

STEFAN'S ACTS OF KINDNESS

Interview by
Twinkle Troughton

How one Westbrook family is transforming tragedy into a resource for support and kindness for young neurodivergent residents and their families in Thanet

Please tell us about yourselves.

We are Emma and Tristan Kluibenschadl, and our children are Ellie and Stefan. We have lived in Thanet for over 50 years, and we are both training consultants specialising in neurodiversity. We have a company called The SEND Trainer Ltd which has been running this since 2018. Tristan currently delivers training on the National Autism Training Programme with the Anna Freud Centre and AT-Autism. He is currently training NHS staff on autism and mental health. Emma is also a qualified play and creative art therapist and works freelance, conducting therapeutic support in schools. Ellie is in her final year at UCA, studying animation and illustration.

Can you tell us about Stefan and his story?

Stefan was a really kind and thoughtful boy who loved skateboarding, archery, rock music and cooking. Stefan received a diagnosis of autism at six years old and dyslexia at seven, and fought really hard to be understood and accepted by others. Stefan tragically died by suicide in March 2022 after he reported that he was being bullied for being autistic at his weekend job. He was on life support at King's College Hospital for a week before being pronounced dead on 26 March 2022.

What is the STAK.life project and how did it emerge?

STAK.life (Stefan's Acts of Kindness) emerged after many parents contacted us after Stefan died, to share their stories of how Stefan had been kind and caring to their children at school, and helped them feel noticed and seen when they felt lonely and sad. So we decided that we would continue Stefan's legacy of kind acts. Initially we raised money through smaller local events to fund local needs. We paid for a child's counselling; paid for

a teen to go to the gym, as it was helping with his mental health; paid for horse-riding lessons for a young girl struggling with anxiety. We then decided to turn this into a more targeted and consistent offer of support.

Who and how will STAK.life be helping?

The community interest company (CIC) is still in its infancy, but we are hoping to have four trading parts to it: fundraising and events; training for professionals, parents and businesses on autism and mental health; awareness-raising and talks on neurodiversity and neuro-affirming practices; and workshops and groups that provide creative, therapeutic support for neurodivergent young people and for people experiencing grief and loss in Thanet.

Please tell us about your fundraising event in May and how people can support the work you're doing.

We have arranged a four-day art event and club night from Friday 3 to Monday 6 May, as Stefan's 18th birthday is 6 May. The art event will be held at Ark in Cliftonville, where we will have an art exhibition and sale, with artwork donated from over 40 artists (Anthony Giles, Kate Malone, Angela Malone, Margo of Margate, Hayden Kays, Paul McGowan and many others). On 5 May we will have a later showing at Ark with music from Inner Artist UK and live poetry. There are also over 30 raffle prizes which have been donated by local businesses. On Friday 3 May there will be a ticketed club night at Justines in Margate, with a live band and singers.

Find out more at:
facebook.com/stak.life.2024
@stak.life or contact
staklifeoffice@gmail.com

