

Inspirational Story Under 18

Evie Roodhouse

In November 2018, at the age of just 9, Evie's world changed for ever when her dad, Steve, took his own life. Evie, her mum and her younger sister were suddenly confronted with a devastating and traumatic loss, which came completely out-of-the-blue.

As Evie sought to process this grief, she struggled with the casual and even cruel way in which her peers at secondary school used words and phrases related to suicide. Out of this pain, she wrote "Words Matter" – a powerful description of her lived experience and a call to "make kindness a promise that you keep." She worked with creative agency Alive With Ideas to produce an award-winning and inspirational animation that is now being used by schools, workplaces, mental health organisations and NHS trusts across the country to educate, train and promote suicide awareness. You can view the animation at <https://vimeo.com/846178012>.

and childhood bereavement charities such as Winston's Wish, Evie was able to keep going. However, when she started secondary school, she was confronted with a new source of pain: the casual use of phrases like "I'll kill myself if I have to sit through another lesson like that," and the cruel acronym "KYS" (Kill Yourself) if someone had done something particularly cringeworthy.

In 2020, three years after her dad died and six months into a global pandemic, Evie had started senior school. She was 11, a little unsettled, but keen to start a fresh new chapter. She'd settled in well, making a few new friends and taking her studies seriously.

Her teachers were aware of the sensitivities around the subject of suicide, and Evie had decided she didn't want to talk about her dad at school – she just wanted a normal experience of school life with good friendships and good grades.

Over time, she picked up on conversations among other pupils where certain things were being said that upset her. "I'll kill myself if I have to sit through another lesson like that," seemed to be a common phrase. And it wasn't just in class that she'd find such shocking language. The acronym KYS (Kill Your Self) was commonly used online, in WhatsApp groups and across social media channels as a taunt directed at someone who has done something thought to be embarrassing or pathetic.

This sort of language seemed to be everywhere, and it was impacting Evie every day. She spoke to her teachers about it, but they did very little about these deep-rooted, cultural challenges and the language that was being used almost subconsciously. So Evie wrote a story about her experience of losing her dad to suicide, and about the way that this language was making her feel. She shared it with her teachers, and it was read out by the head of year during an assembly about mental health. Sadly, there was no real improvement and Evie had no choice but to carry on, which was incredibly hard.

As a result, she became quiet, withdrawn, and unhappy – and ended up moving to a different school. In this more supportive environment, Evie thrived: she joined the school council and became a wellbeing ambassador, speaking about mental health to younger children at primary schools. She even won a prestigious award from the headteacher for this role.

At her new school, Evie saw and heard a lot less of this negative language, but it still existed. She felt it was the right time and place to resurrect her story – but to find a more direct and emotive way to deliver her message.

Evie's mum, Caroline, works for a creative agency called Alive With Ideas. Together with some of the team from Alive, they took Evie's story and turned it into an animation, complete with illustrations, music and a professional voiceover artist, Verity Johnson.

Evie's animation, "Words Matter", is now available to anyone who would like to use it – schools, groups, clubs, workplaces. The response has been staggering and humbling, as hundreds of people have seen it and dozens of organisations are now making use of it to share Evie's experience and wisdom far and wide.

What other people have said about Evie:

Family, friends and school:

"In the year that followed my husband's sudden suicide, my emotional and mental health suffered enormously, and I reached rock bottom at one dark point. It was only when I recognised the green shoots of resilience appearing in my two daughters that I began to feel the strength to close my chapter of 'victim of loss by suicide' and turn to being a survivor. Despite the challenges Evie faced when she started senior school and was exposed to the pain that the offensive language around suicide caused her, she dug deep to find that resilience and she took action. 'Words Matter' is the result of that action. I saw the extreme strength that was required to write her story and share it with

the public, particularly her peers at school. Her desire to raise awareness on this topic was stronger than her fear, and I am so unbelievably proud of her for what she has done.” (Caroline Roodhouse, Evie’s mum)

“My sister wrote the words for an animation called ‘Words Matter’. I haven’t been able to watch it, just because I think it might be a bit too upsetting. She’s really brave for doing that, because that is a hard thing to talk about, especially to a lot of people. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable just talking to my family, so talking to a lot of people would be very hard for her. She is really the best sister ever, and the bravest sister ever.” (Ada Roodhouse, Evie’s sister, aged 8)

“Walking to the school with Evie’s mother to deliver the heartbreaking news of her father’s death is a memory forever etched in my mind. I saw a bright, innocent nine-year-old whose world shattered in an instant. Yet, through this unimaginable tragedy, I have witnessed Evie transform in the most extraordinary way. She is a young lady who embodies kindness, creativity, thoughtfulness, curiosity, intelligence and resilience. Evie is using her experience, whether through her ‘Words Matter’ animation or as a wellbeing ambassador, to inspire and uplift others. Her unwavering commitment to fostering kindness and fairness in a world often lacking both is truly awe-inspiring. She is learning to turn her sadness and pain into a powerful force for good, touching countless lives with her compassion and hope. Evie is a beacon of light for a new generation – and for us all, showing that even in the darkest moments, you can make a profound difference. I am beyond proud of the incredible impact she has every single day.” (Emma Lloyd, Global Learning and Development Director – and fairy godmother to Evie and Ada!)

“Evie, your video is so beautiful and so meaningful. It is so brave of you to have written the storyline and shared your experience. I really appreciate you being brave enough to share it with us.” (Victoria Mercer, Head of English and Evie’s Head of Year, Brighton Hill School)

The “Words Matter” creative team:

“Evie astounded me from start to finish in her input and direction, and the maturity with which she talks about subjects that, as adults, we often struggle to. I am grateful that, thanks to her, some difficult but vitally important conversations will be started.” (Kat, Illustrator at Alive With Ideas)

"It was a total honour to work on this project. I really appreciate Evie's raw honesty, thoughtful way with words and willingness to trust our input and ideas. Caroline and both of her girls inspire me every day." (Lauren Castle, Communications Associate at Alive With Ideas)

"Being the voice for Evie on this project was an honour. Portraying someone other than a character, who is actually real, my own age, someone who had gone through some truly sorrowful and hurtful treatment by ignorant bullies was not taken lightly. The script was honest, open and measured about Evie's experience, which I knew had to be submitted for a 'One Voice' award. So powerful was the piece shown in part, on the evening it won the 'Best Under 18 Performance' category. Those in the room gasped at its humanity and applauded its brave creation so as to save others from the cruelty so often served." (Verity Uma Johnson, Voiceover Artist for "Words Matter")

People who've seen and used "Words Matter":

"Evie's animation has the ability to grab attention and touch people in a way that is beyond words. Amongst a chorus of voices, her work stands head and shoulders above the rest. The rawness and clarity of the emotions talked about come from a brave young lady who is mature beyond her years and is already a role model to her peers and adults alike. The video that she has conceived has made a positive impact in many different environments; a testament to the quality and courage she has. It is one of the most educational and influential messages I have ever seen on the topic of minimising adverse mental health. I have no doubt her animation has altered perceptions and is likely to have saved lives. I would wholeheartedly recommend Evie for this award." (Amandip Sidhu, founder of [Doctors in Distress](#) and winner of the Caroline Flack Mental Health Hero award at the Sun "Who Cares Wins" Awards)

"Evie's film is being added to the PHSE curriculum at school. The teachers watched it last night and there were tears from lots of them!" (Kate Shanks, Founder and Managing Director, Cosy Meerkat Internal Communications)

"Excited to share a powerful story that truly resonates with the core of our work at Givey and Work for Good. Together, let's continue to amplify voices

like Evie's and work towards a world where kindness and compassion prevail." (Neil Mehta, CEO, Givey)

"I make a living from grief education, and Evie's story is now part of the stories I will tell." (Martin Roddis, Educator at Cruse Bereavement Support and Director of Grief-Related Intervention Training)

"My own words won't come as it's made me cry at how beautifully Evie has expressed her emotions. Working for a child bereavement charity, I know how important words can be." (Joanne Somner, Community Fundraiser, Daisy's Dream)

"Your words could be a lifeline for others." (Kenneth Power, HR Manager, Danebridge Medical Practice)