

“The RBL provided a lifeline for my family after tragedy” – Chantelle Wynn

On 10th November 2015 everything changed for Chantelle Wynn and her two young daughters – her husband Ryan had taken his own life after struggling with PTSD. In the days, weeks and months after, Chantelle had to cope with being a mother to her daughters, dealing with the aftermath of what had happened and get through their first Christmas without Ryan.

Together since they were 16 years old, Chantelle, 42, married her husband Ryan Wynn in 1998 and they became parents to two girls, Rosie and Daisy. Ever since she had known Ryan he had been involved in the Territorial Army and loved serving in the military, following in his brother’s and father’s footsteps. Unfortunately, Ryan was left unable to join the Army full time due to being deaf in one ear, yet he was proud to serve in the TA and progressed in his career in medicine as an operating department practitioner, eventually working at the local hospital.

Chantelle said: “Ryan used to be laid back, nothing fazed him and he absolutely loved being a family man, whether it was playing football with the girls or going out as a family, we always used to have fun.

However, when Ryan returned from a six-month tour of Afghanistan in 2006 everything changed. He came back a different man, he had seen awful things out there as a medic and to protect me he refused to talk about what had happened or how it had affected him. Over the next couple of years we carried on, but small things would put Ryan on edge, with bonfire night noise and Remembrance time being particularly difficult.”

After his tour, Ryan was eventually diagnosed with PTSD. The family struggled to find help and support for his condition. Chantelle said: “Year after year Ryan and I just learnt to cope with his diagnosis and he was put on anti-depressants by his doctor. However, there was no support after his tour and I think he felt alone as a reservist – he went out an individual and came back as an individual.”

In late 2015 Ryan hit rock bottom and had attempted to take his own life. Chantelle said: “It was heart-breaking to see the man I loved and the father to my children just become so desperate. He had attempted to take his life in his car and after that I had to hide everything I could think of to protect him. He even came home one night smelling of petrol after claiming he had been at a friend’s house and eventually broke down saying he couldn’t go through with it. We went to a crisis meeting with his doctor and I hoped something would be done to help him and us as a family.”



Ryan was put on suicide watch for less than 24 hours after the crisis meeting, but Chantelle was surprised to find that she received no further help or advice during the days that followed. On the Monday morning, after a weekend of waiting for a response, Chantelle followed up on their meeting and was told nothing could be done until later in the week. “I thought they may have sectioned Ryan then and there at the Friday meeting, but instead we were sent home and I was promised a call back – I got nothing.”

On the Tuesday morning, Chantelle went to work as normal and ensured she kept in contact with Ryan throughout the day. At lunchtime he told Chantelle he didn’t want to pick the kids up from school and so she arranged for a friend to help with the school run and take the pressure off Ryan.

“In the afternoon I had a phone call from my eldest daughter Rosie saying she had come home and couldn’t find her Dad but his shoes were in the house. So, I came back home and raised the alarm with his friends that he may have gone missing. However, I then noticed the garage door was locked and it is usually accessible for the girls to go through to the back of the house. I immediately knew something wasn’t right and ran into the garage to discover Ryan had taken his life.”

Chantelle and eldest daughter Rosie, who was 14 at the time, had to cope with the trauma of finding Ryan, while youngest daughter Daisy was left devastated by the loss of her Dad.

Chantelle explained: “It was just something you never forget, it was a horrendous time and I was told that the girls wouldn’t be able to get any help for six months and we should just grieve. However, I knew straight away that we needed to start processing what had happened and we were referred to group counselling.”

She continued: “I didn’t know what to deal with first or which way to turn and it seemed that all the little things to sort out were building up. As well as dealing with our grief, the paperwork and the general aftermath of what had happened were a struggle to cope with and so one of my friends suggested I ring The Royal British Legion to see if they could help.

“At first I generally didn’t think the RBL would be able to help, I thought it was for veterans rather than families. However, Annette from the West Midlands team came to see me within a few weeks of Ryan passing and she was amazing.

“From the moment she arrived she simply listened to everything I had to say, my frustrations, my upset, my concern for the girls and it was just a relief to have someone turn round and say ‘yes we can help you’.

“Annette provided advice on how to get copies of paperwork I required from the TA and also directed me to a solicitor for help with the inquest – just that support with the little things really took a weight off my shoulders. However, the biggest thing was the help we received



in the run up to our first Christmas without Ryan, I knew it was going to be hard and upsetting, but with the RBL's help we were given food hampers and the girls received presents when I had no headspace to deal with such things. Annette also suggested a holiday away from home to help us cope and told us the Legion would take care of everything.”

Chantelle and the girls went to Nottinghamshire Center Parcs for their first family holiday without Ryan. The holiday, funded by the RBL, gave the family the chance to take a break, get away from the stresses and strains of home life and spend time together. “The holiday allowed us to reconnect as a family of three and took us out of the bubble we had been living in since Ryan's passing. Just to have that opportunity to make new memories and process how we were all feeling in a safe and relaxed environment was priceless and came at a time that was difficult for us with it being our first Christmas without Ryan.”

“The girls absolutely loved the holiday and it gave them the opportunity to just be kids again, enjoy the activities like rock climbing and simply have space. It was the break we really needed and we came back stronger after feeling so numb before.”

Seven years on, Chantelle and the girls, now 17 and 21 years old, continue to make memories as a family and move forward while still keeping Ryan's memory alive. Chantelle completed the Birmingham Half Marathon in 2016 and raised money for the RBL, while Daisy is still playing football and Rosie is now at Uni.

Chantelle summarised what the Legion's support has meant for her: “After Ryan passed it seemed that we had nowhere to turn and support wasn't easy to access. However, the RBL came in and listened, supported and helped us come back together as a family. It's comforting to know that they aren't just there for the immediate needs, but Annette still checks in on us and I know I can contact the charity at anytime for advice and information. I really do hope that by telling my story others will realise the Legion do a lot more than people know and if any other families are going through similar experiences I would urge them to get in contact and just ask for help.”

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