

# Meerkat Mail

Issue 16



## Welcome to Meerkat Mail

Hello Marvellous Meerkats!!

It feels like just two minutes ago we were writing our last introduction but here we are again. This year certainly seems to be going by quickly while we all try and get used to this strange new world, we now live in.

There have been some big changes to our Meerkat Team over the past few months. We said goodbye to Debs who was covering Sophie's maternity leave and we also said goodbye to Sarah who has gone on maternity leave. Due to Covid-19, there was just Kate in the team for a few months, but we are now excited to welcome both Sharron and Sophie back on a part time basis.

We have been working hard to provide the Meerkat Service to families virtually over the past few months which has been a whole new way of working. Inside, you can read how Isla has been accessing support virtually and how Charlie has been supported during lockdown with the loss of her dad. There is also a section for you to share with your grown-ups so they can read about the bereavement training sessions we have been doing in some of your schools.

We have answered your questions about returning to school and have some great fundraising stories to share with you. There are also some fun Sudoku and crossword puzzles for you to get your brains back in gear ready for school.

We hope you are all keeping safe and fingers crossed we can see each other again soon.

Love from  
the Meerkats x



# Charlie's Story

My name is Charlie. I am 15 years old and my dad sadly died from cancer during lockdown.

I have been getting support from the Meerkats for a while now. They are a support group for people who have dealt with loss of a family member or dealing with living with a family member with a terminal illness.

At the Meerkats you get to talk to someone about your worries and feelings about grief and dealing with someone who has a terminal illness.

Before the Covid-19 I would meet at the Rowans Hospice to talk through my worries and learnt to understand my fears were normal.

Sometimes you get to meet up with other people who also use the Meerkat service and do fun activities like bowling, watching a film etc. This is great as you get to mix with other people who are going through similar things to you.

My Meerkat meetings have helped me deal with my emotions and worries whilst living with a Dad with a terminal illness. Even though lockdown happened I was still able to get support by having phone calls. This helped me loads as lockdown made my worries feel worse. I felt more alone as I couldn't mix with my friends and talk to them about how I was feeling.

Losing a parent/family member during lockdown is really difficult as there's a few restrictions still in place but I was able to call the Meerkats to ask questions about what would happen next and other worries I had. Kate called me to talk me through what happens at funerals and how they are different at the moment. She is always there if I need support and helps me find ways to cope with my grief.

I miss my dad, and learning to live without him is hard but my family and Meerkats are helping me through it. I have been learning to cook as my dad liked cooking and I think he will be proud of me.

Charlie x



## Virtual Meerkats

With Covid-19 rules meaning we can't see people like we normally would, we have had a busy few months of trying to get to grips with using technology to see children and families!

We have been working from home instead of in Meerkat Central and we've been doing some of our work over the phone and also using Zoom video sessions when it's helpful for families to be able to see us. This has been very strange for us because, as most of you know, we like to use lots of materials normally in our sessions with paints, glitter, games etc and this is hard to do when we aren't in the same place. However, we have managed. As it turns out children have all sorts of materials in their own houses, so we've managed to do things like memory jars together over Zoom as well as lots of drawings!

It has been amazing to see how quickly everyone has adapted and found ways to do things we had never thought about doing before. We are hoping over the next few months to start thinking about how we can do some of our groups, parties and events virtually too. Fingers crossed we will be able to hold our Christmas party in some form as we have really missed seeing you all, so watch this space!



## Rowan Meets:

# Craig Willcock

Fundraising & Events Manager, Rowans Hospice



### Did you always want to be a Fundraising & Events Manager?

I always wanted to be a pop star but as I can't sing – at all, I began to look at other options. I have been working as the Fundraising & Events Manager here at the hospice for almost 2 years. I have always wanted to work for a local charity to give something back to the local community and support those who are less fortunate. So when I saw the job advert, I knew this was for me and 2 years later, here I am.

### How has COVID-19 affected the fundraising events that you organise?

We postponed all of our events and have been looking at how we can adapt these going forwards. We have had many virtual events that people can take part in from home and do in their own time such as the free cycling event 'MyRowansRide' where people can sign up to take on a bike ride where and when they like, to raise money for the hospice.

### You have to book singers! What is your favourite song?

My favourite song is 'Believe' by Cher, it's such an uplifting song. I saw her in concert last year at the O2 in London.

### That sounds like fun, and what's been your favourite event?

Our children's Starlit Walk which is normally held at the Portsmouth Historic Dockyards is my favourite Rowans event. After months of planning, event day is suddenly here and then hundreds of children are taking part in a mass Zumba dance warm up and then off for their walk around the dockyard in fancy dress. Then seeing their faces at the end when they receive their medal as they cross the finish line is great.

### What does your job involve?

Managing a team of 4 fundraisers to raise money for the charity and also tell people across the community more about the work of the hospice. One day I could be working with the team to plan an event, then next I am meeting members of the public talking about their fundraising. It is quite a varied job, but can be very rewarding.

### What is the best bit about your job?

Planning an event and then watching this develop from the initial idea to the live event on the day with lots of people attending to support the hospice and raising money. Yes it can be fun – from choosing a venue for the event and booking singers and dancers, to meeting supporters and seeing them all having a great time.

# Isla's Story

Hi my name is Isla Smith and I am 13 years old.

Two years ago, at the beginning of June my family and I had just come back from Cyprus. I was ill at the time, after a few days of being home my Mum started to feel ill as well. We thought maybe she had caught the illness I had. But my Mum had back pains as well so she went to the doctors and they just gave her some tablets. My Mum had to go to Crete for a hen party with her friends. After a few days my Mum's belly got really big, she looked like she was pregnant. We didn't know what this was. My Mum had to come home early as she started to feel a lot worse.

The next day after she had come home, my Dad dropped my brother and I off to school and he took my mum to the doctor. The doctor didn't know what this was so they sent her to the hospital.

After a few hours of scans and x-rays my mum was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer. When my family and I found out we were devastated. It was coming close to the 23rd June which was my Mum's birthday. We hoped that she would be allowed out of hospital which she was and so we organised a surprise party for her, which she loved.

A few nights after my Mum's party we had to call an ambulance as she couldn't really breathe where the cancer was on her lung. On the 3rd of July after school my brother and I went to see our Mum in hospital. What we didn't know was that this was going to be the last time we saw our Mum because on the 4th July 2018 my Mum died in my Dad's arms at 5:30 am. The doctors and nurses worked on my Mum for 30 minutes but she had unfortunately lost the battle. We found out with our grandparents and we were heartbroken.

After a few weeks of my Mum's passing I started counselling at Meerkats with Sarah. Sarah helped to understand why my Mum died and why it was ok to get upset. After all my amazing counselling with Sarah I started the Meerkats group where I learnt how other children felt about losing someone.

After a year I started counselling again but on Zoom as we were in lockdown. I started again because I was struggling without my Mum. Zoom is very fun, it can just be a little bit of a challenge to set up but after it's set up you're all good and ready to start talking!

This time I was with Kate. Meerkats have helped me loads so THANK YOU!



Isla x



# Kids Fundraising during lockdown



**Jeffrey, age 2**

Meet our youngest fundraiser EVER! Two year old Jeffrey's mum Grace, filmed him scoring goals in ten places around the house including the washing basket, an open drawer, and the kitchen sink. His ultimate goal scoring challenge raised £600!



**Matilda, age 8**

Matilda's ambitious list of ideas for her 2.6 Challenge included drawing 26 rainbows, reading for 26 minutes, running 2.6km and overtaking 26 times on her bike. Matilda and mum Melanie raised over £350!



**Jacob Pope, age 13**

We've been so inspired by Jacob and all the young people in our community who've got involved in fundraising for us during the lockdown. Jacob completed a 100km run in lieu of football training in memory of his Grandad Bob. Jacob smashed his target of £150 and ended up raising over £1,000!

**Evie Jones, age 4**

Learning the importance of being kind towards others, Evie took on the 2.6 Challenge performing 26 random acts of kindness towards friends, neighbours and local key workers. Her kind acts included posting treasure hunt boxes to friends, leaving tubes of bubbles for neighbours and sorting out food items for the local food bank. She raised over £650!



**Sienna, age 11**

Sienna completed a 2.6km run and raised nearly £300. Her mum said, "She loves sport, so loved the idea of the challenge. We have a dear friend who is currently receiving support from the Rowans and Sienna wanted to help her".

*Do you think you could take on a fundraising challenge for Rowans? You could come up with your own fun idea, or use one of our ideas below.*

1. Bake cakes and sell them to friends and family – everyone loves a sweet treat!
2. Persuade your family to take part in this year's Virtual Rowans Ride – have fun as a family whilst raising money for Rowans
3. Hold a sponsored silence – can you keep quiet for a whole hour? Or even a full day?
4. Could your family cars do with a wash? Offer to wash their cars in return for a donation to Rowans.
5. Fill an empty smarties tube or one of our loose change boxes with coins and once it's full donate it to Rowans.
6. Take on the Moon & Stars Memories Walk – see details over the page.

# Something to share with the grown-ups!

When something as huge as someone you love getting really poorly or dying happens, the adults in your family will probably worry about how you're doing, even more than they usually would.

Below are some links to websites and resources that the adults looking after you might find helpful. Maybe you could check out the information together. Remember, we're at the end of the phone: **023 9224 8025** or email: **meerkats@rowanshospice.co.uk** for any questions or worries you and your family might want to talk through.

Download or ask for a hard copy of our Small Book of Big Conversations, which offers guidance to parents/guardians supporting children through loss and bereavement: **www.rowanshospice.co.uk/care/meerkats/**

RipRap is a website for young people who have a parent with cancer. There is also a section on bereavement for young people: **www.riprap.org.uk**

We also wanted to let you know about some bereavement training we've been delivering to schools to help teachers understand how they can best support you. Since lockdown and restrictions due to Covid-19, we've been doing this schools' training virtually and it's worked really well! The training covers information about how children grieve at different ages and in what way this is different to grief in adults, top tips for schools to support grieving children and their families, some case study examples and a discussion of resources that teaching staff can use with children and young people. So far, we've shared the training with 13 schools across Hampshire and have more booked in! If you think your school would be interested in completing the training, you or someone from your family could let a teacher know this is available to them.

## Moon & Stars Memories Walk



Could you help us with some fundraising? This October we are bringing together our two biggest events, Moonlit Memories Walk and our Children's Starlit Walk, to create the Moon & Stars Memories Walk. This virtual walk takes place during half term week on Saturday 24th October. You can choose to take on the 1.5, 3, 6 or 9 mile challenge with grown ups in your family and walk this where you like during the day.

You can sign up to take part on our website here:  
**[www.rowanshospice.co.uk/moonstars](http://www.rowanshospice.co.uk/moonstars)**

# Crossword

## Crossword Clues

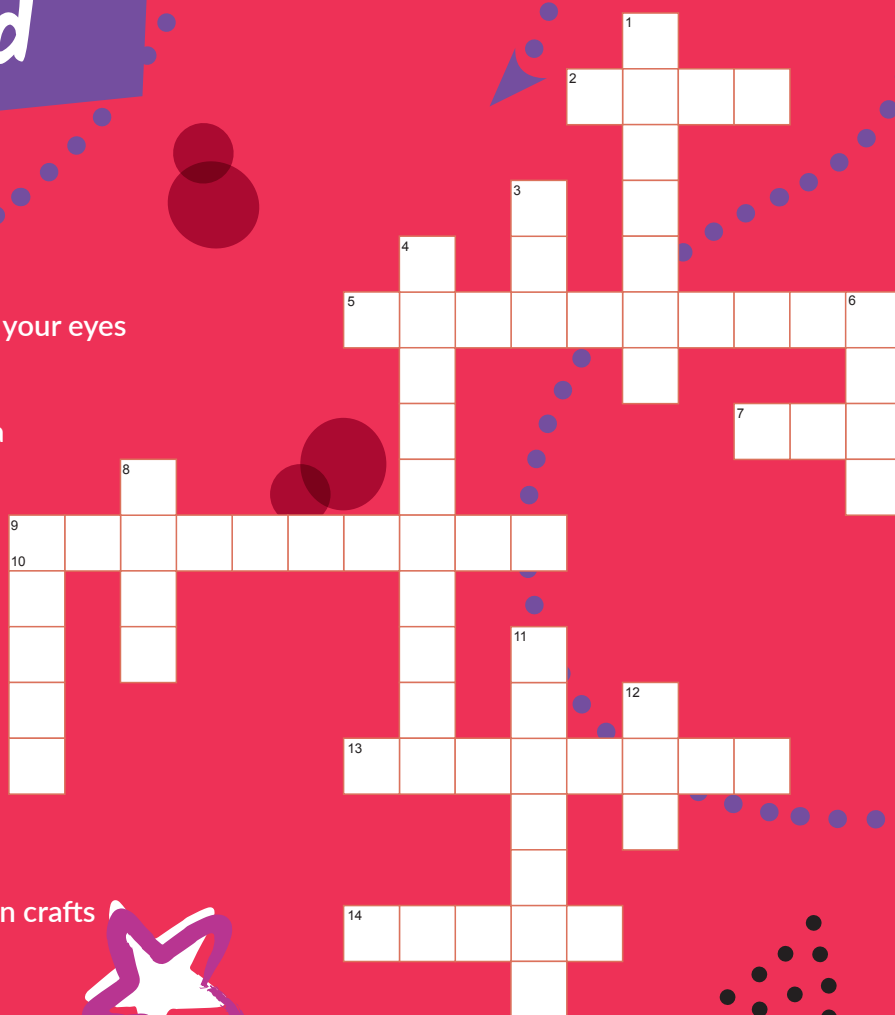
### Across

- 2 Something that grows on a tree
- 5 An accessory you wear to protect your eyes from the sun
- 7 Something you use to write with
- 9 A picture that you might keep as a memento of someone
- 13 An item of footwear
- 14 The colour of the Rowans Hospice logo

### Down

- 1 The type of animal that Rowan is
- 3 Type of pet
- 4 Someone who raises money for a charity
- 6 The beach has lots of this!
- 8 Something you read
- 10 A type of celebration
- 11 Sparkly stuff used for decorating in crafts
- 12 Item used to open a door

Answers on back page.



## Sudoku

		3			4	5		2
	5				3			
		8			5	3	6	
			2			7	4	3
2	7		3					8
3	4		7	5				
		5	4					6
9		2						5
4					2	9		

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Answers on back page.



# Your Questions

At Meerkat Central we get asked all sorts of questions. Here are the answers to some of them:

**Q** What can I do if I feel nervous about going back to school and being around lots of people?

**A** Lots of children may be feeling nervous about going back to school. It can help to talk about any worries you have with the adults in your family and with your teachers so they can help you find ways to cope. It might help to find out what new rules there will be at school to help keep everyone safe so that you know what to expect. Speaking to your friends who may have similar worries might also help and remembering the positive things about school that you're looking forward to having back.

**Q** What if I have fallen behind whilst doing home learning?

**A** Children will have done different amounts of learning while they have been at home so it will most likely take everyone a while to get back to being at the same place. The teachers will know this and will be able to support you if you feel you are struggling.

**Q** Being in lockdown has made me think more about my special person and I have felt more sad than I have in a while, is that normal?

**A** Yes, during lockdown everyone has had a lot more time to think about things so it makes sense that you might have spent more time thinking about your special person and how much you miss them. Being at home might be where you spent a lot of time with them so spending more time than usual there without them might have meant you miss them more than usual. During lockdown you also couldn't see your friends or do lots of things that help you cope with the sad feelings so it makes sense that you might have felt more sad than usual.

**Q** What if people ask about my special person who died during lockdown?

**A** It is normal to feel upset or not sure what to say if people ask about your special person. It is ok to say you don't want to talk about it and it is also ok to tell them what you feel comfortable telling them. You can also get one of the adults looking after you to talk to your school and ask them to let your class know that your special person has died before you return, if you would like them to know, and so you don't have to explain lots of times.

## Word Search

Shoe

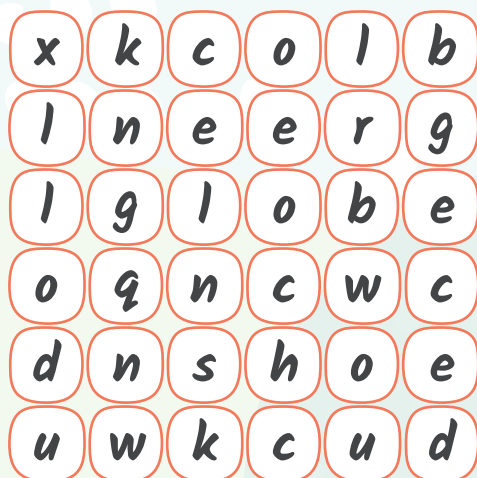
duck

doll

globe

block

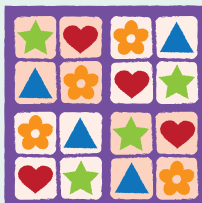
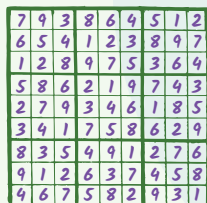
green



Answers to crossword and Sudoku

**Across:** 2 Leaf, 5 Sunglasses, 7 Pen, 9 Photograph, 13 Trainers, 14 Green

**Down:** 1 Meerkat, 3 Dog, 4 Fundraiser, 6 Sand, 8 Book, 10 Party, 11 Glitter, 12 Key



We'd love to hear your thoughts on Meerkat Mail!

Email us at:  
meerkats@rowanshospice.co.uk  
www.rowanshospice.co.uk

Rowans Meerkat Service  
Rowans Hospice  
Purbrook Heath Road, Purbrook  
Waterlooville PO7 5RU

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