future editions, please do not hesitate in emailing us (familysupportservices@sfh.org.uk).

Please take care and we wish you a lovely Christmas and festive season and a peaceful New Year.

Stella & Peter

Someone Is Missing at Christmas

Let this be a loving reminder
That someone is missing today,
Someone our hearts still hold on to,
as we travel along life's way.
Someone who made life so special,
for all those who gather here,
Someone who won't be forgotten,
But cherished from year to year.
And now as we pause to remember,
Let us all fondly recall,
How dearly each of us loved her,
And oh...how she loved us all

