

RED BALLOON LEARNER CENTRES

RedBalloon Newsletter



Red Balloon
LEARNER CENTRES
For the recovery of bullied children

AUTUMN TERM 2020 EDITION 1

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A very warm welcome



Dr Carrie Herbert MBE

What a year it's been! The pandemic threw our students' plans in the air, but I've been so impressed at how they engaged in their lessons and wellbeing support online.

Red Balloon of the Air students, of course, are well-versed in working online and were were ahead of the curve!

That said, it was good to see Centres open again in September at the start of the year and children once again learning with their peers. Huge credit is due to staff who continue to deliver a first-class learning experience in the face of adversity, and to students who are following ever-changing guidelines to minimise infection risk!

Everyone's commitment has clearly paid off, and our leavers rightly celebrated some fantastic exam results in August. Of children who took GCSE maths, for example, 72% received grades 4 to 9 (the old grades C to A*), and 78% achieved the same in English. They gained a whole host of other qualifications alongside. You can read more about the exam results on our lovely new website. Do take a look - www.redballoonlearner.org.

But no grade on a certificate can show how our students have changed and matured. They have overcome many challenges and we're impressed at how they've grown as individuals. Whatever results they achieved, we're proud of the social and emotional progress they've made too. I'm sure that the future holds great things for them; for students like Lottie and Ethan, who share their stories with us in this newsletter.

I hope you enjoy reading about our students' achievements as well as Red Balloon's local and national news. All of this is only possible thanks to kind supporters; so my gratitude to each and every one of you.

Carrie Herbert
Founder

About Red Balloon: Increasing numbers of children are missing from school because of severe bullying, mental health problems, long term conditions or trauma. Red Balloon offers a programme of academic and therapeutic support to help them re-engage with learning and life.

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Meet Lottie

Lottie was so severely bullied at school that, at the age of 11, she started to see a noose and imagined hanging herself.

Then someone told her about Red Balloon of the Air and she says that it's the best thing that ever happened to her.

Lottie took her lessons and wellbeing support online, and received face-to-face therapy at home. And, when she was ready, Lottie attended the community hub in Danbury, Essex, where she gradually learned to be around her peers again.

"Red Balloon has helped me regain my confidence and feel so much better about myself."

"I am now able to trust people and be more sociable and I have begun to develop long-lasting friendships that I have not had for such a long time.

I can concentrate on lessons better, and I am in charge of my learning. I make decisions about when, where and what I learn and as a result of this I am getting higher grades. When I get stuck on something there is someone there to help you. The teachers really care about you.

I finally even have a plan for the future."

Lottie left Red Balloon in July and is now taking a Skills for Enterprise course at the Colchester Institute. She's even made a new friend, which she thinks would have been very hard before Red Balloon. We wish her well.

"Red Balloon has really given me my life back. I can't thank them enough."

* Lottie's name has been changed to protect her identity.

You can read more from Lottie on our website at: redballoonlearner.org/stories/



News from **Our Centres**



On the steps at Herbert House

Red Balloon in Cambridge welcomes more students

Red Balloon Cambridge was the first Centre in the Red Balloon family to open its doors for ten children in the city almost 25 years ago.

Since moving to Warkworth Terrace we have grown to take 18 children each year. Now, following the green light from the Department for Education, we are increasing that number further, which means even more self-excluding bullied and traumatised children can benefit from our educational and therapeutic programme.

“So far we have 17 new students and they are settling in so well. They are currently taking part in their educational and wellbeing sessions online, and coming into Warkworth Terrace for their community sessions. Here they get a chance to do hands-on projects such as art, cookery and science, and learn to feel comfortable around their peers again.”

Jessica Lechner
Head of Centre Cambridge



Heather Jolly

Introducing Heather, the new head at Norwich

We are saying a fond farewell to Angela Hewett as she steps down from her role as Head of Centre at Red Balloon Norwich.

She has been working with her team to support students for over 12 years. In that time, 170 children will have regained their confidence, taken their exams and moved on to great things as young adults. We wish Angela well for the future.

“I am thrilled to be taking over as Head of Centre at Red Balloon Norwich. I feel privileged to be part of such an amazing team and cannot wait to see our students grow and flourish as individuals by having the unique opportunity to learn in a safe and supportive environment.”

Heather Jolly
Head of Centre Norwich



Christina Pepper

A change at the top for Red Balloon Reading

Tristan McGuiness has stepped down as Head of Centre at Red Balloon Reading to spend more time with her family.

During her 18 months, she has helped strengthen the school and grow it, having brought her skills, knowledge and experience from her previous role as Head at Red Balloon NW London. We welcome Christina Pepper as the new Head of Centre in her stead.

“For the past eight years, I have been privileged to work at Red Balloon Reading and experience the Centre grow from strength to strength. It is with great excitement that I take up the leadership. I look forward to supporting an amazing team and using my experience of embedding creativity into teaching and learning to engage our students in new ways.”

Christina Pepper
Head of Centre Reading

Red Balloon of the Air students get ready for science

Pipettes, goggles and test tubes!

Just some of the science goodies that students have received to start the new term, and in time for their science-focused Curiosity Club activities too. Red Balloon of the Air students take their lessons online, and the science boxes we send them mean they can take part in experiments and hands-on learning, just like their counterparts in mainstream schools.



The expedition was greatly enjoyed by all!

Red Balloon NW London navigate the Thames

Students at NW London once again embraced their adventurous sides...

...and embarked on their Silver Duke of Edinburgh expedition at the end of July. The students spent three days canoeing down the River Thames camping overnight, organising meals, map reading

and making decisions as they went. These student-planned and led expeditions are an integral part of the award scheme, offering youngsters the opportunity to learn and build on many of the personal and social skills learned during the year at the Centre. This extracurricular activity is a firm favourite!

We're looking forward to sharing more news and exciting developments across our Centres as the new academic year unfolds. Get the full story for all our news snippets above and more on our news page: redballoonlearner.org/news-events/

Keeping bullying on the political agenda

Politicians need to be continually reminded about how children's lives can be severely blighted by bullying in school. So in 2012, we set up the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the matter.

Giving bullied children a voice



Red Balloon provides the Secretariat, which means we arrange the meetings, invite practitioners, academics, researchers and charities, as well as politicians, to exchange ideas. This gives everyone the opportunity to share research findings and policy changes and to keep abreast of various developments.

Our online meeting in July was hosted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance and chaired by Daniel Zeichner, MP for Cambridge. There were over 20 participants including Baroness Brinton, academics and researchers studying bullying, various charities, local authorities,

and teachers' unions as well as counter-bullying consultants.

We embarked on a very full agenda covering topics from sexting to the bullying of Roma Gypsy and Traveller children in schools. Participants also got to hear from Dr Niamh O'Brien about her research on self-exclusion, working with Red Balloon students. You can read more about her study on page seven of this newsletter.

We also discussed a newly composed fact sheet for incoming MPs, so that they know how to respond to constituents who consult them because their child is being bullied at school.

The possible detrimental effects of the pandemic was a hot topic too, and conversation included a rise in cyberbullying, increased isolation of children who already self-exclude and even greater than normal anxiety of moving to a new school.

Some of the presentations from this meeting can be found on the dedicated website which we manage at: www.appgb.org.uk/

Do take a look and let us know if you have any particular issues you would like raised at future meetings.

Red Balloon students at the heart of bullying research

Red Balloon students recently had the opportunity to work with researchers from Anglia Ruskin University to explore the experiences and support needs of children who self-exclude from school.

Dr Niamh O'Brien (Senior Research Fellow) and Anna Dadswell (Research Fellow) from the Faculty of Health Education Medicine and Social Care, used 'participatory methodology' as a way of involving students all the way through the research process. Firstly, Niamh and Anna worked with students at Red Balloon in Essex to explore the experiences and support needs of children missing from school because of bullying, and this knowledge was then used to design the research questions.

The researchers, along with students, then conducted focus groups at all of Red Balloon's Centres using these questions.

Findings suggest anxiety is a main factor in self-exclusion due to bullying. One interviewee said:

"I just kept it to myself, and almost every night, I cried myself to sleep. This anxiety was shaped by friendship dynamics..."

"...these people were supposed friends, but they were just fake people that just wanted to hurt me".

Another factor was insufficient help when children did ask for support:

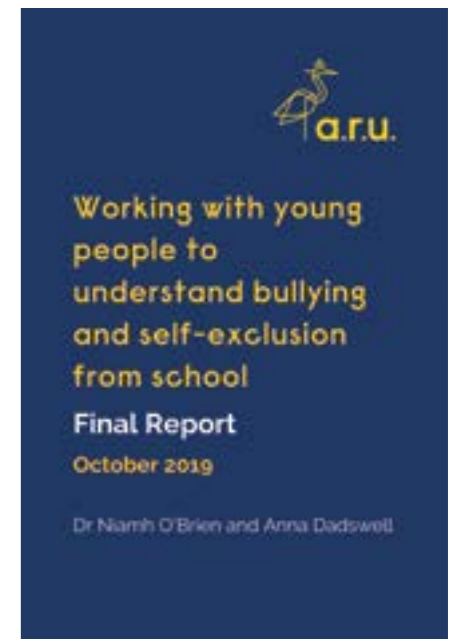
"The teachers don't do anything. It even got to a point where we were complaining so much, they would just put me in isolation as well."

Another interviewee added:

"I just felt I wasn't allowed to go out of school. You feel like you're stuck, there's no exit."

These factors led to our students' gradual withdrawal from school, and eventually self-exclusion:

"It's not a decision. I don't think someone decides on self-excluding ... you get so overwhelmed and then suddenly you look around and realise you haven't been to school in months."



This research is groundbreaking in that the experiences, knowledge and insight shared by Red Balloon's students had not been reported in bullying literature before.

Find Niamh and Anna's report on our website at: redballoonlearner.org/publications

Ethan shares his story

This year has been really hard for all children across the UK as the COVID-19 crisis threw their studies and plans into disarray. But while most students are now back to school and enjoying life after lockdown, many will stay stuck at home.



Plagued by bullying, disability or trauma, thousands of children won't be going back to school this term, and many have been missing from lessons for years!

Children like Ethan who, before joining Red Balloon, hadn't stepped outside his home in over three years. You may have seen his story recently in the Cambridge Independent, on our website and in social media.

Thanks to the support he received from the amazing staff at Red

Balloon, Ethan completed three GCSEs this year and is staying on to pursue more. He's also started to leave the house because he knows he has to prepare for the future.

You can read more about Ethan's progress on our website: redballoonlearner.org/stories alongside stories of other children who have gone on to flourish with Red Balloon.

Can you help us, help children like Ethan

As a charity, we rely on the generosity of our supporters and friends like you to help turn children's lives around for the better.

We know the COVID-19 crisis has been tough on everyone but, if you are able, will you help change the lives of others like Ethan?

Your gift, no matter how small, makes a big difference. You can leave your donation at the web address below.

Thank you so much.

www.justgiving.com/campaign/backtoschool20

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Some of the photographs in this newsletter have been posed by models.