




SeeSaw Grief Support

25 years of supporting bereaved children
and young people in Oxfordshire

Impact Report


July 2024 - June 2025



“There was never any pressure to do things a particular way, there was no patronising tone or false sympathy, it was just straightforward real empathy and practical advice when we needed it. Thank you.”

“SeeSaw are great because they help you when you need it and you can talk to someone that’s not family. I know they are always here for me if I need them. They listen to me and understand what I have been through and have been an amazing support for me and mum.”

“I was completely overwhelmed and struggled to see what tomorrow would look like when I first reached out to SeeSaw. Now I would say we are both experiencing healthy grief, have many more good times than bad times and have coping mechanisms for the tougher days.”



A word from...



Our Chair of Trustees Gillian Forrest

It has been my privilege and pleasure to serve as a Trustee of SeeSaw Grief Support for more than 20 years. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary I have been reflecting on the difference we have made to bereaved children and young people across Oxfordshire.

I'm so proud of how SeeSaw Grief Support has developed and the King's Award, honouring the work our volunteers do with children and young people, has been a particular highlight for me.

I will be stepping down in November 2025 but I feel very reassured that I am leaving SeeSaw Grief Support in very safe hands, continuing the much-needed work we were set up to do and finding ways to adapt and develop that work to meet the community's needs.

Our Director Judith Mulligan



This year is the 25th anniversary of our work with children and young people, and their families in Oxfordshire. In that time, we have regularly asked ourselves, and the people who use our service, 'what more can we do to help?' We have embarked on a programme of development to ensure that our resources, training and information is accessible and relevant to the families who need us and the professionals who work with bereaved children and young people. As part of this focus we have changed our name to make it easier for families to find us and identify what we do, and we have also been capturing the voices of those we have supported this year, but also across the years, to find out the difference we made. You can read some of their very moving stories in this report and on our website.

We are sad to be saying goodbye to Dr Gillian Forrest, our dedicated and tireless Chair of Trustees, but also excited about our next chapter with new plans coming to fruition and a new Chair of Trustees, Robert Kirtland.

What our support looks like:

Between July 2024 - June 2025

462 children and young people from
323 families benefitted from our service



We monitor our reach across the whole of Oxfordshire. The 323 families we worked with were split across the 5 district councils, roughly in proportion to their general populations.

Cause of bereavement:

38%

deaths from cancer

9%

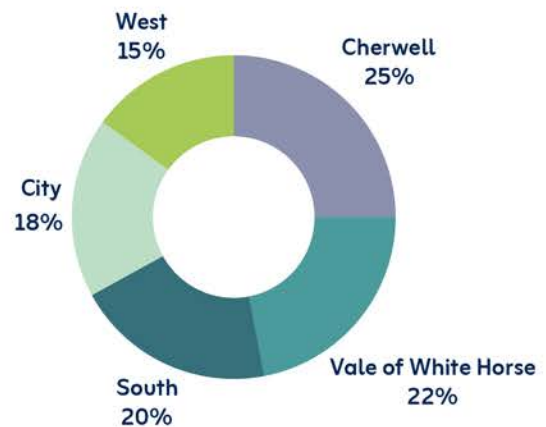
sudden illness

16%

death by suicide

9%

heart related deaths



Age of children and young people supported:	0 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19
	4%	28%	40%	28%

Male: 45% **Female: 55%**



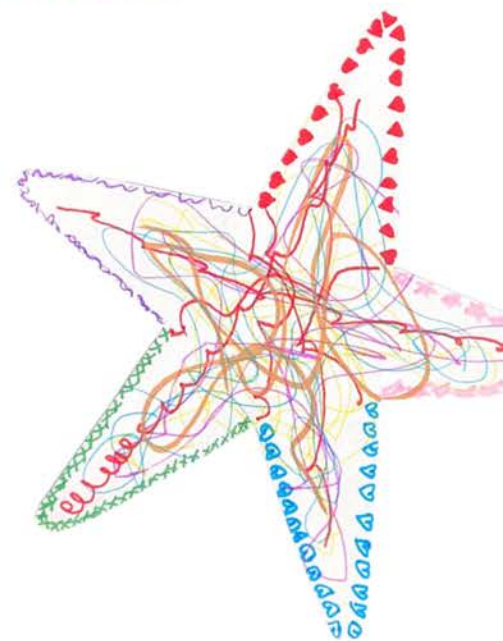
Pre-Bereavement Support

Our Pre-Bereavement work can start when a parent, carer or sibling has been given a terminal diagnosis. Families may contact us for advice on how to manage this information with their children and how to support them. We offer this support throughout the progression of the illness, into palliative and end of life care and after the death.

Families can choose when and how they want to engage with the support, and we will work with them to make sure it is what they need.

101 children and young people from
63 families, benefitted from pre-bereavement support

“SeeSaw have been invaluable - we wouldn't have managed without them. I would encourage anyone facing terminal illness or bereavement to get in touch.”



Khalida's story

We often work alongside Sobell House Hospice, supporting children and young people when their caregiver is receiving end of life care.

“I first heard about SeeSaw when my Mum was admitted to Sobell House Hospice for end-of-life care. I was 17 and in the middle of my A Level exams. Mum had cancer when I was young, but it came back again when I was 14.

A couple of weeks before she was admitted, Mum had surgery and she could no longer eat. I was then told that she wouldn't be coming home and probably only had a few weeks to live. I had been used to Mum being ill for pretty much my whole life but hadn't seen this coming. Sobell House mentioned SeeSaw and helped me make a self-referral for some support.

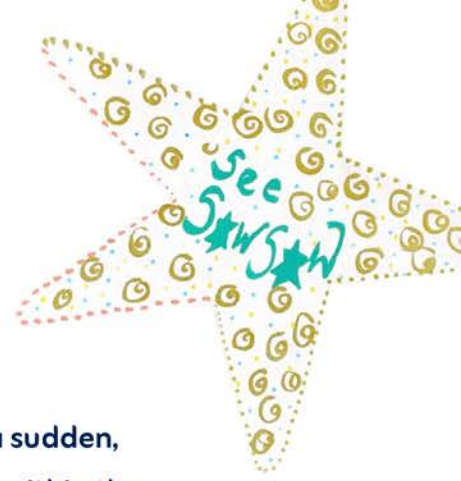
A worker from SeeSaw came to meet me at Sobell House the same day we spoke on the phone. She explained what support they offer and I thought it could be helpful as I don't really talk about Mum's illness with anyone. I was also able to ask her about what to expect as I was really scared about what it might look like – she explained what changes to expect in Mum's final days, and what would happen afterwards. It helped me think about how I – and different people in my family – might feel and react, which helped me to see there's no 'right or wrong' way to feel or behave. I found it really helpful to talk to someone outside the family. I was able to introduce my worker to Dad, and she also helped him understand some of what I might be going through, which was helpful.

Mum died soon after this visit. My worker was able to visit me at home after Mum died, where we talked about how her death had been: I wasn't with Mum when she died but was able to go and spend time with her body afterwards. I was glad I did it, but I found it hard to leave her.

We talked about my spiritual beliefs, school, exams, and university – I had more exams in the days after Mum died, however I found I couldn't focus and felt underprepared, so I didn't sit my last exam. My worker talked with me about whether I felt able to engage with end of A Level celebrations with my friends – hearing that it was 'ok to be ok' and hearing how early grief can come in bursts really helped me and I was able to enjoy some nights out.

My worker helped me navigate my first few months of grief as I waited on my exam results; I got my preferred place at Uni and decided to go for it. I was able to talk through how to explain to new people what my family circumstances are. My worker also helped me learn some new coping strategies to help me better manage my health anxiety, which I think I will always struggle with.”

Early Support



Our Early Support work is carried out when a family has experienced a sudden, usually unexpected, death. We call it 'early' because we offer support within the first 6 months following a death.

166 children from

111 families were supported
as part of our Early
Support offer



We may provide support within 24 hours of a death if a family contacts us immediately. This is a time when often the family are in shock; the circumstances of the death may have been traumatic, and the most useful support is to help them to make sense of the information they have, decide what the children in the family need to know, and understand and focus on some strategies for managing the changes to their life.

We find that families often want practical help to make a plan: for the funeral, for their changing routine, for questions that may come up, for the inquest, for other changes they may have to make as a result of the death.

Over the past few years demand for this piece of work has grown and we consider it a very important part of our service. If we can help families at such as early stage with key messages and good strategies it will help them to manage their grief further down the line.



“The children weren't sure about the Early Support Session beforehand but were willing to 'give it a go'. Afterwards, they said 'That was SO GOOD! Can we go again?' I saw a difference in my son's behaviour and emotional regulation after the session - he was calmer and less angry and volatile.”



Support after a death

Families can contact us at any point after a death to request some support, up until a child is 18 years old. We may advise the adults around a child or young person how best to support them, we may advise the young person directly, we may undertake a piece of 1-1 work with the young person, and we may work in partnership with other agencies who are involved with the family. We offer a child-centred approach to support, and it is always tailored to the needs of the young person.

Our support after a death may begin with Early Support, but may not begin until sometime later. Families may wait before contacting us as grief can take a while to show itself and over time it may become apparent that some support would be helpful.

377

children and young people
benefitted from bereavement
support after a death

“SeeSaw are nice and friendly, and you can see them when you need to. My worker was kind and she knew that we miss daddy the most – even though he had lots of friends who miss him too.”



Esther's story

A conversation about grief and building hope.

Esther began being supported by SeeSaw Grief Support in 2023. Her dad died suddenly when she was 14 in 2022.

How has SeeSaw Grief Support helped you?

I was able to deepen the dynamics and relationship with my family as this really changed when my dad died. I was able to have mature conversations about grief and gain better insight.

What have you learnt about grief?

There's a social norm that you're sad after the death of someone and then it slowly gets better and you get happier and happier, but I've found that grief always stays the same in your life, you just grow who you are as a person around that grief.

Speaking to people that knew my dad in a different way than I did, learning things about him and continuing to ask questions about him, has ensured I can continue a relationship with him.

**“we could all use
SeeSaw's advice, not
just me”**

How have things changed for you with SeeSaw's support?

One major shift that happened with SeeSaw was my transition from unhealthy coping mechanisms to healthy coping mechanisms. I would say that has been one of the biggest changes. I now write a diary and it is my favourite part of the day. I actually enjoy reflecting on my emotions.

“I don't even think I knew how to grieve...it was really nice to have some outside advice, to be able to trust someone and to be able to speak about how I was truly feeling.”

What advice would you give to a newly bereaved young person?

It does get better, it does. It's hard to see at the beginning but trust me it does. I never thought it would, and honestly SeeSaw has helped me continuously throughout these sessions, showing me there is hope and there is a way to continue your relationship with that person who's died. This has been the most impactful thing. Weirdly, my relationship feels stronger than ever and I can understand him so much more deeply now.

Grief is a very subjective experience. It's not like you slowly get better through time, it's up and down and you have to face everything as it comes.

Find out who you are, stay in touch with your emotions, find out what you enjoy, and you will get through it.



What is your hope for the future?

My hope for the future is to take after my dad and become a lawyer in Germany and raise a big family there.



Peer Death Support

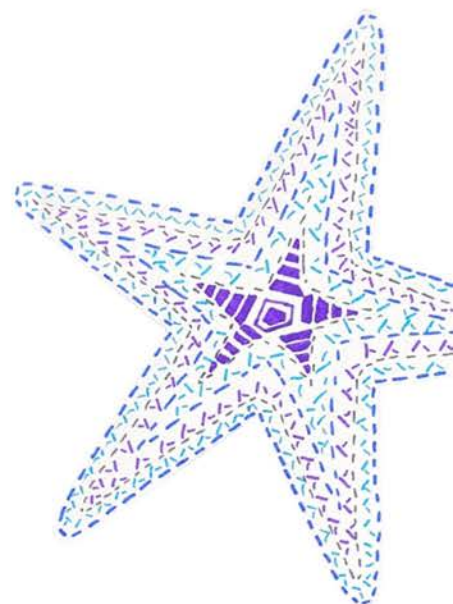
‘Making sense of my grief’

We introduced a new piece of work this year, with the support of Public Health Oxfordshire. As a member of the Oxfordshire Child Death Overview Panel, we identified that there was a gap in our service for support for young people when a friend has died suddenly. Our Peer Death group work, ‘Making sense of my grief’, is offered to schools when we are notified of a sudden young person death.

Since launch, we have delivered the group work in two schools with a total of 27 participants. Feedback from the young people and the schools has been very positive – all feeling they have benefitted from the support.

“The team were on hand to help guide and support the school. They were available to the young people at school offering individual and group support sessions. They have also supported and continue to support us as we navigate this heartbreaking period. The impact of loss to a child’s friends cannot be underestimated having seen and felt it first hand it is like nothing else I have experienced before.”

Parent of young person bereaved of a friend.



Supporting schools and professionals



A large part of our work is consultations with school staff, health and social care, and other professionals.

113

different schools and educational settings

214

consultations with school staff

205

consultations with other professionals



We provide support when there has been a death in a nursery, school or college community, as well as liaison and advice when a young person has been bereaved or will be bereaved. There has been a significant increase in our work this year, driven in part by the increase in Early Support work and the new 'Making sense of my grief' group, as well as by the increase in demand for our schools' training. Our remote training packages are popular with schools and other professionals, often in preference to in-person training. This year we had 77 requests for our training from primary, secondary, independent and special schools, as well as Early Years settings and 27 professionals - an increase on the preceding 3 years.

We value working in partnership with others to share learning and we were very pleased to partner with CBUK, Helen and Douglas House and Oxfordshire Health to deliver training for trainee paediatricians.

“Staff are reporting that they found the session really helpful and the feedback will support us to continue the discussions around how we might make the situation more bearable if/when we are faced with a similar challenge in the future.”

Measuring our impact

It can be hard to measure the impact our work has. We are often meeting children and young people at a time of heightened emotion and confusion. The difference may not make itself apparent for a while, but we use a range of tools to try and capture any changes or progress. Often it is the words of the children, young people and their families that convey the impact best.

100%

reported their grief support as being very helpful

100%

of service users would definitely recommend SeeSaw Grief Support

93%

are very satisfied with the service they received

Goal Based Outcome Measure:

We developed this as an additional tool with children and young people to help them to identify the changes they would like the work to make and to measure their progress. Our intention is to increase children and young people's sense of agency and make them active partners in their grief work journey. We take a score at the start of the support and again after support to measure improvements. **75% of participants improved by up to 4 points with an average improvement of 2.31 points.** Most participants started with scores on the lower end (0-4) and at the end scores shifted toward the higher range (6-10), indicating solid progress towards their goals.



Happiness is a good emotion to be right now
if you are angry take deep breaths in and out 10
times and then close your eyes.

“There was a positive noticeable difference in how I was acting before and after starting sessions. I now use my knowledge from my worker in day to day life and find it easier to analyse feelings and situations. The diagrams especially, really helped me put grief into perspective, from them alone I've also learned so much!”

“I would definitely recommend SeeSaw support to other young people in my situation – it helped me feel less alone and it felt comforting to know I had someone in my corner.”

“I was worried about talking about Mum, but the first couple of sessions have reassured me that we will take things slowly and focus on my coping strategies before we start talking about the difficult stuff. I only signed up because Dad wanted me to, but I'm actually really glad I did and can't believe how much I've talked about...I don't talk to ANYONE normally!!”



Our Volunteers

As a voluntary organisation we depend on our volunteers; we wouldn't be able to fulfill our mission without them. We have a team of dedicated and talented volunteers who meet with children and young people to support them with their grief. We call them Volunteer Support Workers or VSWs for short. It is due to them that we were recognised for the quality of our work in 2023 and awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service.

However, they are not the only volunteers we depend on. Our fundraising volunteers and patrons allow us to engage with our supporters across the county and our trustees offer their skills and knowledge free of charge to steer the organisation and ensure we are meeting our objectives. All our volunteers are integral to the success of SeeSaw Grief Support and were honoured by the King's Award.

183 children received 1-1 support from our team, including

43 directly supported by our Volunteer Support Workers

“SeeSaw is full of passionate people that want to do a great job for the young people they work for.” Phillip, VSW



The King's Award
for Voluntary Service

25 years on



Marilyn Relf, Trustee and co - founder, shares how SeeSaw Grief Support became the organisation it is today.

“When we started this work, we had no idea what it would become, and how successful the charity would be... it has such a reputation and that is reflected in the hard work of our staff and volunteers.

It all started with one person’s vision, Ann Couldrick. In the mid 1980s, Ann and I set up the bereavement service at Sobell House. Ann, as a former health visitor and one of the first Macmillan nurses, was a pioneer. Whilst working at Sobell House, Ann worked particularly with people who had young children. She noticed that a lot of the people we were working with struggled to know how to support their children’s grief. We became determined that we needed to do something, to give children a better service.

At the same time, early studies of bereaved children were published, showing that bereavement could not only affect children in the short term – with their anxiety, depression, wellbeing, it could also go on and affect them in their adult life as rates of suicide and depression are higher when a young person has been bereaved in childhood.

8,000+

children and young people supported over the past 25 years

Some timely funding we were offered started us off, and Ann went out into the community, talking to children, parents, family members, teachers, professionals working with children. Her report provided us with the evidence to find out what the needs are of bereaved children and young people across Oxfordshire.

Ann determined we needed to provide a direct service to children and young people, to give information and advice to parents, and support professionals who are working with children.

Ann’s blueprint has stood the test of time, and that is what SeeSaw is still doing now, 25 years later.”

Inclusion and accessibility: why is this important to us?

The 2020 lockdown was the beginning of a journey for us in rethinking our service offer. We began to create more online resources as a way to replace in person support, but over time this piece of work has grown and developed into a review of our approach to equality, equity and diversity, which has included training for our staff and volunteers.

We have reviewed our service offer to look for 'gaps', provide more choice and make our support more accessible. We are keen to ensure that when people look at what we do they can see it is relevant to themselves and reflects their experience and community. When we won 'Brand the Bus' we were delighted as we had specified that we wanted to raise awareness of our service amongst the whole Oxfordshire community. The bus features the words and experiences of bereaved children and young people and was designed by young people.

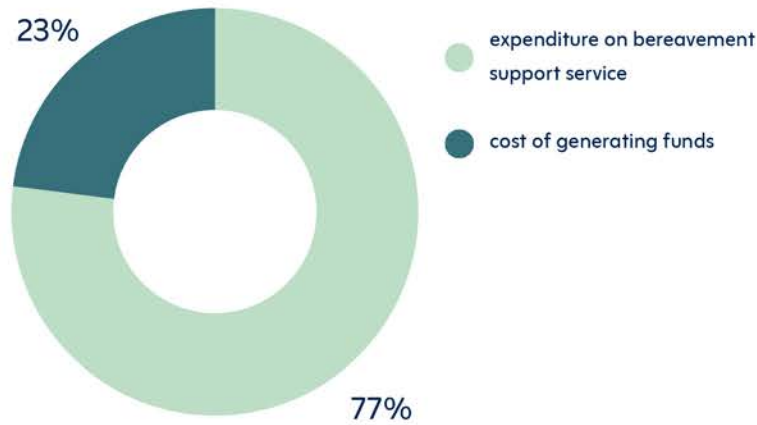
Voices of young people are at the heart of what we do, and in consultation with children and young people, we have created resources in different formats, easier to engage with online and on phones, and some specifically for children and young people, with captions and downloadable scripts.

We have introduced a new piece of work to support young people when a peer dies as we felt it was an important gap and something there was a demand for. We have included stories from our 'beneficiaries' to share their lived experience across our social media and website, and we will be redeveloping our website in 2026 to ensure it is easier to navigate, with quickly accessible and inclusive content. We will continue to consult with children and young people and will be creating a 'Young Ambassadors' programme in 2026.



Sustainability

Raising funds to support our work is vital and never easy for small local charities like SeeSaw Grief Support. We have worked hard to maximise our fundraising capacity and to connect with our local community and supporters. Thanks to prudent budgeting and strong fundraising our income has recovered and we've been able to replenish our reserves. We are now in a position to invest in some new and exciting developments to our service over the next few years, which is why we have increased our clinical staffing capacity and the amount we spend on bereavement services, and invested in our fundraising capacity to guarantee our sustainability for the future.



32%
income growth from
23/24 to 24/25



Fundraising success

SeeSaw Grief Support's growth over the past 25 years has relied on our ability to raise funds, with over 90% of our income generated through individual donations, grants, corporate partnerships and community initiatives. Over this period, we have received **£8 million in donations**, with a record income of **£619,497 in 2024-25**.

This year:

50% raised in grants from Trusts & Foundations

11% donated by individual giving

21% raised through gifts in wills

14% raised by corporate & community groups

How your donations help:

£560

funds a peer support session when a young person has died

£100

funds immediate support following a sudden death

£25

buys a Happy Self journal for a young person

BBC Children in Need, Impact

Officer- South West, Louise Gifford

"We are absolutely thrilled to be supporting SeeSaw Grief Support through BBC Children in Need funding. The work they do is vital in helping children and young people navigate the incredibly difficult experience of bereavement. Funding contributes directly to the staffing costs of the project, and provides young people with a safe and supportive space where they can express their feelings, and build resilience. Emotional wellbeing is at the heart of what SeeSaw provides, and we are proud to play a part in making that possible for families across the region."



Fin's Story

“When I was 10 years old, my sister passed away at the age of 14 due to a dangerous driver. SeeSaw Grief Support helped me and my family through this. The support brought back smiles to our faces. As a team, myself and a few mates wanted to do a big challenge for charity. Our challenge was a 24 hour run around Abingdon and Oxford. During this run there were struggles, but we pushed through and ended up running 106 km raising £1,189 for SeeSaw.”



Sarah's Story

“I chose to run for SeeSaw Grief Support as the charity has been an incredible support to me and my family since my husband died suddenly in 2020. Having the right words to explain everything to the children in a way that they would understand was, and remains, a mind-blowing task. How do you get that right? SeeSaw Grief Support provided expert, compassionate and invaluable advice to me, as well as offering support directly to the children. What they do is incredible and I'm so grateful. Thank you.”

Kelly's Heroes

“This year our 12 Heroes rode from Oxford on Thursday 5th June embarking on an epic 3-day journey of around 420 miles, covering 125 miles a day. This monumental journey took us from Oxford to the south coast on day 1, followed by an entire circuit of the Isle of Wight on day 2 and a ride on to Swanage where Kelly is laid to rest.” The team raised £7,156 for SeeSaw Grief Support, in memory of their friend, Kelly.





What's next?



Trustee

Robert Kirtland

"I'm looking forward to becoming the new Chair of SeeSaw Grief Support. Not only do we have a lot to be proud of but we also have a lot to look forward to. Our future plans continue to focus on growing our service to make us accessible to all bereaved children and young people, and those who care for them. Our new 3-year strategy will focus on what we do best: high quality, child-centred grief support, tailor-made to suit each family. Thanks to a very successful year of fundraising and prudent financial management we will be investing our resources in new interventions, developing meaningful partnerships, and better evidencing the value and impact of our work."

"I'm excited...the charity has never been in such a strong position as it is now. With the expansion of the clinical team, fundraising going well, fundraising team strengthened, the charity is on a really good footing and building on the legacy that Marilyn, Gillian and my grandmother, Ann Couldrick, started 25 years ago."

Nick Couldrick, Trustee

Thank You

We simply could not do the incredible work we do without the kindness and generosity of our supporters. Whilst we can't name everyone, please know that every donation makes a real difference.



Inspired by our incredible fundraisers?

Scan here and start transforming the lives of bereaved children and young people today!



www.seesaw.org.uk

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SeeSaw
Grief Support

Reg. Charity no. 1076321



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REGULATOR**



The King's Award
for Voluntary Service