In this issue
Events for 2017 .................................................... 2
Contact details .................................................. 2
Carrie’s foreword ............................................. 3
Group news ..................................................... 4
Centre updates .............................................. 6
RB Air update ................................................. 8
Student achievements ................................. 9
The difference you are making .......... 10
Charitable support ................................. 11
How you can help ................................. 12

Safeguarding
Red Balloon is committed to safeguarding
and promoting the welfare of children and
young people and expects all staff and
volunteers to share this commitment

Events in 2017/18
A wide range of events is organised by each
Red Balloon Learner Centre.
If you visit www.redballoonlearner.org you
can find out what is happening near you.

• Jingle All the Way, Cambridge Chorale
  (in aid of RB-Cambridge)
  9th December 11am, Great St Mary’s
  9th December 5pm, Great St Mary’s

• RB-Norwich Carol Concert
  21st December 7pm, St Peter Mancroft
  Church, Norwich

• RB Golf Day
  15th May 2018, Woburn

• Open Garden 49 New Square
  9th – 10th June 2018, 11am–5pm, Cambridge

• RB-Norwich Golf Day
  6th July 2018, Barnham Broom

Contact details
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NW London  Reg. Charity 1109947
admin@nwldnondon.rblc.org.uk  Tel: 020 8864 6433

Braintree  Working in partnership with RBAir
Reg. Charity 1137151
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Reading  Reg. Charity 1136446
admin@reading.rblc.org.uk  Tel: 0118 958 3004

Red Balloon of the Air  Reg Charity 1138657
admin@rbair.org.uk  Tel: 01223 354338

Red Balloon LCG
www.carrieherbert.wordpress.com
Dear Friends

I am sure you know this, but it bears repeating – our students’ mental and emotional wellbeing is key to their recovery. Over the last 21 years we have gained a wealth of experience in how best to amalgamate learning and therapy in a supportive community to nurture our students’ wellbeing.

But how does this actually work? How do we do it? This issue of our newsletter will bring our wellbeing provision to life. Hear from our RBAir mentor Yvonne about coaxing isolated students out of their bedroom and read about the RB staff conference and its importance for sharing and developing RB philosophy and values (p. 5), learn from our RB Centres and RBAir about the importance of music, arts and equine therapy (pp. 6 & 7) and, finally, let us thank you for your role in all of this (p. 11), because we wouldn’t be what we are without you.

The first months of the new school year have been a busy time, with the Centres and RBAir bustling with large numbers of new students, whom I would like to welcome warmly. It has also been a time of farewells. I would like to thank Stan Webster, Chair of Red Balloon Group until September 2017, for his support and commitment, sound, wise and perspicacious advice during the nearly seventeen years he devoted to Red Balloon. My best wishes for the future also go out to Clive Bairsto, who resigned recently as RB Group’s CEO. We are excited to welcome Mike Frankl as the new Chair of Trustees for RB Group.

Lastly, I should like to wish you all a joyous Christmas holiday and a happy New Year.

With kind regards

Dr Carrie Herbert MBE
Founder and President
Group news

Red Balloon has a new Chair of Trustees

After more than a dozen years, I stepped down as Chair of Trustees at our September meeting. I have thoroughly enjoyed helping to build Red Balloon, which was still a single Centre housed in Carrie Herbert’s home in Cambridge when I first became involved.

Stepping down was always going to be a wrench, but it is made much easier by the fact that I have such an able and experienced successor in Mike Frankl. Mike has been a Red Balloon Trustee for several years, and also Chair of Trustees for the Cambridge Centre. I look forward to continuing to serve Red Balloon under his chairmanship.

Stan Webster

Becoming Chair of Red Balloon

I became a Trustee of the Cambridge Learner Centre in 2011, its Chair 18 months later and a Group Trustee a short time later. Since then I have been continuously impressed by the wonderful work carried out by our staff. I have heard many extremely moving stories from individual young people about how their lives have been changed and turned around by Red Balloon.

I come to the role of Chair of Red Balloon Group with experience of several other charities, from faith groups to homelessness to higher education, and I have a wide background in governance. I am ambitious for Red Balloon and believe in working closely in partnership with our paid senior leaders.

To be a trustee of an education establishment is to take on a serious commitment and responsibility. In today’s climate we depend completely on the dedication and support of all of those who volunteer to become a trustee of one of our Centres.

I also hope that we can find better ways to support our staff in the amazing, but at times stressful, work that they carry out, and to provide adequate rewards for all of their time and effort. I look forward to working with my other trustees and the senior staff to maintain the high standards and quality of the therapy and education we provide to 150 young people each year and hope that together we can find ways to help even more students to recover over the coming years.

Mike Frankl
Executive Chair of RB Group

Great News!

Red Balloon has been chosen as a beneficiary of the Co-op Local Community Fund

Co-op members will be able to support us for 11 months until October 2018.
If you are a member, 1% of what you spend on Co-op products goes to the Co-op Local Community Fund and will be shared with Red Balloon.
Watch our website and Social Media for more information in the months to come.

Choose us as your Co-op local cause
Go online coop.co.uk/membership

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Impressions of Red Balloon’s 2017 Staff Conference

As a conference rookie, I was hoping that the Annual Conference would be the perfect way to start the new academic year. The prospect of two days in the leafy and cerebral setting of Homerton College promised to be a great welcome back.

The first big surprise was the sheer size and scale of the organisation. Eighty people, including trustees, mentors, counsellors, support assistants and teachers from Cambridge, Norwich, NW London and Reading, gathered together to take part in training and professional development. It was good to be able to meet in person so many who have been a voice on a phone or a sender or receiver of emails.

Carrie welcomed everyone and over the next two days we took part in workshops, talks and activities with a focus on our Wellbeing Curriculum.

The delicious dinner at the Cambridge Cookery School after the first day was followed by an encouraging and entertaining speech by Vic Goddard (Headmaster of Educating Essex).

The highlight of the second day for me was a poised and articulate university student of psychology, who spoke so eloquently and movingly about her experience of eating disorder, mainstream education and subsequently her time with Red Balloon. It was hard to believe that the successful and confident young woman speaking to such a large audience, unfalteringly, had once been such a troubled teenager. She was inspirational.

The conference delivered. I am already looking forward to next year’s.

Juliette Fraser
Teacher and SENCo at RBAir

A day in the life of…

an RBAir mentor

Bringing wellbeing to life

Working as a mentor for RBAir can be tough at times, but it is also very rewarding. The young people I support are dealing with very difficult circumstances, some suffering from severe mental ill health.

A typical mentoring day for me might look like this: first thing in the morning I would visit two students in Whittlesey, then drive to see two students in Newborough, after which I would go to Yaxley to meet another student whom I would then take to meet other students at the satellite centre.

The visits to the satellite centre reflect a huge leap forward in their recovery. Initially, students were anxious and worried about what might await them, and to take the pressure off, I did most of the talking. (Later they told me how grateful they were for this.) Two weeks in, and they started to enjoy the sessions and looked forward to meeting up. After the initial getting-to-know, we would use the sessions to explore various topics.

A day such as this always results in a large amount of paperwork and follow-up actions: recording detailed notes of intervention in students’ diaries, feeding back information about students’ wellbeing to teachers and therapists, organising activities for students, or liaising with agencies such as CAMHS to keep a student safe, to name but a few of the tasks.

This work can sometimes be very draining, especially when a young person is very low or even suicidal. On the other hand, when students are doing well because of our support, it is very rewarding.

Yvonne Reddington
RBAir Mentor
Centre updates

Red Balloon – Cambridge

Jessica Lechner, Coordinator

It’s been a busy start to the year at Red Balloon - Cambridge, with some fantastic experiences for the students as well as developments within the Centre.

We were invited to submit a selection of our students’ film projects to the Cambridge Film Festival, and a range of our short films was screened to the public in October, highlighting the talent and interest our students show in film-making and media studies. A number of our young people have also had their artwork on display at a local exhibition, and some were awarded prizes.

We all went for our annual apple-pressing at the home of one of our former staff members, and returned with gallons of delicious juice.

Our students are very keen charity fundraisers, and have collected an amazing £120 by organising and holding a coffee morning for the Macmillan cancer charity. We too have been the beneficiaries of fundraising, thanks to Qualcomm, who are helping us raise money for refurbishment of the art room. Following their prize-winning displays, it is no less than what our young artists deserve!

Finally, there has been painting of a different kind over the half-term holiday – thanks to Bombardier for painting our interior walls, giving the Centre a fresh new look ready for the second half of the autumn term.

Red Balloon – NW London

Tristan McGuinness, Coordinator

Everyone at RB-NW London is enjoying being in the garden for lessons in the new classroom built to cope with rising student numbers.

We have just restarted Equine Therapy, using the money remaining from Haberdashers funding for this hugely popular therapy.

Events held so far this term included a self-defence class run by Action Breaks Silence. The students enjoyed tackling the padded man and bringing him to the ground! Then, in a two-day workshop run by Tender, students explored their feelings through role-play, and discussed abusive relationships.

We have already held our curriculum evening for Year 10 and 11 students and their parents to discuss the qualifications they will be taking in June 2018. This is part of our careers programme that includes visits to further education colleges and work experience. A good start to the year after a successful ISI inspection!

Protecting your privacy

Like all charities, we are under pressure to prove that we contact you only with your permission. Our privacy statement at privacy.rbl.ac informs you how and why we use your personal information and how we keep it safe. If you like what Red Balloon does and agree with our use of your data, please sign up to hear from us at subscribe.rbl.ac
**Red Balloon – Norwich**  
*Angela Hewett, Coordinator*

Since the last Newsletter, 10 of our students have moved from the Centre to further education. All took GCSEs and had amazing results. The pass rate was 75% higher grade passes. The courses that they have opted for are A levels at Isaac Newton and Jane Austen 6th Form Colleges, and Arts and A-levels at City College. They have settled into their new environments and are making good progress.

Having so many leave meant we were able to take 11 new students. This is the first time that we have had so many start at the same time. The Wellbeing team did a marvellous job in making the 11 new and seven old students feel good about the coming term.

Attendance is good and confidence is growing. It’s amazing how each young person has developed since starting here in September. During the first week, they are all asked to complete a wellbeing questionnaire about how they are feeling; the questionnaire will be revisited at the end of the first term and they will be able to see how they have improved. We are looking forward to seeing their responses.

**Red Balloon – Reading**  
*Tom Crook, Music Therapist*

When J started at Red Balloon, it seemed necessary to help build his confidence and help him adjust to this transition. As J was into music, it was felt music therapy might be a helpful intervention. In his first session, he showed great interest in the drum kit. He was a quick learner and showed a natural musicality.

As his confidence grew, J explored other instruments and began songwriting. We began by writing out the lyrics for him to record over some hip-hop style beats. But as this progressed, it became clear that he was in fact quite an adept freestyler. J’s lyrics seemed to reveal more from his unconscious self. Topics concerning his last school, friends, family and even a recent road accident all emerged in this stream of consciousness that was his freestyle rapping. As we worked we would discuss some of the topics that came up and I feel the music allowed J the space to explore some of these issues and feelings he might have had surrounding them.

By using music as a means of self-expression, J has been able to rebuild self-esteem and self-confidence, while finding his place here within the community.

**Christmas Cards**

For those of you who receive this newsletter by post, we hope you have received your free gift – a 2017 Christmas card.

Please send it to someone who doesn’t know about Red Balloon. The card this year was designed by Karen Freeman, a Suffolk artist, who was impressed by what she heard about our work on Look East. If you like the card and want to help us spread the word, please order as many as you need (you will have to pay for postage), and we ask you for a donation.

To order, please phone Karen Turner on 01223 366052 or send an email to admin@group.rblc.org.uk
RBAir Update

Stephanie Franklin, Coordinator of RBAir

We grow and grow!

The end of the academic year in July has seen 38 students leaving RBAir to either move back to mainstream or on to further education, training or employment. In the summer, 19 students sat GCSE exams. Over the years, results have been steadily improving, with the proportion of students achieving A*-C increasing from 14% in 2015, to 50% in 2016 and 57% last year. Considering our students have huge gaps in their learning and many have complex needs and anxiety, these amazing results make us very proud of our them.

We continue to grow, in both student and staff numbers. We started the new academic year in September with 63 students, and another seven are starting their recovery journey with RBAir in the second half-term. We are pleased to welcome two new science teachers, three mentors, two therapists, two English teachers and one administrator as additional staff to our team.

Chesterton Mill has been a busy hive of activity for a while and shortly after the beginning of the academic year we opened a new unit to accommodate growing staff numbers. Our “engagement team” had the pleasure of moving into neighbouring premises in early October.

Case Study

When James started at Red Balloon aged 16, suffering from severe depression and anxiety had led him to a point where the thought of leaving his house would fill him with paralysing panic, he had lost the will to learn and the ability to bear the presence of other people. He had repeatedly tried to take his own life and spent many months in hospital.

Initially, James would refuse to leave his bedroom and was not able to attend a Red Balloon Centre. At RBAir – Red Balloon’s online centre – he was allowed to focus on his love of computing and coding and through that connect with our teachers and other students. He made friends in the Red Balloon community and re-discovered his ability to enjoy learning.

James’s journey was not an even path. A few weeks into his second term, he became very unwell and had to be hospitalised again. But he had made some important progress. He was no longer afraid to leave the house. And after two months in hospital he started at our Cambridge Centre.

This summer, James sat his GCSE exams in Maths and having passed that with a B grade he is now on course to complete English, Computing, Physics and Design & Technology and is expecting to start a Level 3 Computing course at college next September. To quote his mentor Caroline, “For a young person so vulnerable, this is an achievement beyond words.”
As a precursor to student outcomes, it would be remiss of me not to mention the hard work of all staff working to support students. Centres were subject to four inspections last academic year. In each of those inspections the judgement reached was that, “the Centre is fully compliant” with all eight regulatory requirements. The first of those covers the quality of education provided: inspectors consistently expressed their praise for the work carried out by staff.

Student numbers have continued to grow: each one of the Centres has increased numbers from 15 to 20, and Red Balloon of the Air continues to expand. By the end of the year we were working with 144 students.

All of those students came into Red Balloon following significant difficulties in accessing mainstream education. One student described in writing how she had thrown objects onto her foot or intentionally fallen out of bed in an attempt to break bones so that she would not have to attend school; another described his daily despair as a result of bullying at the hands of older students.

It can be immensely difficult for young people who have had such damaging educational experiences to re-engage and to perform well.

Many students do, however, make the progress and gather the qualifications they require to move on.

During 2016/17 75% of KS3 students in maths, 87.5% in English and 87.5% in science made progress either as well as or better than their mainstream peers. 68.8% of external examination grades achieved by students were in line with or exceeded forecast grades. It should be remembered that forecast grades are usually based upon assessed cognitive achievement levels before their education was disrupted and take no account of the impact of missed periods of education or of the way in which mental health issues can impact upon learning.

It is testament to the progress made by students that 35 KS3 students have successfully returned to mainstream education and that 42 of the 45 leavers have moved on to further education or training.
The difference you are making
Karen Schmiady, Development Manager

How charitable giving helps us provide amazing wellbeing support

Our unique recovery programme comprises 50% education and 50% wellbeing. Learning and wellbeing reinforce each other – students cannot learn when they are mentally or emotionally unwell and learning provides the sense of achievement necessary to build confidence as well as mental and emotional resilience. While in some cases the statutory funding we receive as an alternative educational provider covers most of the cost of teaching (and we’re still lobbying the Government to get all our students funded), many elements of our wellbeing provision would not be in place if it was not for the charitable support we receive. These elements, central to what we do, deliver important outcomes for our students.

The wellbeing provision includes therapy or counselling and community activities, and much of what we do covers both areas. Music, for example, has huge therapeutic power, allowing students to express their thoughts and emotions in ways words cannot. By expanding the limits of communication and providing shared experiences, music therapy helps build and strengthens students’ sense of community. Arts club, coding club, equine therapy, and role play along with enquiry-based learning contribute hugely to students’ social engagement and self-esteem.

For many of our students, these extra-curricular activities provide the opportunity to exhibit their talents and discover hidden skills and passions.

The RBAir mentors are an important pillar of wellbeing provision. They are the face-to-face link to the students, many of whom are literally hiding away in their bedroom. They visit them every week, coax them out for a walk, or to visit the zoo, go rock-climbing, meet other students at the satellite centre or join a bigger group on a residential trip. The mentors are students’ bridge to the Red Balloon community and crucial to building students’ self-esteem.

Students have to leave the known and safe Red Balloon environment from time to time if they are to be able to re-engage with the outside world and society. Our regular trips and residential trips encourage them to become more independent, develop deeper friendships with other students and, again, provide opportunities for them to discover abilities they did not know they had.

It is only because you support Red Balloon – with donations, through fundraising or volunteering - that this happens. Thank you.

Arts club, coding club, equine therapy, and role play along with enquiry-based learning contribute hugely to students’ social engagement and self-esteem
Charitable support

Dr Carrie Herbert MBE, Founder and President

Thanks!

So much of what makes Red Balloon special is possible only thanks to the generosity and enthusiasm of our supporters. This newsletter’s focus on wellbeing has brought some of it to life.

Mentors like Yvonne can provide intensive 1:1 support only thanks to Comic Relief and BBC Children in Need; thanks to The Alex Roberts-Miller Foundation all our students can delve into the world of books, embark on outdoor adventure thanks to DG Marshall of Cambridge Charity, or find peace and pleasure in music thanks to the Ingles Charitable Trust and Christina Russell.

Learning is essential for wellbeing and at RBAir we deliver it using modern IT – hence, a big thank you to The Haberdashers’ Company and The Percy Bilton Charity for laptops for our students.

A huge thank you to an Anonymous Trust, The Philip King Charitable Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation and Christine Brown for helping us cover our general costs.

Thank you to Conscious Communications for pro bono marketing advice, to Great Western Railways, Greater Anglia and Govia Thameslink for allowing our staff and students to travel free on their networks; Shortest Path Training for supporting RBAir, as well as Cambridge Cookery School, Cambridge Wine Merchants, NW Brown Group and Whitfield Group for sponsoring our staff conference.

A big applause and thank you to all our devoted fundraisers Bea Edwards and Theo Phelps (at the Dragon School Oxford) raising bursaries for students, Qualcomm and 3Counties Committee supporting our Cambridge Centre, Naomi Feinstein running a marathon for RB Group, Wooden Spoon supporting RB Norwich and Ruben and Rachel skydiving in support of RB NW London.

And last, but not least, a big thank you to all our regular givers and volunteers.

Golf Day 2018

Save the date: 15 May 2018

We are delighted to open registrations for the Red Balloon Golf Day 2018. It will be held on Tuesday 15th May 2018 at Woburn Golf Club, Milton Keynes MK17 9LJ. All proceeds from the day will be used to further the work of Red Balloon.

To enter, download and complete the entry form from: http://golf2018.rbl.ac/

We hope you can join us!
How you can help

Inspirational stories from Red Balloon supporters

There are many different ways to support Red Balloon and help bring about positive change for severely bullied and traumatised young people. Here we would like to share an inspirational story about the benefits of volunteering for Red Balloon.

**Hands on volunteers from Bombardier**

For Peter Keighron and his team of Bombardier engineers, project managers and finance analysts, team building days redecorating Red Balloon Centres are becoming a much loved tradition. Earlier this year, he and his nine volunteers from London spent two days at our Centre in Harrow redecorating the science and art rooms. The pleasure was mutual and the team decided to come back to give the four-storey hall of our Cambridge Centre a face-lift. Peter Keighron says: “We are a relatively new team and volunteering for Red Balloon is a great way of bringing our team together and engaging in something meaningful.”

In project administrator Bianca’s words: “I feel proud to be part of a company that gives back to its community.” Peter, Bianca, Antonio and all the other hands-on workers much enjoy volunteering for Red Balloon and want to do more of it in the year to come. Luckily, we are not yet running out of walls that can do with a bit of fresh paint – so see you soon!

**Feeling inspired?**

If you feel inspired by what you have read about the importance of wellbeing at Red Balloon and the difference our supporters are making, please get in touch with Karen & Susa by email to devteam@redballoonlearner.org or call 01223 366052. They can advise you if you want to make a dedicated gift to a particular area of our work, do some fundraising or volunteer for Red Balloon.

If you would like to contribute on a regular basis please go to our website www.redballoonlearner.org and click on the DONATE button.

www.redballoonlearner.org