

RED BALLOON LEARNER CENTRES

RedBalloon Newsletter

SPRING TERM 2021 EDITION 2



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A very warm welcome



Dr Carrie Herbert MBE

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Cover photo:

Dr Carrie Herbert MBE, Red Balloon's Founder, with Ruth Loshak, Red Balloon Cambridge's first Co-ordinator.

It hardly seems possible that it has been 25 years since Red Balloon started around my kitchen table!

It all began when I heard about students who had been so badly bullied that they stopped going to school. I explored this with lots of teachers and it became clear that this was affecting about 1 in 1,000 children. I was horrified.

I was contacted by a family who desperately needed help for their daughter. This 13-year-old had been bullied so severely that she had attempted suicide. The school had unhelpfully asked her to leave. So I offered to provide her with education at my house. She arrived in late November and by the spring half-term she was thriving, and returned to mainstream education. We told our local education authority that we had opened a school for bullied children, and Red Balloon was born.

From humble beginnings in my Victorian townhouse, Red Balloon has grown to have Centres in four locations across the south east, as well as an online provision across 12 counties. Today over 200 young people study with Red Balloon at any one time, and in the last 25 years we have helped over 1,000 get their lives back on track.

The essential foundations of our recovery programme: wellbeing, education and social re-engagement remain, but our practice is constantly evolving so students can receive the very best care. Looking forward, we will be extending our reach so even more marginalised children can re-engage with learning and life. The need is undeniable: all our Centres have waiting lists, and the pandemic has increased the number of children facing difficulties. We have already opened a second Centre in Cambridge, and further growth is planned.

Our students continue to progress to sixth form, college, apprenticeships, university and beyond. They become the successful adults they could only dream of at the start of their journey with Red Balloon.

I want to thank you for your continued support in giving bullied and traumatised young people the bright futures they so deserve. We couldn't do it without you. Please join us in celebrating our 25th anniversary.

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.

Daniel's story

Daniel, now 28, describes his time at Red Balloon, from arriving having spent time in psychiatric hospital, to developing the social skills and confidence to succeed.

and there was a big sense of them wanting me to do well. They treated me as an equal and someone to be respected, which was a big important thing for me.



Daniel at a pharmaceutical conference

"I think my biggest achievement while at Red Balloon, corny and obvious though it may sound, was actually getting GCSEs; because I didn't think that would be possible when I joined. But I got my A and my A-stars so I was happy with that. Just getting through was the biggest achievement I could have hoped for. I am now studying pharmacology at university, as well as setting up my own pharmacology business."

If I hadn't gone to Red Balloon, honestly I'd probably be back in the psychiatric hospital. For one thing I definitely wouldn't have managed in mainstream education.

Red Balloon absolutely prepared me for the future. It taught me a lot about managing social interactions as well as treating others as equals. Being on equal terms with teachers with first names, I think that was definitely one of the things that enabled me to form my network of pharmacology contacts, which is what got me where I am today."

"I had an awful time at my first senior school; I was bullied horrendously. I arrived late in the year and I was the outsider and found it hard to make friends. It just went from bad to worse really, the teachers were not supportive and it rapidly reached the point where I didn't have any friends at all at school and I was miserable.

When I left my first senior school I was pretty torn up. I was ill with post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder and anxiety. I just couldn't cope with the full-on social stuff and the workload. So I had to leave my second school too, after which I spent about a year in a psychiatric hospital. I'd had to take a lot of time out at that point and I was feeling hopeless. I wondered

what the hell is going to happen to my education? Am I going to have to be homeschooled? What's going to happen with University?

It was at that point that I came to Red Balloon. I was about 15 and had been out of education for a year. My medication had been adjusted so that I was just about in a good enough state to manage out of the hospital and sort of function. But I wasn't well enough to go to mainstream education, and that's what was going on for me when I joined Red Balloon.

Things at Red Balloon were different to my previous schools; it was quieter, more relaxed, and it felt more comfortable. The teachers were very supportive,

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

Looking forward: Our new Future Fund

As we reflect on the past 25 years, we cast an eye to the future too, to ensure our recovery programme is there for the next generation of children who need us.



Will you help build the Future Fund and support the next generation of Red Balloon students?

We are so grateful to Daniel for inspiring us with his Red Balloon journey - his story demonstrates how children can turn their lives around with our combination of education, wellbeing and social re-engagement. We wish him continued success.

We believe that all children have the right to build a brighter future for themselves, but sadly there are increasing numbers of children like Daniel too frightened to go to school. So we have an ambitious three-year growth strategy in place.



The four key elements of our plan include:

One

Opening two new Centres - the first in West Sussex and the other in South Hertfordshire. We know children in these areas need us so we are exploring how best to support them via Red Balloon of the Air and Centre-based programmes.

Two

Expanding provision in areas where we are already well-established - we opened a second Centre in Cambridge just before Christmas, and another is under development in NW London. Norwich and Reading have waiting lists, so there is potential for growth there too.

Three

Continuing to lead the way in online learning and face-to-face wellbeing support - by expanding Red Balloon of the Air toward Peterborough, and strengthening our presence in Essex.

Four

Underpinning the whole of Red Balloon with strong infrastructure support - by ensuring there is first-class education and wellbeing leadership, finance, HR, IT, marketing and fundraising expertise in place so that teachers, therapists and mentors can do what they do best - providing excellent care to students.



We have set up the Red Balloon Future Fund so that hundreds more severely bullied and traumatised young people can rebuild their self-belief, strengthen their resilience, resume their studies, take exams, and progress to mainstream school, college or work.

Students today will become the adults of tomorrow - so will you help them be confident, well-educated, and contributing members of society?

Will you help us take the steps we need to turn our vision - and students' aspirations - into reality?

Here are some ways to contribute to the Future Fund

You could:

- Take part in a fundraising event such as our Plog for Red Balloon Day on 6 May or our Red Balloon Ride in June (see page 11 for more)
- Make a donation either online at redballoonlearner.org/donate (select Future Funds) or by using the donation form on the back of this newsletter
- Introduce us to your corporate social responsibility team at work and we can explore partnership opportunities
- Become a Friend of Red Balloon and stand by us every month by setting up a regular gift
- See if any other ideas on our website take your fancy - or let us know of your own unique way to show your support.

▼ To find out more about our 25th celebrations and how you can support tomorrow's vulnerable children, visit: redballoonlearner.org.uk/25th

From humble beginnings

25 years of Red Balloon





Red Balloon founded
1996

Red Balloon Cambridge moves into Warkworth Terrace
2003

Red Balloon Learner Centre Group established

Red Balloon Norwich opens
2007

Red Balloon NW London opens
2009

Red Balloon of the Air opens
2011

Red Balloon Reading opens
2011

Centre for Social Justice's 'Education, Employment and Skills' Charity Award
2017

Shortlisted for ISA award in excellence and innovation in mental health and well-being
2019

Red Balloon Group and RBAir move to Milton
2019

RBAir opens hub at Danbury in Essex
2019

Cambridgeshire High Sheriff Award

StandUp Charity of the Year Award 2020 - Ben Cohen StandUp foundation
2020

Red Balloon Cambridge opens second location
2020



A whistle-stop history of the Centres

From one Centre in 1996 to five and growing today, each Centre is a unique haven providing a safe, welcoming space for students.



Jess Lechner, Head of Centre, in the art room of our second Centre in Cambridge

Red Balloon of the Air (RBAir)



A blended online and face-to-face provision, RBAir was started in 2011 to reach students unable to leave the house or who lived too far to get to a Centre daily. Starting with just 7 students at launch, RBAir has grown to support more than 80 students a year over 12 counties, with sessions and extra-curricular activities being provided both online and face-to-face in community hubs.

"2021 is a big year for RBAir too, as we're celebrating our 10th anniversary. The pandemic has shown everyone how important access to effective online learning really is. Demand for places at RBAir is now on the rise, so watch this space!"

Michelle Williams,
Head of Centre

Cambridge

Cambridge is the flagship Red Balloon Centre, first opening its doors 25 years ago and moving to its permanent home in Warkworth Terrace in 2003. At the end of last year, a second location was opened, in Norfolk Street, allowing an additional 18 students to enrol. Since the start of Red Balloon in 1996, around 375 students have been supported by the Cambridge team.

"I'm very proud of everything Red Balloon Cambridge has done over the last 25 years, and I'm really excited about what we're doing now. We have grown organically, through hard work and a shared vision, which is why we are now able to operate across two locations: separate buildings, but one Centre. Here's to the next 25 years!"

Jessica Lechner
Head of Centre



Red Balloon Reading has a waiting list too, so has potential for growth

NW London

Red Balloon NW London opened its doors in 2008. The Duke of Edinburgh award has become a stalwart favourite extracurricular activity at the Centre, with many students progressing through the various levels and completing canoeing expeditions together on the Thames.

NW London has spearheaded the introduction of equine therapy to help students improve their mental wellbeing and personal development.

"It is our absolute privilege to work with a group of exceptional young people. Despite the challenges life has thrown at them, our students show enormous resilience and supporting them as they grow is incredibly rewarding. We have lots of fun as we learn and the house is often filled with the sound of laughter."

Cathy Taylor
Head of Centre

Norwich

Norwich, the second Red Balloon Centre, was created in 2007. Having started life in a church hall, the Centre was well established before moving to its current, permanent home in 2010. From this excellent location in the heart of Norwich, students take full advantage of the libraries, museums and other educational establishments nearby.

A steady success since opening, Norwich has seen 170 students pass through its doors.

"Over the past three years we have enrolled a further 20 students, in partnership with RBAir, for those who have suffered such trauma they are unable to leave their homes. We are also looking to open another Centre over the next 18 months which will enable us to reach even more young people."

Heather Jolly
Head of Centre

Reading

Our fourth Centre, in Reading, was established in November 2011 and moved to its current location in February 2012. The uniqueness of Red Balloon's provision in the area resulted in a more diversified intake, with more students with special educational needs joining the family, and often staying longer.

"Underlying everything at the Centre is the support for students to find their element or passion in life. Recently, interest in global issues from students and staff has prompted a number of environmental activities shaping the Centre and surrounding streets, from plogging and upcycling, to creating a bug hotel in the garden. There are currently 23 students from seven local authorities at our Centre, with 81 alumni over the years moving on to bigger and better things."

Christina Pepper
Head of Centre

Fantastic Fundraisers

It's thanks to loyal supporters that self-excluding children can turn their lives around, reconnect with learning, re-engage with their communities and find their place in the world.

To help launch our 25th anniversary with a bang, two groups of fundraisers have already been putting in the miles for our Future Fund.

Team Sam - 10 million steps for Red Balloon

Sam suffered from anxiety and then depression due to long term bullying at school. It got so bad that in 2019, he began having suicidal thoughts. After spending nearly three months in hospital, Sam started at Red Balloon of the Air (RBAir) and, in its nurturing and safe environment, made remarkable progress.

Inspired by the improvement in his wellbeing, Sam's family and friends

pledged to walk 10 million steps by 16 March, the first anniversary of his admission at RBAir, to raise money so other children can benefit from our life-changing education and therapy. Sam's mum, Angela, said:

"Publicly sharing what had happened was incredibly difficult, but by doing so we have realised how many people truly care and want to help us and other young people who have been bullied."

Team Sam is making great strides toward their target. Thank you, Sam and family, for allowing us to share your story and for proactively raising awareness about bullying.



Go Team Sam! Go!

Qualcomm's Red Balloon Ride

Fantastic fundraiser Ralph Burditt, of Qualcomm Technologies International Ltd, organised a Red Balloon Ride and challenged his colleagues to leave the post-Christmas comfort of their sofas and cycle phenomenal distances to support our Future Fund. Over January, 14 of them braved the elements and showed no fear of the freezing temperatures which greeted them on their rides (but sensibly they did their cycling indoors when it was icy!)

Team members signed up to three different target distances, based on their ability: 300km, 600km and 1250km, and we had an award for total distance and total altitude in each distance category. The Red Balloon Riders did not disappoint! Over the month, our 14 cyclists rode a combined 9,417 kilometers and raised £5,148 for Red Balloon in the process! You can see more about their achievements, and their photographs, on the news pages of our website.

We were so inspired by the team's amazing ride that we've adopted the idea! Will you support the Future Fund by joining in a cycling challenge? Fear not, you won't have to do crazy distances, and we've picked June for its warmer and longer days.

Read more about it on page 11.

Two fab new Fundraising Events

Will you help celebrate our 25th anniversary and support future traumatised children by joining one of our fundraising events?

Plog for Red Balloon Day

Thursday 6 May *

The first of our new events is Plog for Red Balloon Day! It's the Swedish craze that's combining outdoor exercise with picking up rubbish - and it's catching on around the globe.

By plogging you can help save the environment, get fit, meet up with friends (when restrictions allow) and raise funds for Red Balloon students, all at the same time!

How you plog is up to you. Traditionally, participants jog while collecting rubbish, but you can walk, cycle, skate or do any other outdoor activity you

like. We'll tell you all you need to know - like how to dispose of the rubbish you find - in our participants' pack.

You can set how long you want to plog for, and how much you want to raise. You can plog for an hour, a morning, or even a whole day.

Let's create a Red Balloon movement and plog together on 6 May! The weather should be warmer - what better way to embrace the joys of Spring?

*If you can't do 6 May, then choose a day which suits you.



Students from Red Balloon Reading are already dab hands at plogging

Sign up to either (or both!) of these challenges today and you'll receive:

- A participants' pack with plenty of top tips
- Exclusive access to a challenge Facebook community
- Tips on setting up a killer JustGiving page
- Motivation to help you hit your target

Sign up at:

redballoonlearner.org/25th or call 07383 092734

Join us today, and together we can support the next generation of traumatised children who need us.

Red Balloon Ride June

Will you pledge to Ride for Red Balloon in June? As we're 25 this year, will you join us in cycling a collective 25,000 miles? Just pick a distance which suits you - it could be 25, 250 or 2,500 miles. Whether you're new to cycling, an enthusiastic novice, or an expert on two wheels, just make the challenge your own.

Perhaps you can team up with colleagues from your department at work and challenge a neighbouring team to match your target - a little inter-team rivalry is a great motivator! You can register as an individual or a company and we'll send you a participants' pack with everything you need to



One of Qualcomm's riders was soaking in the scenery on his Red Balloon Ride

know to get inspired and out on the road.

Donation form

Yes, I will support future traumatised children by donating to Red Balloon's Future Fund

Here are examples of how your gift to the Future Fund could transform students' lives. You can see more ways in our Wish List at redballoonlearner.org/25th



£96 helps provide two hours of teaching for four children



£48 helps provide a fortnight's therapy for one child



£500 buys a laptop so students can study from home

1 I'd like to make my gift online

- Become a Friend of Red Balloon and set up a regular gift at rbl.ac/donate (select Future Fund)
- Make a single donation via rbl.ac/donate (select Future Fund)

2 I'd like to make my gift by cheque

I enclose a cheque payable to Red Balloon Learner Centre Group

Date / /

Title: Mr Mrs Miss Ms Other:

Forename / Initials Surname

Address

Postcode

3 Add Gift Aid

Make your gift worth 25% more with Gift Aid at no extra cost to you

giftaid it

☐ I am a UK tax payer.
 * Ticking this box allows Red Balloon Learner Centre Group to treat all gifts you have given in the past four years, and all future gifts you make, as Gift Aid donations.

*By ticking this box I am confirming that I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

☐ I am not a UK tax payer

You can see our privacy statement, which explains what you can expect from us and how we collect and manage information about you, at www.redballoonlearner.org. If you want to change the way we communicate with you please let us know. Red Balloon will have regard for your donation wishes but they will not be treated as a binding restriction. This ensures that we can direct funds towards the greatest need if circumstances change. Please contact us if you require a further explanation.

Thank you for your kindness

IF DONATING BY CHEQUE PLEASE RETURN THIS WHOLE PAGE TO:

Red Balloon, Suite 3, Winship House, Winship Road, Milton, Cambridgeshire, CB24 6AP

redballoonlearner.org

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