



# Balloons

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



## 20 years of making a difference Lola's story...



*Me and Dad*

Ten years ago, when I was 11 years old, my Dad died, I was halfway through year 7. He was a character, very funny, liked to party, a super friendly guy. He was musical and creative and in the last few years of his life he found a passion for making drums.

My parents separated when I was very young, but we still had a close relationship – he lived around the corner and I'd see him all the time.

I knew that he struggled with his mental health and sometimes he wouldn't be very well. As a child that's the extent I understood - I was told that it wasn't my fault, it wasn't his fault, and there wasn't much I could do to help. He sadly died by suicide and when it happened, I shut down.

I found it really hard to go to school. I did go back for a couple of days early on, but where I live is a small community and it felt like everyone knew and at school the older kids were pointing and whispering about me. After that it took me a long time to go back, I'd mostly stay in my room and play video games as a distraction.

When I did go back, I spent a lot of time in the pastoral room, rarely going to many lessons, but being there meant I saw friends at break times. School arranged for someone from Balloons to come and see me. I remember a lovely lady who would come and meet with me to give me the space to talk about my Dad and my feelings.

Living in a small community is a blessing, but also sometimes a curse, in that everyone knows your business! I loved that the lady from Balloons was completely independent, she didn't know me or my family, which gave me a safe space to talk about it all.

I remember that we made a tree in my Balloons sessions, in fact I still have it in my room at home today. She brought in this huge carved tree made out of wood, and we created leaves for all the people who are there for me, to remind me about who I could turn to when I needed help – family members, friends, people at school.

My family also had fantastic support over the years from Pete's Dragons who support people bereaved by suicide. We have great local charities here to help people suffering a bereavement and Balloons and Pete's Dragons have been a huge part of my journey.



“If you asked me what I would say to my 11-year-old self, I would say, there is nothing you could have done. It was not your fault. And although I may not have believed it at the time, and it would be hard to hear, I would say that it does get easier over time”

Please remember that we are here for you or someone you know who needs support.

Get in touch on [support@balloonscharity.co.uk](mailto:support@balloonscharity.co.uk)

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