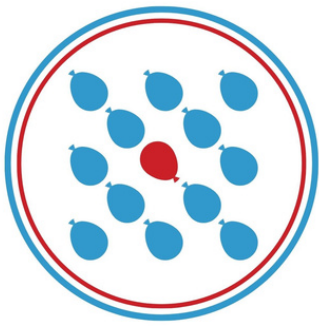




Balloons

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



20 years of making a difference Flo's story...



When mum died, I was just about to start my GCSEs. Mum was ill for a very long time. Her death wasn't a shock, but still, you can't really prepare yourself. Because this person you adore is, one day, just gone.

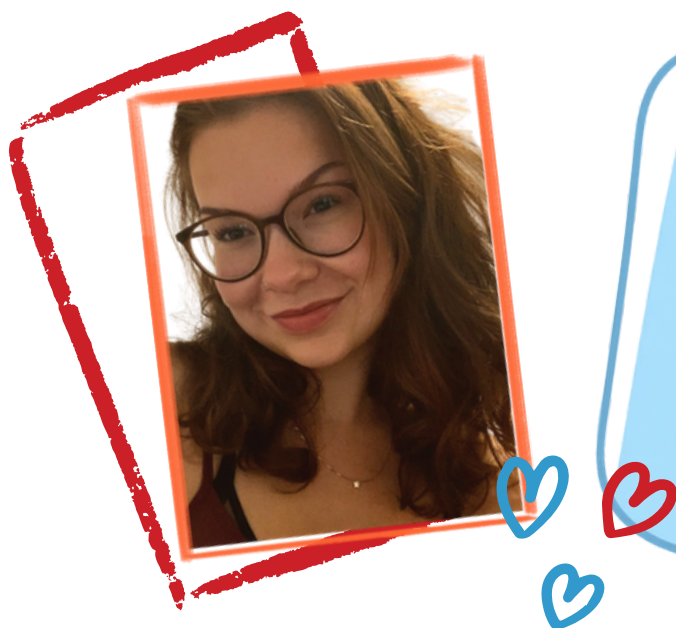
My mum was fabulous – she went to art college and did every single artistic career you could think of, fashion design, silk making.

And then she became an art teacher; she liked working with kids who were struggling in school, she connected with them. She really wanted to be a mum, so she fostered children and when she was 43, she had me.

We both shared a love of art, of creating things. While she was ill, I wasn't doing very well in school. I remember her saying 'You really need to get your act together.' But after she died, my dad was depressed and angry and my 13-year-old brain said I had to look after him. There was no space to grieve, no time for me to dwell on things.

Adults tried to get me to talk to all these professional people, but I just felt like I was being belittled. "They just don't get it", I thought. I stopped drawing and painting and threw myself into school. I thought I would do it for her. Fast forward five years and I was on my own for the first time. That feeling of starting something huge – University. It's in those times that you just want the most important person in your life, you know? To talk to them, to be like, "Wow, this is a lot. What do I do now?"

I felt, finally, like I was ready to grieve. That's when the University put me in touch with Balloons. From the first visit, it was so different to seeing the counsellor in hospital when I was 13. Everyone at Balloons was so warm and welcoming. But it still felt strange that it had taken me so long to get here.



I remember saying to Kate, my Grief Support Worker, "I shouldn't feel this bad - it's been five years. There are so many people who are in the depths of their grief. I'm just now unravelling mine."

But she was quick to tell me that grief is different for everyone; it doesn't matter how long it's been. Each session would be a conversation, a way to learn about my feelings, to try different coping mechanisms when they'd pop up. Grief often makes you feel like you have zero control over all these feelings. It sounds so simple, but Kate helped me to put these on a piece of paper, which I still have now. Recognising them, naming them, seeing them there - they all helped me make sense of my emotions.

Now, I'm in my second year of University, reading art history and slowly making art myself again. There are so many things I've taken from my time with Kate to help move forward in my life.

There's no right or wrong way to grieve. But, if I could speak to 13-year-old me, I'd tell her it's ok to talk to someone. To feel what you're feeling. There's no reason to be scared, there are people who really want to help you. You don't need to do this alone. Although things will never be the same, there's a safe space you can go to start to make things better

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

Get in touch on support@balloonscharity.co.uk

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