

Dementia in focus

Suellen Grellman went from a full life into a decline, leaving her family to grapple with her diagnosis

» **Ben Graham**

JUST before Suellen Grellman turned 60 her family noticed a sudden change in her behaviour – and their lives have not been the same ever since.

Sarah Holmes, from St Ives, said her mother's driving became erratic, she stopped reading books and became cranky around her grandchildren.

"She was a very intelligent woman who used to read all the time and do crosswords," Mrs Holmes said.

"And, she just stopped doing that and she became anxious all the time.

"We were all scared to say something.

"But then we all agreed there was something wrong with Mum, so Dad took her to the GP."

Mrs Grellman failed a memory test, but it was a few years before



she was diagnosed with young onset dementia.

Now, aged 67, she is in full-time, high-level care in North Turrumurra.

"She's been in a nursing home for about three years," Mrs Holmes said.

"She can't walk, talk, eat or do any activities of daily living.

"She spends most of her day in bed and she doesn't know who anyone is."

The family have been raising

awareness around dementia ever since and, this weekend, the Holmes family of Sarah, her husband Rob and two children Harrison, 6, and Oliver, 3, will be in the Sydney Running Festival.

They will be tackling the 3.5km course with the Kids4Dementia team and raising funds for Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing.

Mrs Holmes said one of the hardest parts of her mother's disease was seeing the effect of it on her father, Richard.

"He's only 66 and he's lost his life partner slowly over the last 10 years," she said.

"It's also hard because she saw her grandchildren, but she never really got to see them grow up."

Kids4Dementia is an education program which teaches kids aged 9-12 about dementia. To donate, visit donate.grassrootz.com/blackmores-sydney-running-festival-2017/cheba/kids4dementia/holmes-family



Rob and Sarah Holmes with their boys Harrison, 6, and Oliver, 3. (Right) Sarah's mum Suellen Grellman with her grandsons. Picture: Adam Yip