



Barden Family

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Hospice Care Week: We wrote a song for our mum because she's "the best".

When children are unable to articulate what death means to them, music therapy can help them process the feelings of grief and pain that the loss of a parent inevitably brings. All those feelings we have – anger, sadness, confusion – have to go somewhere, and the power of music can help children not only to let their emotions out but also to create memories they can treasure and look back on when they feel that the world is a safe place once again.

DB, much loved mum to 15-year-old M and 12-and-a-half-year-old L, was

diagnosed with a brain tumour and admitted to **ellenor** hospice in Gravesend to spend her remaining days. Having been introduced to **ellenor**'s professional Nordoff Robbins music therapist Petra Stoffel, D's children turned their thoughts into lyrics and used music to honour their beautiful, amazing mum and to express what she means to them in their own unique way.

The children are energetic, smiling and chatty – and the bond they share is immediately clear. They speak with ease about their family, their love of music and showbiz; M plays the piano a little and wants to be a psychologist when she's older and L plays electric drums, is a budding magician (patients and staff love his magic card tricks!) and always has preparations for some show or other going on – he says his bedroom at home is full of stage set's he's designing.

The Bs' is the sort of home where the radio is forever pumping pop, rap or jazz out in the kitchen, with the family taking every opportunity to conga along to it. It's this love of music, and the fact that it punctuates their life as a family unit, that persuaded M and L to try music therapy as a method of coping with D's illness. Not that they were without doubts: *"At first, I was a bit sceptical,"* says M. *"Would it be the right way to talk about mum? Could our music do her justice? Now, though, I sing the tune we've written for her in my head and I know that, whenever I do in the future, I will remember all our happy times together".*

Says L: *"We wanted to write a song and sing it to our mum to remind her of all the great times that we've had. I wasn't sure if we could get our feelings across in a song; I thought at first we were just going to write a song in general. But Petra was easy to talk to, so we ended up discussing all the things about our mum that we love and putting those things into our song for her".*

Adds M, "We worked out the tune on the piano first, and remembering good times helped us work out a happy melody. When it came to the words, we brainstormed ideas about what we wanted to say".

"We ended up with stuff that's just all about us and our family, really," says L. "Best mum. We think of you every day – that's really what it's all about".

For Mum, D, the song – with the lyrics that are so completely personal to her beloved family, their experiences and how they relate to one another –

means more than she can say.

So having been through the process of coming up with such a creative response to celebrate their mum and what she means to them, would M and L recommend music therapy to other youngsters in similar situations to their own?

“It depends on the type of person you are” says L. “Music worked for us because we like it enough to want to express ourselves through it. Some other type of therapy might benefit other people in different ways, depending on what they’re interested in”.

Says M, “The process has made us want to have more music in our lives. I’d like to learn to play the piano better so I can play it for myself one day. And I think L would like to expand the song a bit – maybe even write some new ones”.

Thank you to L and M for sharing their story during Hospice Care Week – an annual week of activity to raise the profile of hospice care across the UK. Hospice care needs more people, skills, and resources to deliver its care and services to patients or their families dealing with life-limiting and terminal illness. If you would like to find out more about our services or support **ellenor**, please visit our website: www.ellenor.org/our-care or to support your local hospice this Hospice Care Week go to: <https://ellenor.org/HCW>

Music therapy at **ellenor** is provided in collaboration with Nordoff Robbins, UK’s largest independent music therapy charity who uses music to enrich the lives of people with life-limiting illnesses, disabilities and feeling of isolation.

We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children’s Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the

London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley, receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

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