Connecting the Children's Heart Community

# Karan's Story

My name is Karan Panesar and I am a 19 year old university student from east London. I currently devote the majority of my free time volunteering for ECHO, however my heart journey with this amazing charity began just over 8 years ago.

On the 30th of March 2011 I underwent my first ever major open heart surgery in order to treat a complex congenital heart defect which I was diagnosed with at birth. As I was recovering on the Savannah ward at the Evelina London Children's Hospital I was visited by a few members from ECHO who introduced me to the charity. It was at this moment when my life changed for the good.

Prior to joining ECHO I felt very isolated as I did not know anyone else who suffered with congenital heart disease let alone have the same condition as me. I lacked independence as my parents, like many others were highly overprotective of me and tended to wrap me in cotton wool. This knocked my self-confidence as I struggled to form significant relationships with others. I also had a bad habit of self-loathing and feeling sorry for myself. All of this contributed to my anxiety and depression, however fortunately for me ECHO came along and completely transformed my life for which I am extremely grateful.

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On the 25th of July 2017 I had my second heart operation shortly before my 18th birthday and just as I was about to start university. At this point I made the conscious decision to start volunteering for ECHO.

I draw upon my personal experience as a congenital heart patient to mentor young people aged 11-18 on how to cope living with a heart condition and I also support the transition period between paediatric and adult care. Additionally I work as part of a team to plan charitable events which contribute towards achieving our organisational goal of connecting the children's heart community.

My main reason for volunteering is because I know how much of a positive impact ECHO can have on the lives of young children with a heart condition and I want others to experience the way this wonderful charity made a huge difference to my life. Our work here is very important as many families would feel lost without our guidance.

From joining the heart community here at ECHO I have found a family that will stay with me forever and I wish many others would join us on this incredible journey.

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Throughout my teenage years I attended many events run by ECHO, some of my favourites included a trip to the London Dungeons, visiting Madam Tussauds and the annual Christmas party. Not only were these activites entertaining but I also found them helpful as I was provided with useful information and advice on living with a heart condition which supported me throughout my adolescence.

From attending these events over the years I met many other young people who also have heart conditions like myself. This was very encouraging as I found comfort in the fact that I was not alone and there are others who also share similar experiences as me. I no longer felt isolated as I established many friendships which boosted my confidence and developed my social skills.

I became more independent by participating in events I otherwise would have been unable to without the presence of my parents. ECHO have also supported my family including my older brother and sister who now have a better understanding of my condition and can cope better with having a sibling who has a heart condition by expressing their feelings more openly. In general I strongly believe ECHO has improved my emotional wellbeing.

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# Interested in volunteering?

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