

Nelson's Journey: Overview of the Charity's Operations

First, a word from two of our Child Bereavement Support Workers:

"It is an honour and a privilege to be someone that children and teenagers turn to when their lives have been turned upside down by the death of someone special. I have spent the last 4 and a half years being motivated and inspired by the bravery and resilience I've witnessed in hundreds of children going through unimaginable pain. Seeing the path these young people are walking and being someone they turn to ask directions along the way is so incredibly rewarding. People often think that a bereavement workers job is sad or morbid, but getting to hear so many fantastic memories about people and help young people overcome anxieties and self-esteem issues to look towards and believe in their own futures just goes to show that our work is more about life than it is death. I am so lucky to work for this amazing charity and get to be a part of children and teenagers' courageous journeys. To me, this is not a job or even a career, it's my calling."

"There are many opportunities for training and to learn at Nelson's Journey. As part of my continued professional development, the charity supported me to access The Working in Childhood Bereavement course from St Christopher's Candle and Hospice UK, based in London. The course is accredited by Middlesex University and I was able to gain a Level 5 certificate. Having gained this qualification, I was then able to lead on our new Early Support service that was set up in November 2020. I also have opportunities to help develop both this service and others within the charity."

Story of Nelson's Journey

In the mid-1990s a group of social workers attended a social services training course at Caistor Hall, Caistor St Edmund, Norwich where they learnt about Winston's Wish, a charity supporting bereaved children in Gloucestershire. Several people attending the course including some who had personal experience of supporting bereaved children felt strongly about the need to develop a similar service in Norfolk and as a result, Nelson's Journey was born and registered as a charity in November 1997.

Why are we called Nelson's Journey?

When the charity was set up, the Trustees wanted a name that had a connection with Norfolk. With Lord Nelson having been born in Norfolk and as a bereaved child himself (his mother having died when he was 9), 'Nelson' was chosen as part of the charity's name. 'Journey' is to represent the journey of grief that everyone embarks on when they experience a significant bereavement.

Smiles House – our home

Smiles House is located a few miles east of Norwich on the Octagon Business Park in Little Plumstead, and provides a permanent base where we have a visible and accessible centre for everyone who needs us and expand the service we offer. We have the space to provide a vital service for young people and their families; to run training sessions for our volunteers and further develop our partnerships with other organisations.

Our vision

Our vision is to give every bereaved child (aged 0 – 17yrs inclusive) in Norfolk the support they need to move forward positively with their lives, never having to cope with their loss alone. We know offering the right help at the right time gives them the best chance of avoiding long-term mental and emotional health issues, which can lead to educational problems, drug and alcohol abuse and law-breaking. We understand too that coming to terms with their loss often means dealing with anger, bottled-up feelings and confusion as well as grief, particularly when their loved

one's death was sudden, unexpected or the result of suicide. Our 1:1 sessions, therapeutic weekends, activity days and group interventions offer support tailored to each child's needs and circumstances, and our guidance gives parents and carers the tools they need to support them.

Our services

Our services include many opportunities for us to meet the varying bereavement needs of children and young people.

As part of an initial assessment process, Child Bereavement Support Workers review referrals, and any other relevant information received, at a Support Plan Meeting. The team are then able to recommend the service that can be provided to best support the child's individual needs; this may include referral/signposting onto other services, should Nelson's Journey not be the most appropriate service at that time.

Our interventions include:

Support Line: provides telephone referral, information, guidance and support to families, carers and professionals working with bereaved children and young people. It's staffed by professional Child Bereavement Support Workers who are trained and ready to provide vital support.

1:1 Support - For children and young people who have complex bereavement needs/additional needs and would benefit more from individual support than in a group setting. This face-to-face support is offered within schools, in the home or at our base at Smiles House in Little Plumstead. Support can also take place online using Microsoft Teams if this is suitable for the child or Young Person.

Early Support Service provided by a named Child Bereavement Support Worker in the team at and around the time of death. The early support service covers questions such as 'Should my child attend the funeral?', 'Should my child see the body?' and our Support Worker is able to guide parents and carers through these early questions. The support worker will remain in telephone contact with the parent/carer for up to 3 months after the referral is received. At the end of this period, the child's needs will be reviewed and to assess if further bereavement support is required at this time.

Activity Day - A one day intensive programme of bereavement support including memory work activities, exploring feelings and building self-esteem. The day will provide children and young people with coping strategies and an opportunity to meet other children with similar experiences.

Residential - A two-day intensive programme of bereavement support (with an overnight stay), including memory work activities, exploring feelings and building self-esteem. Both days will provide children and young people with coping strategies and an opportunity to meet other children with similar experiences.

Group Events – we organise events such as Memorial Walks and a Christmas Carol Concert which gives families and individuals an opportunity to come together and remember those who have died.

Positive Activities – We offer children and young people referred to us (and on occasions their families) the opportunity to take part in one off positive activities. These may include outings, events or activities that offer children and young people the opportunity to meet others who've had similar experiences and help them relax and enjoy themselves. These positive activities may be run by NJ staff or by other providers and partners. Last year, for example, we were able to offer a programme of drama workshops, delivered through Norwich Theatre Royal.

We also offer:

Parents & Carers Online Workshops: a new service, developed in 2023, for parents & carers of children recently referred to Nelson's Journey. This online session raises their awareness of bereavement needs; and services that are available for them to access, while they are waiting to meet a support worker.

Child bereavement training for professionals who may find themselves having to support a bereaved child e.g. teachers, youth workers and Family Liaison Officers. This is delivered by Child Bereavement Support Workers online using Microsoft Teams.

Resources: We have a range of resources we use to help support those caring for bereaved children.

We have also delivered a number of pilots for service initiatives that we may look to develop further including:

Family Bereavement Programme: a programme of bereavement support delivered over 4 consecutive weeks. It gives children and young people and their parents/carers an opportunity to meet others who have had similar experiences and participate in therapeutic activities designed to support bereaved children and young people.

Drop Ins: opportunities for parents, carers and professionals to drop in and meet a trained Child Bereavement Support Worker to talk about any aspect of bereavement.

Wellbeing Workshops: One of themed workshops which may be for children and young people experiencing particular challenges (e.g. irregular sleep patterns due to bereavement worries).

How we work with bereaved children

We receive enquiries for support direct from families as well as professionals such as teachers, GPs and social workers. If a family is open to receiving support from us then the child's bereavement needs will be assessed and appropriate support will be offered. In some cases, an assessment may identify that the child has other needs beyond that of their bereavement and in these circumstances would be referred on to other agencies.

Types of referrals and causes of death vary, and include unexpected and violent deaths e.g. murder, suicide, Road Traffic Collisions (RTC), sudden deaths such as brain haemorrhage and heart attack, as well as expected deaths through long term illnesses e.g. cancer.

Some of the children supported by Nelson's Journey are looked after by the local authority, living with foster parents or a carer from the family.

A Child Bereavement Support Worker will speak with the parent/carer of the child asking a range of questions which will assess whether the child's functioning has been affected by their bereavement e.g. they may be more angry than normal, depressed, self-harming, refusing to attend school, sleep regression, bed wetting etc.

For some children they may require less intense support, such as information, guidance and resources that can be shared with the family. If the child is displaying a substantial detrimental change following their bereavement, then a comprehensive assessment visit is arranged. During the assessment we speak to both adult and child:

Adult – To find out what they think the child's understanding of the death is: has the child cried?; did the child attend the funeral? Also talk through with them how children grieve e.g. If a child is very upset about the death one minute and then running around and laughing the next, that is fine; it's called 'puddle jumping'. Behaviour in school has worsened, again normal.

Child - Their understanding of the death sometimes conflicts with what actually happened. What memories do they have of the person who has died? What were their feelings around when they were told of the death and since then e.g. do they feel angry sometimes?

Outcome of assessment

Following an assessment, the bereavement worker will support the parent/carer in deciding what service would best suit their child's needs. Occasionally we may have to refer a child on to a higher-level mental health service e.g. if they have been self-harming. Some children may require 1:1 work and others are invited to attend a therapeutic residential weekend, activity day or a group activity.

On activity days and therapeutic weekends, activities take place to help the child talk about their feelings, emotions, memories and help them to realise they are not the only one going through such an experience.

Following our therapeutic weekends and activity days, we contact the family to check how the children have been since attending and whether the family feel they need further support.

Monitoring of the impact of our work

We monitor the impact of our work at the point of referral, following the completion of therapeutic interventions and after they have received support from us.

We also request written feedback from children, young people and parents and carers following our therapeutic weekends and activity days to ensure they felt we met their bereavement needs and felt adequately supported.

Our team

All our staff feature on our website at: <https://nelsonsjourney.org.uk/about-us/>

The line management team at the charity is: Simon Wright (CEO); Rebecca Hume (Child Bereavement Services Manager); Kim Chase (Office Manager); and Gary Stevens (Funding & Marketing Manager).

Service Team

The Child Bereavement Services Manager manages the team of 8 Child Bereavement Support Workers (CBSWs). CBSWs have been trained in bereavement support on arrival at Nelson's Journey, with the charity funding places for the team to achieve Level 5 certificate 'Working in Childhood Bereavement' accredited by Middlesex University:

<https://professionals.hospiceuk.org/what-we-offer/courses-conferences-and-learning-events/childhood-bereavement-courses>

Business Support Team

The Business Support Team is managed by the Office Manager. Business Support Officers and volunteers work to provide administrative and practical support to the whole team. Linda and Louise are part-time Business Support Officers, each working two days a week. Linda has particular interests in the charity's financial processes; and Louise is developing a school engagement programme and working with other parts of the charity to co-ordinate and develop our relationships and practice with schools.

Funding and Marketing Team and Events

The Funding and Marketing team is led by Gary Stevens, our full-time Funding and Marketing Manager. Responsibilities for developing and delivering specific areas of fundraising income, campaigns and initiatives are distributed across team members. Tasks and responsibilities may change in accordance with fundraising strategies and opportunities.

The team work collectively, supporting one another to bring in the funds to deliver the charity's service. The Business Support Team support the management of income from fundraising, and the implementation of a calendar of events across the year.

Events

Nelson's Journey typically would organise a number of our own marketing and fundraising events during the year, including: Walk of Smiles; Easter Egg hunts; charity Balls; and Christmas events.

Young Volunteers

Our young volunteers include past service users and non-service users aged 11 – 17yrs who provide feedback, advice and guidance on improving services for bereaved children in Norfolk. They also develop their own initiatives and projects. It is important to us to have young people involved in the development of our charity, they are key to us ensuring that the services and ideas we develop are appropriate for the young people that we support. Young Volunteers were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service during 2020.

Young Volunteers work on projects which will benefit our service users and the charity including developing a Bereavement Resource for use in schools, a Bereavement Gift Box of activities, and volunteering alongside other young volunteers for Nelson's Journey's activities and events.