

Balloons

Supporting bereaved children and young people in Exeter, East and Mid Devon

Our 2025 Impact Report & 2026-2029 Strategic plan

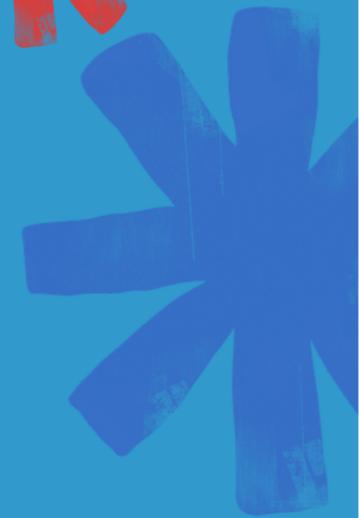
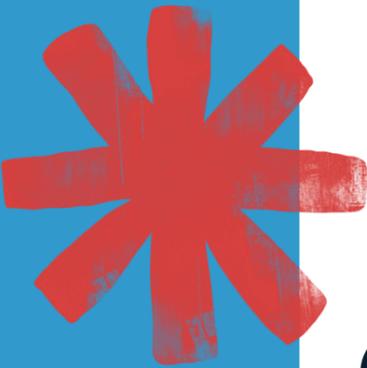


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Introduction

“

I want to say a big thank you to my grief support worker, and I will miss her. I could trust L when I was talking to her and she listened really well.

We made some stuff that really helped me. Thank you so much for the gifts. I really enjoyed my sessions. Thank you.

Balloons service user

”

Balloons is at a very exciting stage in its development, as we work towards helping more and more children and young people deal with bereavement. The statistics set out in this report show just how many people we have been able to support.

During 2025, we focussed on Fundraising, to help diversify our sources of income. We do not receive any government or public sector funding, so we have to raise every penny we spend. We have been very fortunate to have received several large donations and grants, for which we are extremely grateful, but we need to expand our list of regular donors as well.

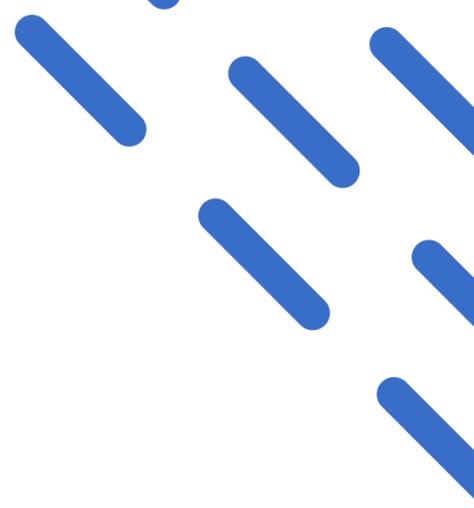
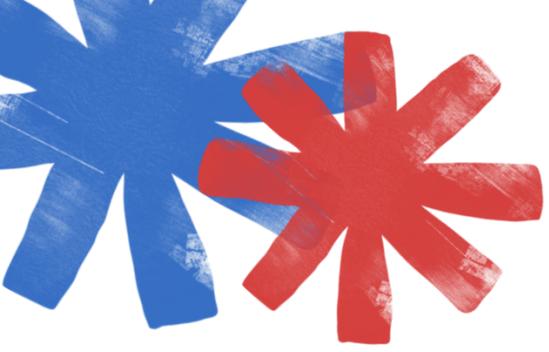
2026 is our 20th Anniversary, page 18 shows just how much we've achieved in two decades. We are using our celebrations to reflect on what so many people have achieved to date, to consider how we will expand our services over the coming years, and to work with other local organisations to help co-ordinate the county's approach in the support of children and young people who suffer a bereavement.

There are lots of ways in which you can help us raise funds this anniversary year – please go to our website www.balloonscharity.co.uk to find out more.

Many thanks in advance for anything you can do!

Charles Pallot – Chair of Trustees





OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

At the end of 2025 trustees and staff, alongside input from volunteers and service users, developed our strategic plan for the coming 3 years, focussing on priorities of service delivery, income and our people. Against each strategic priority we have agreed targets and a work plan, which we will focus on in the coming years.



“Balloons workers are just incredible. Our young people really value the space and the work you all do.”

School professional



OUR VISION
That bereaved children and young people have somewhere to turn when someone significant in their lives dies.

OUR MISSION
To support bereaved children and young people in our area when someone significant in their lives dies.
To work alongside their families and the professionals who care for them to further enhance the support they receive.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To support bereaved children, young people (CYP) and families and improve their outcomes

To generate income to sustain and develop our services

To grow our people (staff, volunteers and trustee board)

HOW WE'LL ACHIEVE THEM

Delivering direct and indirect support to CYP and their families pre and post bereavement

Diversifying income streams in the short, medium and long term, developing and delivering on an annual fundraising strategy

Supporting and investing in our people

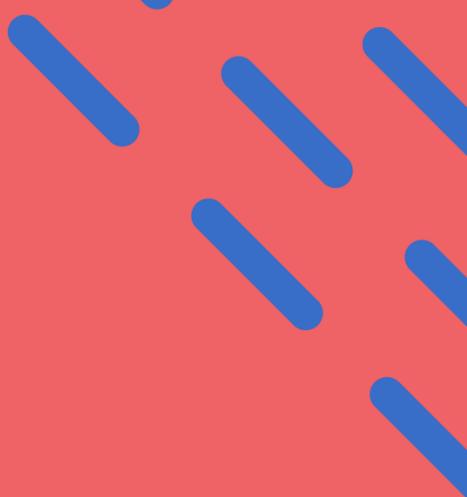
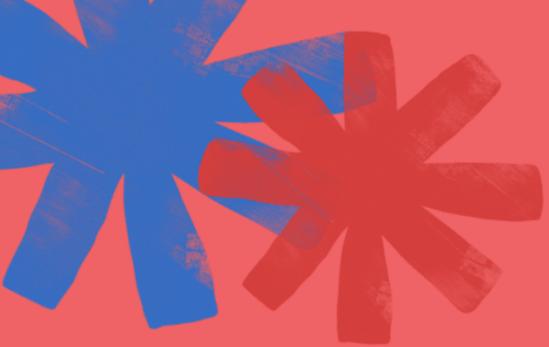
SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- Bereaved CYP and their families receive help and feel supported at all stages of their grief journey.
- Bereaved CYP and families receive help when they need it.
- Families, professionals and community members feel supported and able to help CYP in their care.
- Balloons remains relevant and responsive through seeking the input of CYP and families and engaging in external developments around bereavement.

- Year on year increase in unrestricted funds from community fundraising.
- Grant funding in place to meet annual funding needs
- Stable funding position by March 2028 when Lottery funding ends.
- Increased profile to reach more potential supporters - effective website, engaging social media, PR, talks and presentations.

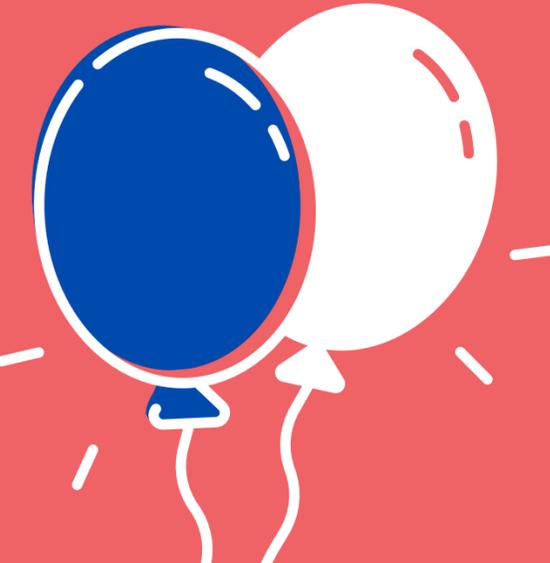
- Motivated and empowered staff team.
- Team of over 45 Grief Support Volunteers providing quality one-to-one support through effective recruitment, training, supervision, team meetings and communications.
- Increased number of volunteers to help with fundraising and other Balloons activity.
- Trustee board in place providing effective governance.





PRIORITY 1

SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



"I have had a lot of therapy and you were the only one I found useful. I wish you could help me with everything else I have issues with"

Balloons service user

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Priority 1

Over the last year we have supported **585** children and young people; over **2000** hours of time was given to Balloons by our volunteers.



For the children and young people that we provided one to one support to:

- 92% supported after a bereavement
- 8% supported before an expected bereavement

Who died/was dying:

- 41% – parent or carer
- 40% – grandparent
- 19% – sibling, friend, or other relative

Causes of death (post bereavement):

- 75% – illness
- 25% – sudden death, suicide, accident, and, infant death



Trained **48** professionals in bereavement support

Supported **153** children and young people by delivering **517** one-to-one grief support sessions

Supported **85** children through group work

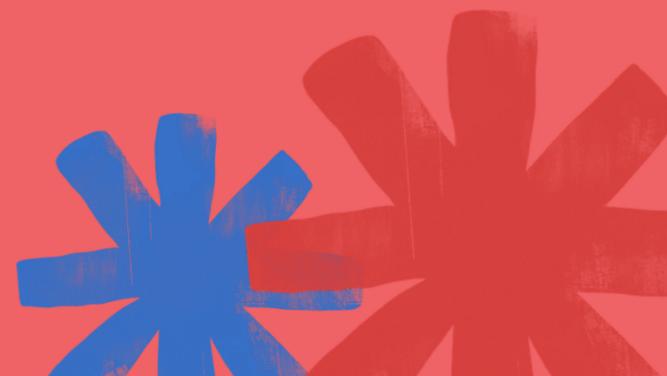
Trained **7** new volunteer Grief Support Workers – we now have 45 volunteers who we have supported to work with bereaved children and young people

Responded to enquiries with advice, information and a listening ear which supported **347** CYP indirectly

Delivered support in over **56** local schools and colleges

5 Activity Days where **65** children, young people and their parents/carers were able to meet with other bereaved families – including a driving day, creative workshops and Build-A-Bear

Sent out **105** care packages and resources to bereaved families





Working in partnership



2025 has seen some great opportunities for us to collaborate with fantastic, locally-based, organisations. Here are just a few:



ramm

In June, we took children and families to The Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter for a child-friendly tour of their 'Food: Beyond the Plate' exhibition. Children loved the amazing exhibition (covering themes from cream teas to school dinners!) and enjoyed making their own clay pots inspired by what they saw.



It was lovely to get together again with Red One and Fox School of Motoring to give our young people a chance to have go on the Exeter road circuit for the day! In spite of the very wet weather, it was a lot of fun and valuable road skills were learned. This is such a well-regarded event and provides a great opportunity to build confidence and come together with others!

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Priority 1



National Trust

In October, we had the opportunity to work with the National Trust on an apple event at Killerton. It was fantastic to get together with families who have had support from Balloons, have an amazing tour of the orchard and apple press, and then get together for a creative session, where children were able to share their views about their experiences of support from Balloons - you can see these on page 8.

The difference we have made

We receive feedback and constantly monitor our services to see how we can improve and best respond to the needs of those we work with. Sometimes the most powerful feedback is the few words of a quote and the sharing of a story...



'It was really hard when Nana and Granddad died, within six months of each other. I didn't want to make anyone, especially my dad, more upset, so I kept my feelings to myself. That's why going to Balloons helped so much. My Grief Support Worker never pressured me to talk. We made things together, like memory boxes and jars filled with coloured glitter to remind me of Nana and Granddad.'

After a while, I felt braver talking about them and though I still miss them, when we talk about them, we laugh more than we cry.'

Martha, Year 6, Exeter



'I can't even begin to tell you how life changing your input is to our little people. We can't change the tragic events some have to go through, but YOU DO change how they come out the other side.'

Jo, Family Support Worker, Stoke Hill Junior School

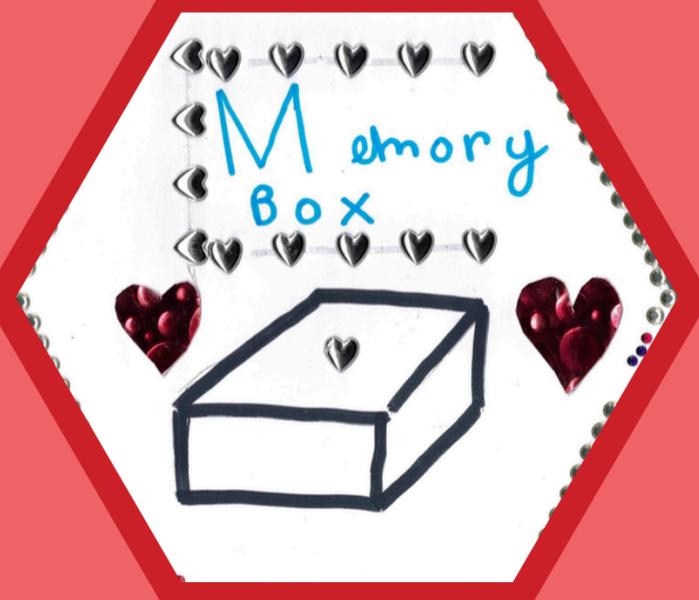
'Balloons has greatly impacted my child's confidence, her ability to process grief made her look at what she can do when she gets angry and sad about the situation. She's really grown, the staff at school have also commented on this. I can't thank Balloons enough for giving her this opportunity to express her feelings in a safe space with what she describes as a wonderful lady.'

Parent of M, Exmouth





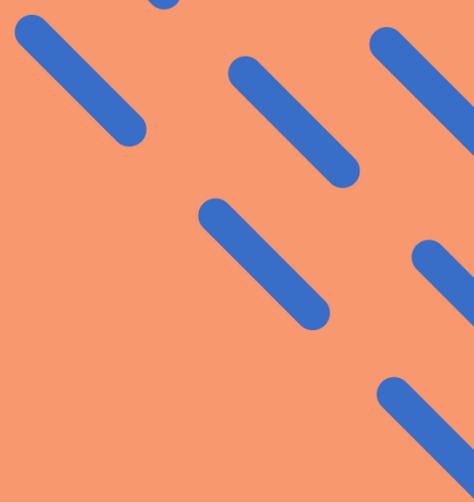
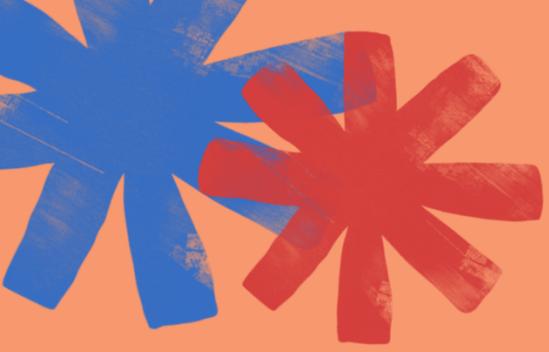
WHAT
BALLOONS
MEANS TO ME



Priority 1 - What's next?

We will continue our support and advice line – making sure that families and schools know we are here at any stage when a child is facing a bereavement. We will run one-to-one sessions, group work and activity days. We will also be building on our work with parents, including Parent Coffee Mornings and piloting Family days.



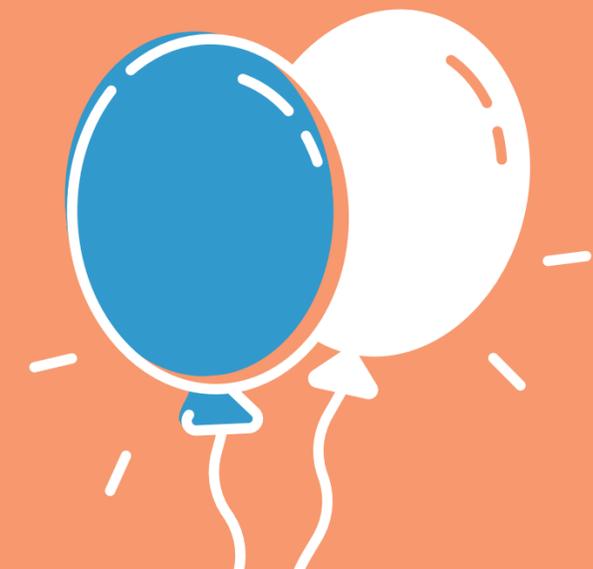


PRIORITY 2

SUSTAINING AND DEVELOPING OUR SERVICES

“Thank you so much for the support both children had. B has hugely benefitted from the support he has had and has spoken to me about how he appreciated chatting to someone and learning some strategies to deal with his grief.”

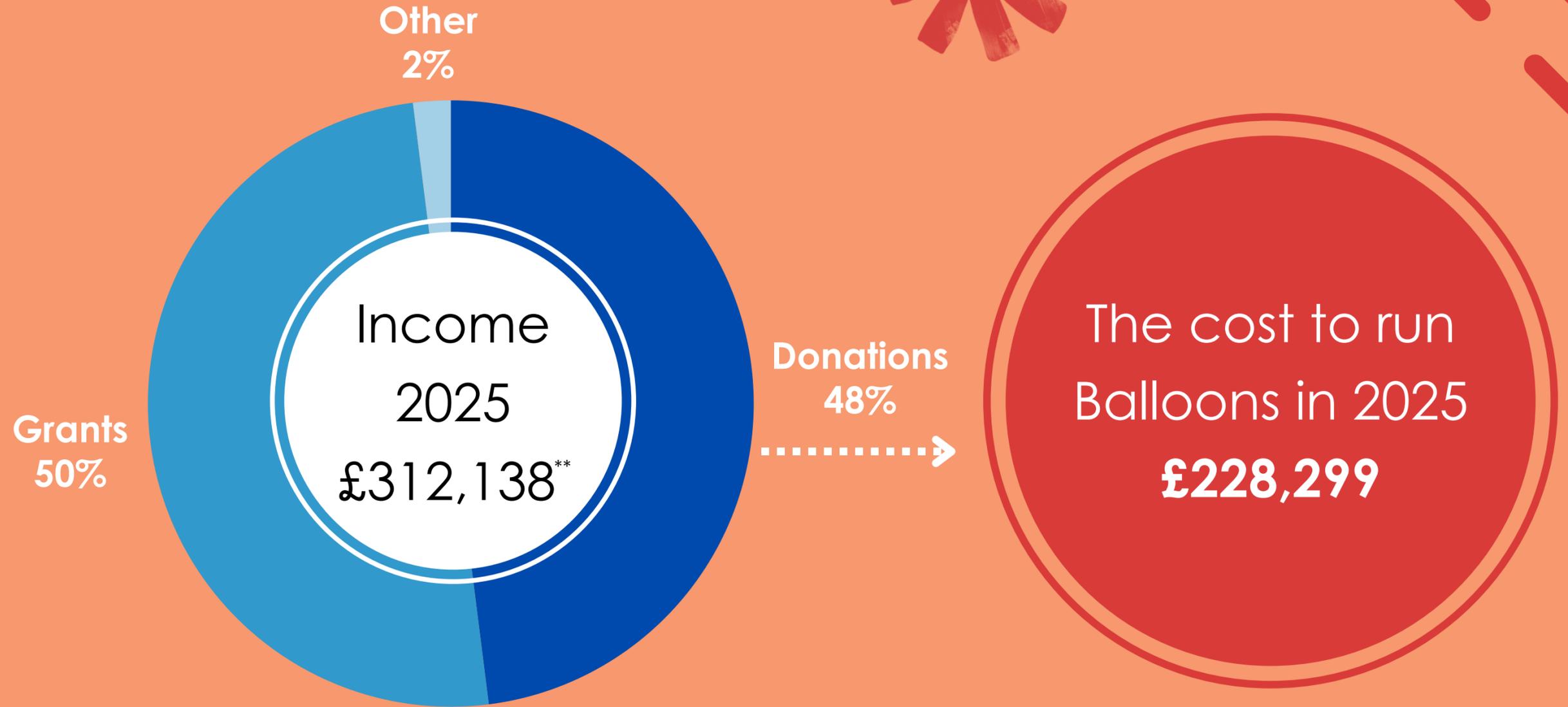
Parent



Finances

Generating enough income to cover our costs is essential for keeping Balloons running.

Recent years have been difficult, following Covid and the Cost-of-Living Crisis, but 2025 has been a positive year. With support from the community through fundraising and donations as well as successful grants, we covered all our costs and added to our reserves. Our ongoing grant from the Big Lottery has continued to support our service delivery.



Balloons exists thanks to the generosity of those who believe in the impact of our work. As we receive no statutory funding, we are incredibly grateful to everyone who raises funds, donates, or supports us through grants. You can find a full list of this year's supporters on page 13.

**Please note this includes a one off £70k donation that we were notified of at the end of the financial year, with funds being received in the following financial year. Our full year, audited accounts will be available on our website by June 2026.

All the runners for 'Team Balloons'!



2025 Fundraising Highlights

Our local community has been amazing in making the work of **Balloons** possible this year. From individuals and community groups raising funds, to businesses making donations, we have been extremely grateful for your support. Here are a few highlights and a full thank you list is on the next page

Sophie, Willow,



and Sophie

Raymond Hill



Ladies Club

Joanna Mardon



School of Dance

Heavitree



Strummers

Marlow



and Jim

Cranbrook



Arrows

Exeter



Quilters

The Buffs



at Beer

Day Lewis



Countess Wear

2025 Thank you!

We are so incredibly grateful to all the organisations, clubs and societies (listed below) that have raised funds or supported us in kind over the past year. And to the many wonderful individuals who give so generously - thank you. Your kindness makes it possible for us to be there when children and young people need us most.

Priority 2 - What's next?

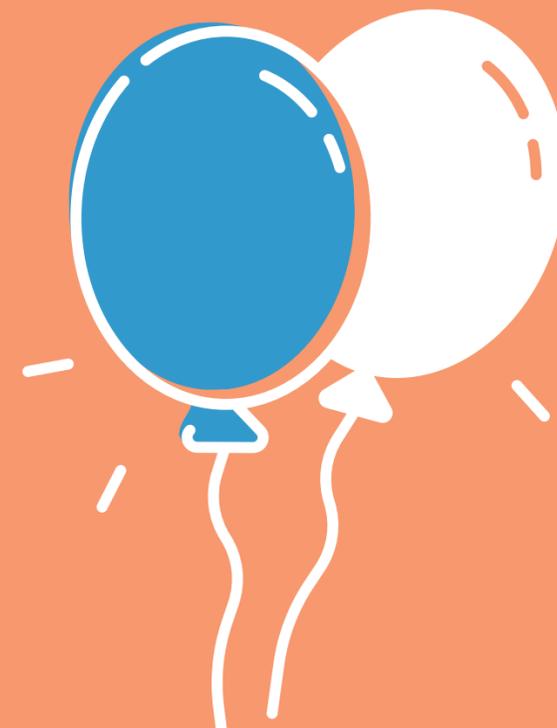
Our focus is to continue to raise our profile, grow our regular supporters and generate enough funds to cover our costs.

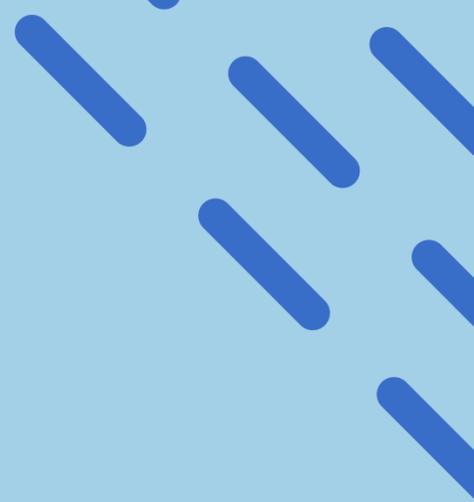
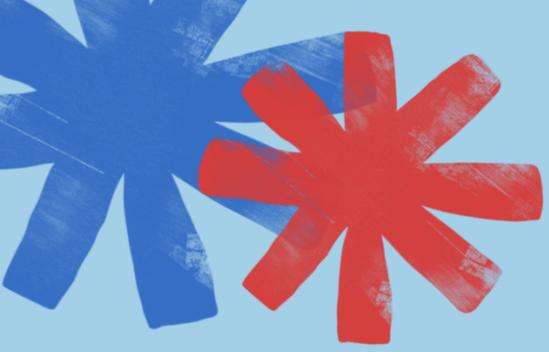
If you want to get involved in any way - be it joining in a fundraising event, asking your company to support us, setting up a monthly donation, becoming a fundraising volunteer or having us come and talk at an event, we'd love to hear from you!

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Priority 2

Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust	Everyys Solicitors	Porter Dodson Solicitors	The Vintage Maker
Armada Asset Finance	Exeter Chiefs	Postcode Community Trust	The Works
Bargain Buys	Exeter Community Lottery	Primark Exeter	Topsham Wine
Beaverbrooks	Exeter Eyewear	Puerto Lounge	Two Moors Primary School
Bellway	Exeter Festival Chorus	Raymond Hill Ladies Group	Walter H Squires & Son Funeral Directors
Bertram Law	Exeter RAG	Roofworx southwest Ltd	Warburtons
Bicton Feltmakers	Exeter Road Primary	Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes	Warrens Bakery
Bloss Family Foundation	Exeter Round Table	Seaton PCC	Widecombe PCC
Brake	Freemasons	Sedel Collings Trust	Wine World
Buckerell Community Association	Gilbert Stephens	Sir Walter Raleigh Community Pub	
Carousel Court	Iron Mill College	Squid and the Kid	
Centrica	Joanna Mardon School of Dance	St Disen's Church	
Children in Need	John Lewis	St Sidwell's Community Centre	
Clockwise	La La Choirs	Stephens Scown	
Cocolato	Ladram Bay Art Barn	Tedburn Amateur Dramatic Society	
Cogs and Wheels Ladies Morris	Lidl	Tesco	
Combe Estate Shoot	Lions Club Sidmouth	The Duke of York Pub	
Cooks Aweigh	Little Lens Photography	The Forrester Family	
Courtyard by Marriott	MGroup Highways	The Globe	
Craft4Others	Misses Barrie Charitable Trust	The Heavi Deli	
Cranbrook Arrows Netball Club	Morrisons	The Kenora Charitable Foundation	
Crediton Dairy	National Lottery	The Kings School	
Day Lewis Pharmacy	Newport Primary Academy	The Leonard Laity Stoate Charitable Trust	
Donatis	Openwork Foundation	The Maynard School	
Eurostar	Pinwood Pipes		



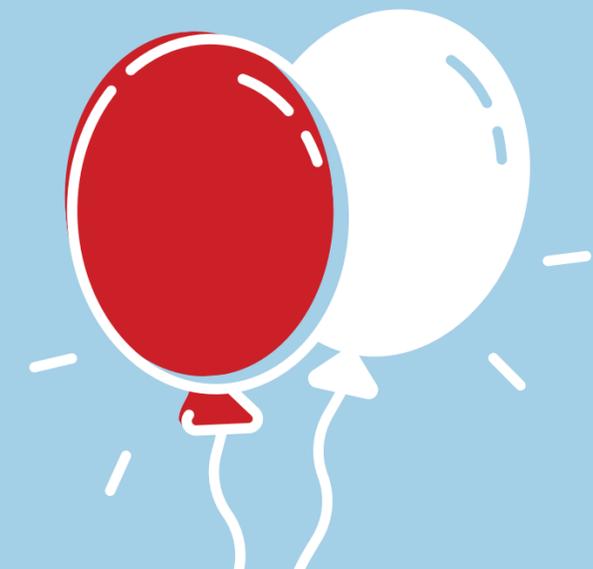


PRIORITY 3

OUR PEOPLE

"Balloons workers are just incredible. Our young people really value the space and the work you all do."

School staff member



OUR STAFF

Without our dedicated team of staff, volunteers and trustees, Balloons would not be able to achieve any of our mission. Our third priority is to ensure that all who dedicate their time to Balloons feel empowered and valued in their roles.

We have 6 part-time members of staff at Balloons.

Donna, Liz and Clare lead our direct work with children, young people and families and supervise our team of volunteer Grief Support Workers.

Nasim is our fundraiser – giving talks, attending events and encouraging the community to support us through donations and fundraising.

Tristan is our Office Manager, ensuring the charity runs smoothly day-to-day including finance, design work, website and supporting with IT.

Nicky is our CEO, responsible for the overall running of Balloons through finance, income generation, overseeing operations and working with the trustee board on governance.

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Priority 3

20 YEARS OF SERVICE

This year was very special, as we celebrated two incredible milestones, with both Donna and Liz reaching their 10th anniversaries as Balloons staff. Their passion, commitment, and care has made, and continues to make, a huge difference to the children, young people, and families we support.

Here are their reflections on their decades of service



Liz

“It is a real privilege to be able to help children, young people & their families to navigate such a difficult time in their lives. Every day is a learning day – whether it be from my colleagues, our service users, professionals or our volunteers. Due to the variety my role entails, it keeps me on my toes, and it certainly doesn’t feel like 10 years! It is always wonderful to hear how well-respected Balloons is in the local community and to be a part of this team”

Donna

“My ten years working at Balloons as a Clinical Manager and Trainer have flown by! It’s a pleasure and privilege to work for such a well-loved local charity. Because of our size, we see at first hand the real difference Balloons makes to children, young people and their families, and this feels very special indeed. I love being part of a warm-hearted, mutually supportive and motivated team of staff, trustees and volunteers, and am always proud to tell people about my work”

LEADERSHIP WITH PASSION



Hannah (our Vice Chair) brings a wealth of experience and insight to our fantastic Trustee Board; all of whom work hard to ensure Balloons stays resilient, trusted, and focused on making the greatest possible difference for the children, young people, and families that we support. Here, Hannah talks about her experience as a Balloons Trustee...

“I feel proud to volunteer alongside my fellow ten trustees, who individually bring a wealth of experience and passion to their roles. I also feel grateful that I am able to support the hardworking staff team, who always keep the children and our supporters at the heart of what we do.”

Balloons may be small in size, but we are definitely mighty in impact and I have really enjoyed being involved.”

OUR TRUSTEES

We have an active board of Trustees who give their time to ensure the safe and effective running of Balloons. The board meet 5 times a year as well as committee meetings throughout the year focused on Finance, Fundraising, Personnel, Clinical Governance, and Safeguarding. We currently have one vacancy on the board for which we are recruiting.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

45 local volunteers give their time to supporting bereaved children. They are trained as Grief Support Workers by Balloons, are matched to children and young people, who they then meet with weekly for a number of sessions to support them in their feelings surrounding their grief. We provide support and supervision for Grief Support workers, with monthly team meetings and an annual conference.

This year, we were also delighted to welcome Helen, our first fundraising and admin volunteer. We hope to grow this volunteer team in the future.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF

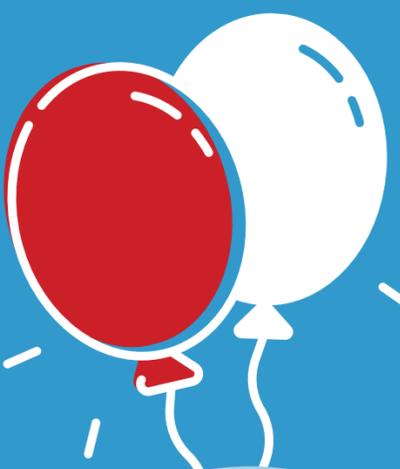
Our volunteer Grief Support Workers (GSWs) support children and young people through their bereavement - exploring feelings, memories, and giving them a safe space to talk about what has happened. Liz has volunteered as a GSW for over nine years and has brought comfort to dozens of children. Here, she reflects on what volunteering as a GSW means to her...



It's truly a privilege to be working alongside such an amazing supportive, and caring team of staff; and enthusiastic, loyal volunteers. There's no question we are all, valuably, pulling together in the same direction and with the same values, to make lives better for all the children and young people that come to us for support. It's such a privilege to be part of Balloons.

Priority 3 - What's next?

Continuing to support and supervise our volunteer Grief Support Workers, so they can support bereaved children and young people. Recruiting to the vacancy on our Trustee Board. Ensuring staff are supported to carry out their roles effectively.



2006-2026 - Our impact

Balloons Charity was first conceived in 2006 by healthcare professionals addressing the lack of specialist support for children in hospitals and hospices, who were affected by bereavement.

After securing seed funding in 2007, we ran a pilot project to provide community support for bereaved children. Since then, we have expanded, with the support of grants and many wonderful donations from the local community. Through these funds and with the passion and dedication of trustees, staff and volunteers we have:

- * Supported 1725 children through one-to-one grief support sessions
- * Trained 1183 professionals in supporting bereaved children
- * Trained over 228 local community members as volunteer Grief Support Workers
- * Sent our 2127 care packages to support bereaved children and their families
- * Run 62 Activity days bringing bereaved families together

We were honoured to receive recognition for our work when we were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2020. We have also been fortunate to gain media attention with notable figures meeting children and young people we work with, including Olympian Tom Daley, HRH the Duchess of Edinburgh, and Radio 1 DJ Molly King.

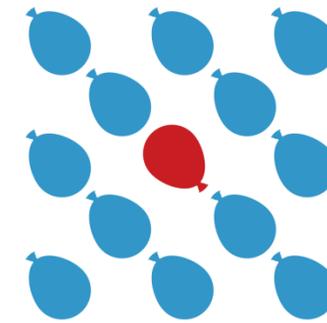
As this report has highlighted, Balloons continues to thrive in 2026 and we look forward to being there to support bereaved children, young people and their families for the next 20 years!



**Thank you for taking the time to
read about our work.**



If you would like to get involved further, please do consider fundraising for us in 2026 as we celebrate our 20th anniversary, or signing up to find out about volunteering opportunities.



Balloons

Supporting bereaved children and young people in Exeter, East and Mid Devon



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