

I lost my son William over 9 years ago. He was stabbed to death, sexually mutilated and had his throat cut. He was just 18 years old. Despite the shock and horror of my son's murder, I took on the system and campaigned for many years for better treatment of families of murder and manslaughter. Unfortunately, on numerous occasions, I fell on deaf ears.

To have been invited to this pilot scheme was, for me, a privilege, and should be made available to all families, regardless of their status or postcode.

When Margaret and I arrived on Monday we were both anxious about what we had let ourselves in for. Speaking for myself I was a broken spirit. Almost immediately, over lunch, we were put at our ease. We learned very quickly (for the first time in 9 years, people were accepting us and not judging us in our broken state.

Since the brutal murder of William I have been unable to cope with any images of violence. I was delighted when Simon took that on board and understood. I felt heard at last.

Jay explained in terms that we all understood the workings of our minds and allayed our fears that we were 'mad' people. We were traumatised by the horrific circumstances that were thrust upon us, and over which we had no control.

The two Carols, Marian and Julia brought out the best in us, relaxing us into feeling human again. For me the combination of massage, art and walking the labyrinth were especially important as I have felt totally isolated on my horrendous journey to survive.

Barbara and Linda did their utmost to ensure that we all had what we needed to help us, and became a friend to us all.

With all the treatments and care made available to us, we felt able to respond and open up; to unleash some of our pain that has been trapped within us for what seems like an eternity, in a safe and peaceful environment. It was OK to cry, laugh, shout; to feel and show emotions, something that we are not allowed to do in our society.

To date, I have carried away with me all the benefits I received during my stay. However, I would quickly like to add that our society is terrified of people whose pain is palpable. They don't know how to cope and are so frightened they're not even trying.

Try asking families what is needed. I feel there needs to be someone experienced to co-ordinate a multi-agency response to families in crisis. Someone to do intensive intervention with the family, monitor the children and assess their needs. After all, their parents are so traumatised they are no longer coping or functioning. This should be available in the immediate aftermath, thus reducing the longer term effects for our next generation. Someone just to step in and help them. My own family was destroyed by the system's failures. This must not be allowed to continue.

Society is helpless in the face of such agony, and we've all got to be braver than that.

Thank you.