

Case study – Joan and Mike O’Connor

“After losing our child in such a devastating and traumatic manner, you’d think nothing else can be as bad. But our experience of the criminal justice system heaped layer after layer of injustice upon us and re-traumatised us at every stage.”

Liam O’Connor, a 20-year-old student, was killed after being hit by a taxi as he stepped onto a pedestrian crossing in June 2023. The case was passed to the CPS to consider a charge of causing death by careless driving, but it was ruled that there was insufficient evidence to proceed with a criminal prosecution against the taxi driver.

Liam’s parents, Joan and Mike, say that through the lengthy investigation and coronial process they felt desperately let down, shut out, and re-traumatised.

“The police investigation and collision report took 15 months to complete. Our FLO was decent and kind and updated us, often just to report a lack of any progress.

“The coroner’s inquest finally took place more than two years after Liam’s death and by this stage, we just wanted to find out what happened on that night.

“We had been told after Liam died that there was dashcam footage from the ambulance on the scene, but it was poor quality and didn’t add anything to the investigation. Shockingly, that footage of the moments after the crash was introduced in the middle of the inquest without any prior disclosure or discussion.

“We should have been given the choice whether we wanted to see the video from the start, but we weren’t. The experience was completely re-traumatising.

“What has also shocked us is that nearly every professional we encountered did not take the consequences of road traffic collisions and Liam’s death seriously. They downplayed what had happened while victim-blaming our son, whose voice could not be heard.

“If our fit, healthy 20-year-old son had died in any other circumstance, such as a drunken punch while still inside the pub that night, we believe the response of the CPS would have been completely different.

“Instead, victims of road collisions are treated like second-class victims. It feels like the system is so focussed on protecting suspects that it throws up endless barriers to justice for families like ours.

“There needs to be a change in attitudes and better, trauma-informed training for all the professionals involved, including the CPS and the police.

“We were supported by Brake after Liam’s death, but access to support shouldn’t be a postcode lottery. The families of murder victims rightly get government funding, yet road

traffic victims and the charities that represent them get nothing. We must have parity with victims of other crimes.”

Brake, the road safety charity has supported this family through its National Road Victim Service. Brake provides specialist practical and emotional support to more than 2,000 families a year following a death or serious injury from a road crash.

Visit www.brake.org.uk/support to find out more.