

**CASE STUDY**  
**Rory and Olly's story**

*Please note names and some of the details about this family have been changed to protect the identity of the family involved.*

Rory and Olly were referred to our service via Rowcroft Hospice following the death of their father 3 months previously. At the time of the referral Rory was 10 and Olly was 7 and they lived with their mum, Sally, who was 40 years old. Sally had been married to the boys' dad, David, for 12 years and Sally spoke about a very happy and settled life with David. David was a fun loving man who loved his family, enjoyed his work and loved to watch and play football.

David had been diagnosed with lung cancer 1 year previous to his death and this had come as a great shock to the whole family. David managed to keep working for the first few months but then his condition deteriorated and his wife Sally cared for him at home with the help of the Hospice at Home team from Rowcroft Hospice. David died at home in the Spring of 2013 surrounded by his family.

Following David's death a referral was made to our charity from the Rowcroft Bereavement Coordinator as it was felt that the family would benefit from bereavement counselling as a whole family. Rory and Olly were struggling to come to terms with the death of their dad and Sally felt she had been unable to get them to talk about how they were feeling as she felt they were trying to protect her. Sally said she was very concerned that they were not grieving in a healthy way and she wanted to do all she could to help and support them at this difficult time.

An initial telephone assessment was undertaken between myself, as Lead Therapist for CFG, and Sally. In this conversation I was trying to ascertain how the family were coping with their grief as a whole family and also individually how each family member was dealing with their own grief following this very big loss within their family. Sally felt that the boys were not opening up about their feelings and she was worried that Rory was becoming withdrawn whilst Olly was displaying a lot of anger.

An initial visit was arranged for myself and another therapist to visit the family at their home in Torquay in South Devon. We visited after school and at our initial visit the boys were reluctant to speak to us and appeared very worried about having to talk about the death of their dad. We spent time getting to know the boys and asked them to talk about what they liked doing and also got them to share a little about the other family members and the relationships they had with each other.

Sally talked openly about the death of David and how she had been impacted and we could sense the boys were very uncomfortable listening to their mum as she spoke of her pain. We took time to explain what we offer through our bereavement weekends and the home visits. Rory and Olly said they would like to meet other children who had lost their dad as they felt they were the only children in the world who had experienced the death of their dad.

On the second and third home visits we noticed a growing openness between Rory, Olly and Sally as they talked about their feelings and shared some of the thoughts that had been troubling them. We used two different board games that enabled the children to open up. Olly was very concerned that something might happen to his mum and it seemed to really help to talk this through during the visit. Part of our role as therapists

at the home visits is to help the family to communicate and to talk about their fears and worries. By doing this family members are often able to not only find understanding from their family but we can help to normalize some of the feelings they are having.

The family attended our bereavement weekend at which we noticed that Sally seemed to find strength and support from being able to share her story with other mums who had experienced their husband's death and were also trying to cope with their children's grief.

Rory had said previously that he could only come for the Saturday as he had a football match on the Sunday, but after he had attended the Saturday session he was determined to come back on the Sunday as he didn't want to miss out.

Olly was able to use our "anger wall" to express his anger at his dad's death by throwing clay at the wall. After he had been able to safely express his anger helped by one of our therapists, he then took the clay inside and made the clay into a model to represent his memories of his dad.

On the Sunday the family all gathered together to create memory jars alongside the other families. This gave Rory, Olly and Sally a chance to talk about what they remembered about David and share those memories as they made layers of different colours to represent the different memories using a mixture of salt and chalk.

Following the weekend my colleague and I returned for a closing visit and noticed a massive shift especially in the boys. Rory was able to talk about his feelings and commented that he had particularly been pleased to meet a boy from his school at the weekend. Sally reported that Olly had been much less angry since the weekend and they had decided to have an anger wall in their garden for occasions when either of the boys felt angry and wanted to express their anger safely.

Sally felt she had benefitted meeting other families who had been bereaved and was planning to keep in touch with a couple of the mums she had met. She couldn't speak highly enough of the weekend and the way it had helped the family to communicate and to realise that they could move forward and take the memories of David with them.

Sally asked to keep in touch with our charity, which is something we offer to all the families who attend the bereavement weekend. Sally, Rory and Olly came to the next social event that we held and Sally said that they felt in a very different place as a family since the weekend. Sally offered to help promote our charity in any way that she could so that more families could benefit as they had. Our relationship with this family continues to the present day.

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