

Supporting the bereaved

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Cruse Bereavement Care, the UK's leading organisation providing support to the bereaved. Louise Duffield talks to those involved with the charity

THE ORIGINS of Cruse Bereavement Care date back to 1959 when a small group was set up to provide emotional, practical and social support for widows and their children. Today the charity has grown to become the biggest of its kind in the world, helping almost 100,000 people every year.

Its work is as relevant and as necessary as it was 50 years ago, although its role has evolved as society and its needs have changed, says psychiatrist Dr Colin Murray Parkes, life president of Cruse.

Dr Murray Parkes, author of many books and publications on grief, has been involved with Cruse for the past 40 years, and has seen it develop over time.

"I think Cruse in the early days was about empowering widows," he says. "At that time women on the whole didn't go out to work. When their husbands died they often felt lost."

As women became more independent, Cruse's role changed to support all those who needed help after bereavement.

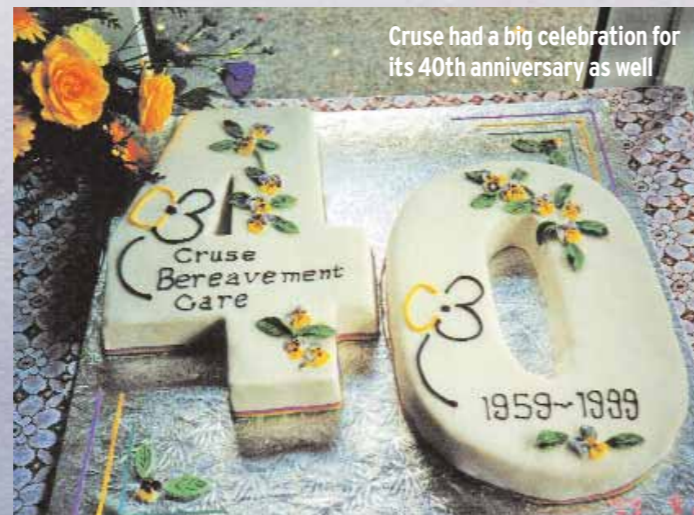
"The second phase was to reach out to all bereaved people, focusing on providing counselling and support with the idea that we could prevent some of the psychological and health problems that might occur (after bereavement)," he

says. "More recently I think we have taken another step forward."

While recognising that counselling is important for some people, he adds: "People who come to Cruse today have a much wider range of needs."

Bereavement affects virtually all of us at some point, but how we react, grieve and cope with it is very individual.

"Everybody needs something in the way of information, and Cruse can provide that," explains Dr Parkes. "In terms of more lasting support, most people are going to come through the



Cruse had a big celebration for its 40th anniversary as well

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Psychotherapist Annie Bennett

Anniversary appeal



To mark its 50th anniversary, Cruse Bereavement Care is launching a Grief Relief Appeal.

The appeal will help fund the

charity's work - allowing it to continue running existing services and expand others. Last year Cruse spent £3.4m on supporting bereaved people.

"Because we provide a free service, and a lot of people are referred by their GP or practice nurse, quite a lot of people think we are part of the NHS," explains Charlotte Barney, director of fundraising and partnerships for Cruse.

"They don't realise sometimes that we are a charity and we have no core funding from the Department of Health or any other departments.

"Our service is free to the user but there's a cost, and that's why we need to fundraise and we need donations."

The Grief Relief Appeal is one of a number of ways the 50th anniversary is being celebrated. There's also a golden jubilee conference at Warwick University in July and a reception for volunteers and others in October.

Local branches and areas are also planning their own events to celebrate the work of Cruse, raise its profile and collect funds. "We're not about death, we're about living," explains Charlotte. "We're about the life of the living bereaved person. We're very much about helping the person that's alive to get on with their life."

To donate to Cruse and help the Grief Relief Appeal, send a cheque made payable to Cruse Bereavement Care to Cruse Bereavement Care, PO Box 800, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1RG or see the website: (www.justgiving.com/cruse/donate).

stress of bereavement without needing counselling, thanks to the support they get from their friends and family.”

Where Cruse plays a crucial role is when the health of a bereaved person begins to suffer, they are exceptionally distressed or they have completely shut down emotionally.

“We really can help these people,” adds Dr Parkes.

Cruse chief executive Debbie Kerslake emphasised that the charity was there to help anyone who needed it.

“Death of a loved one is the most painful experience we will ever face,” she explains. “But it is one that no one needs face alone. For the past 50 years Cruse has been restoring hope to people whose lives have been shattered. We will continue to be there for anyone bereaved, whenever and wherever help is needed, providing relief from grief.”

Psychotherapist Annie Bennett welcomed the work of organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care for helping



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Cruse life president Dr Colin Murray Parkes

bereaved people through the various stages of their loss.

A member of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Annie has worked with bereaved people and believes that Cruse plays a crucial role.

“Cruse is an absolutely excellent way of seeking help and assistance through all stages of grief,” she says.

Anger, denial, depression and acceptance are the stages recognised by the late psychiatrist and author Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. People tend to work their way through these stages, and talking

therapies can be particularly useful during the process, said Annie.

“Talking therapies are renowned for being successful for relieving depression,” adds Annie, author of *The Love Trap*.

50 years of Cruse

The work of Cruse began in 1959 when Margaret Torrie started a small group in her home in Richmond, Surrey, to support local widows.

They were inspired to name the group by a story from the Old Testament, where

Elijah asked a widow to give him some oil from her cruse (vessel).

She had little but because she was willing to share what she had with the prophet, it never ran dry.

Members of that first branch of Cruse took the message from the story that as long as they looked after each other, they would always have resources for others and themselves.

Since then the organisation has grown from a single support group for widows in Richmond to a national charity offering support and counselling to anyone who has been bereaved. Despite the derivation of its name, Cruse is a non-religious organisation and welcomes all people.

It became known as Cruse Bereavement Care in 1987. Previously it was known variously as Cruse Clubs Counselling Service for Widows and their Families, Cruse – The Organisation for Widows and their Children, and Cruse – The National Organisation for the Widowed and their Children.

It now has around 135 areas and branches across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In 2001 the Scottish branches were devolved to form Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland, which operates as a fully independent charity licensed by Cruse Bereavement Care to use the name.

In 2007/08, areas and branches received more than 80,000 inquiries, and longer-term support was provided to more than 30,000 people.

Its national helpline answered about 1000 calls a month, and there were 250,000 users of the children’s website.

Practical information

When someone dies, a number of official procedures need to be undertaken.

Deaths must normally be registered within five days with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

A medical certificate of the cause of death and any forms that have been given by the coroner, if the death has been referred to the coroner, will be necessary.

You also need details of the deceased, such as date and place of birth, first names and previous names, last address, date and place of death, name, occupation and date of birth of any surviving widow, widower or civil partner, and whether the person was receiving a pension or allowance from public funds.

Supporting children and young people

Volunteer Pat Richer helps children and young people with bereavement support.

She’s been involved with Cruse for the past six years, having built up expertise in her professional life as a social worker. Now the chair of the Birmingham area for Cruse, Pat supports children as young as four or five.

She describes her work as ‘liberating’... for the child, as well as herself.

“It’s the joy of working with youngsters who come to you so fresh with their individual response to life,” she explains. “You can start with a very subdued or slightly depressed youngster and you gradually see the change when you get the opportunity to work with them over a period of time.

“It’s freeing the child up to get back into life instead of the way they were responding to these sad events.”

Pat, 71, works with individuals, families, and groups of children and teenagers, who have all been affected in different ways by a bereavement of a family member or friend.

The type of support varies enormously depending on the age



of the child and the circumstances. Drawing, puppets and modelling clay may be involved in helping very young children, while teenagers will benefit from different resources, such as writing or the internet, says Pat.

The length of time that Pat works with each group or individual will also vary.

“Sometimes three or four sessions might be adequate, but it can go on as long as is necessary,” she says.

The bereavement affecting the child is not always a recent one.

“It can be bereavements that have taken place years before but there’s been a trigger incident that has brought to life some of the issues that were not initially dealt with or recognised,” adds Pat.

Sarah Lennox: Dad’s death left her in turmoil



After the death of her father in 2005 when she was 27, Sarah Lennox suffered emotional and physical turmoil.

Her father, who was 60, died within a week of being diagnosed with Goodpasture’s Syndrome, a rare auto-immune disease. Sarah remembers

“You feel like you’re living on a parallel planet”

how she suffered in many ways as a result of her grief.

“I was exhausted,” recalls Sarah, now 31. “The shock had started to manifest itself in me physically. I was very socially isolated because people didn’t know what to say. People would ignore you or they didn’t want to talk about it or go out. You feel like you are living on a parallel planet.”

She struggled with concentration and suffered memory loss. Three or

four months after her father died, someone suggested to her mother that she sought help through Cruse and Sarah contacted the charity in Northern Ireland.

The help that she found most comforting and useful was the understanding and explanation of her feelings that the charity was able to provide.

“It was the reassurance that I hadn’t gone off my rocker; that it was fairly natural and explainable,” she remembers. “Although everybody’s reaction to bereavement is unique to them, there are lots of common strands and feelings and stages that people go through.”

Before experiencing the loss of her father, Sarah admits that she considered bereavement as ‘a painful interruption to life’ and would never have rated counselling as a way of helping. However, she was so impressed with the valuable support and help she received from Cruse that she’s involved with the charity herself, as a volunteer on the Northern Ireland Regional Committee.

Sarah, a commercial property

lawyer in Belfast, had one-to-one and group support from Cruse.

“You particularly benefit from the group support because there’s a strong level of empathy, and that helps to reassure you that you are not going mad,” she says.

“I am keen to increase awareness of bereavement support and the benefits of it. Grief can affect you mentally, emotionally and physically. Bereavement is an ongoing process. It never ends – it’s about coming to terms with your loss.”

Being supported by Cruse made a huge difference to the way that Sarah was able to cope with her loss.

“It was a fundamental turn-about for me, and the main reason was that someone could understand and recognise what I was explaining,” she adds. “You are not a freak. You are a human being who is reacting in an understandable way to a loss. It’s that understanding which helps you turn the corner.”

Sarah has signed up for a sponsored cycle ride from London to Paris in 2010 to raise money for Cruse.

“We’re not about death, we’re about living”

Charlotte Barney, director of fundraising and partnerships





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“For the past 50 years Cruse has been restoring hope to people whose lives have been shattered”

Cruse chief executive
Debbie Kerslake

◀ The registrar will then issue a green Certificate for Burial or Cremation, which should be given to whoever is organising the funeral. If the coroner is involved, only he or she can authorise the burial or cremation.

The registrar will also issue a death certificate (consider requesting multiple copies as you will need to show the certificate to banks and various other financial institutions), and a white Certificate of Registration of Death which needs to be completed and sent to the local Department of Social Security office or Jobcentre Plus office.

If a death has occurred abroad, it must be registered in the country of death. Check with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

■ For more information, see Lawpack's *What to Do Following a Death* guidance manual, available from a number of book shops including WH Smith, as well as online from: (www.cruse.org.uk). Advice is also available via the government website (www.direct.gov.uk) or from leaflet D49 *What to Do After a Death* in England and Wales.

Right: Cruse is always looking for new volunteers to help with its valuable work

Volunteers needed

Cruse Bereavement Care has more than 5500 volunteers, working in a range of different roles. Some offer face-to-face emotional and psychological support to bereaved people. Others run groups for bereaved people, staff the national helpline or support people who communicate via email or letter.

There is also a dedicated band of volunteers who raise money for Cruse.

However, in its 50th anniversary year the charity is hoping to get many more

volunteers and supporters on board. “Volunteers are always needed in a range of roles, including management, administration and fundraising, as well as working directly with bereaved people,” says chief executive Debbie Kerslake. “We are looking for people with time, commitment and a genuine desire to help bereaved people.”

Anyone who is interested in getting involved can find out more at the Cruse website, see ‘Find out more’.



Helpline: the gift of listening



Every year around 13,000 people make a telephone call to the Cruse Bereavement Care National Helpline, and more than 4000 e-mail the support service.

Callers may be seeking help for themselves, for friends or family members, or they could be professionals like social workers, medical staff or the police.

The breadth and depth of calls is immense, says Paul Williams, acting national helpline manager, and ranges from people looking for practical information to those who are in great distress.

“We are giving them the gift of listening, which is something that’s quite under-rated in modern society,” explains Paul. “People might find it difficult to talk to family or friends, or they may not have family and friends. We are an independent listener.” Staffed mostly by trained



Fundraising is vital for Cruse to be able to carry out its work

volunteers, the Cruse helpline has been running for about seven years.

Some people who call for support may have been recently bereaved, while others may be suffering the effects years later.

“We are able to help people with a wide range of emotions or questions,” says

Paul. “We are part of helping people to cope a little more, a bit more of the time.”

The service also receives about 1500 website messages from young people which it moderates before posting on its site, and an additional 500 emails from young people each year.

Funding the frontline work

Richard Levinge is one of the band of volunteer fundraisers whose work is vital to keeping the frontline support of Cruse sustained.

The chair of the Gloucestershire branch hopes to raise between £30,000 and £40,000 with the help of his members and the local community this year to help train more bereavement volunteers locally and support those already working in the area.

“We are in great demand and we have a waiting list that’s too long, and the only way to solve that is to have more bereavement volunteers,” he says. “We have plenty of applicants so we are going to invest in training next year.”

A former financial advisor who now works as head of new business at a solicitors’ firm, Richard uses a combination of methods to bring in much-needed funds and office equipment.

“We have a great band of volunteers – about 85 in Gloucestershire – but they are very much focused on the counselling side and not on the business and

fundraising side,” explains Richard, from Cheltenham.

“As the services have got more and more used, both by GPs and through people getting to know that Cruse is around, that brings more cost to back up the volunteers.”

His role is to make direct applications for funding, help organise fundraising events and to encourage groups and individuals locally to help support the work of Cruse.

As someone who has experienced bereavement – both his parents have died – and who has seen the effect it can have on people – his good friend lost his wife at an early age – Richard appreciates the support Cruse can give to those who have lost loved ones. “I have seen the value of it,” he says. He finds his role very rewarding. “There’s a sense of satisfaction,” he adds.



■ The Cruse Bereavement Care helpline is open from 9.30am to 5pm, tel: 0844 477 9400, email: (helpline@cruse.org.uk). For young people there is a freephone helpline, tel: 0800 8081677, website: (www.rd4u.org.uk).

Find out more

■ Cruse Bereavement Care offers a national helpline, email support, face-to-face support, and helpful literature and publications, website: (www.cruse.org.uk)

■ As part of its Youth Involvement Project, Cruse has a website designed by young people for young people: (www.rd4u.org.uk)

■ Contact the Bereavement Register to stop unwanted direct mail to the deceased, website: (www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk)

■ For information about Annie Bennett, see the website: (www.thelovetrap.com).