OXFORD

An occasional series in which branch chairmen are invited to describe how their services are arranged



PAULINE AGIUS says she became involved with Cruse because her mother had been widowed 48 years. Married with three adult children, she is author of "British Furniture 1880-1915" and a new book "China Teapots" to be published this year.

OXFORD BRANCH SEES CRUSE AS A KIND of walking frame which helps the widowed through a difficult patch. Some need it for weeks, some for months and some find friends in it and stay on. The essential message of Cruse is one of hopefulness, that although there is not much but desolation at first, nevertheless the widowed can and do come through it and find themselves able to make something enjoyable and creative out of "the life that's left."

We have two rooms on the first floor of the Methodist church hall in the centre of Oxford. One is the Cruse office, the other a meeting-cum-sitting room. We are fortunate to have them in a building where many lively activities take place so that newcomers feel they are in the midst of normal life. We pay a very reasonable rent as the Church is glad to have the rooms used for this active, caring work.

Our social programme includes gatherings each Wednesday afternoon and evening meetings twice monthly, usually with a speaker. There are theatre parties and we try to arrange Sunday visits to houses and gardens in the summer. We have occasional lunches for the newly bereaved known to us. For a short time we had a young widows' group which met weekly simply to talk, which they found very helpful. But as yet we have mainly failed to meet the needs of the younger bereaved and have not been able to establish a Parent's Circle because we have few members with dependant children. We are working on this and on the wider problem of how to make Cruse better known and even more easily approachable. Despite persistent publicity some people still think we are part of Salters Thames Steamers.

The rooms are open for four hours each weekday and two hours on Saturdays. They are run by about forty helpers, doing two hour shifts two at a time. Members are encouraged to drop in and we hope they will increasingly use the sitting room as a convenient meeting ground for friends. We have lots of literature about local activities, holidays, theatres, exhibitions, lectures courses, rambling groups etc. and encourage members to join. A number have had very enjoyable short break holidays with new Cruse friends.

We deal with the business of the the AGM as quickly as possible and follow it with a (free) hot casserole supper. This certainly gets the party going and serves as a symbolic reminder of the point of the Cruse story: that sharing a meal is one of the most caring ways of helping.

We are about to try to spawn Cruse-hosted "talking groups" in different localities and perhaps in people's homes, where the fairly recently bereaved, say, three months to three years, can profit by being able to discuss their situations, problems and feelings with others at roughly the same stage.

We would like also to extend our services to help the bereaved partners of other adult couples.

The branch is financed by interest from our successful £10,000 Capital Fund Appeal, by an annual coffee-to-lunch Bring and Buy, a Jumble Sale, occasional events such as a 'knit-in', and for two years by a local authority grant of £1,500. This has suffered in 'the cuts', but, we trust, will soon be, at least partly restored.

Helpers receive travelling expenses. Everyone who takes on a responsibility, whether it is organising the telephone rota, catering for the newly bereaved lunches or distributing Newsletters, becomes, ex officio, a member of the new Management Group. This way about twenty helpers and/or members should be fully in the picture

We have six (to eight) trained counsellors who see the bereaved in their homes or in the office. The counsellors have a group meeting with their supervisor once a fortnight and can telephone her at other times. Whilst we understand the need for non-directive counselling in some cases, our counsellors find that what many clients need is rather more befriending than counselling with a large 'C'. To try to prevent the counsellors from becoming over-burdened, some helpers are also "befrienders" who, if needed, help members after they have finished meeting their counsellors. We need more counsellors and plan to run a training course in the hope of being able to recruit a varied range of men and women.

So far all this has been about inside Cruse, but it seems to us that a vital part of Cruse's task must be to alert the whole community that the bereaved do specially need the help of friends and neighbours in two ways: first we should try to speak to them as soon as is reasonably possible and be prepared to let them talk and talk. Secondly, we can all help by continuing to include them in our normal social lives in the same way as when they were part of a twosome.

POSTBAG

Please write to us. We welcome the views of all Cruse workers and also our other readers

From Jenny Wainwright, former secretary. Chiltern and Beaconsfield Branch

We think the following points helped in getting a Chiltern District Council grant.

1. Clear and accurate record of past and expected expenditure was presented to the Council.

2. Personal contact of the councillors. I knew half a dozen of the relevant councillors and my recommendation and support for Cruse was respected.

3. Personal interview with the Treasurer of the Council rather than his representative. Sam Essene, our chairman, and I attended. We were able to add the human dimension to the application. Hopefully the officer was impressed with our accounts and aims and reported accordingly.

4. Self-help. Our Council is sympathetic to organisations that make real efforts to fund raise themselves. We do - vigorously. Conversely, we hear that they do turn down grants to organisations that pay their workers (other than expenses). We don't.

5. Lastly we always write to the Treasurer and Chairman of the Finance Committee conveying our thanks. Hardly any organisation does and it is much appreciated.

From Jack Morgan, British Rail Welfare Officer South West Regio Chairman of Southampton branch

I should be glad if anyone in Cruse could tell me where I might find a description of child or teenage bereavement which has been written by someone in those age groups. We have been thinking for some time that the branch should do more to reach out to the youngsters - but how? We should welcome news of the experience of others who have tried, and that includes the failures, of course, as well as the successes.

This poem, written in adulthood reflects on a childhood bereavement - Editor

THE LESSON

'Your father's gone,' my bald headmaster said.
His shiny dome and brown tobacco jar
Splintered at once in tears. It wasn't grief.
I cried for knowledge which was bitterer
Than any grief. For there and then I knew
That grief has uses - that a father dead
Could bind the bully's fist a week or two;
And then I cried for shame, then for relief.

I was a month past ten when I learnt this;
I still remember how the noise was stilled
In school-assembly when my grief came in.
Some gold-fish in a bowl quietly sculled
Around their shining prison on its shelf.
They were indifferent. All the other eyes
Were turned towards me. Somewhere in myself
Pride like a goldfish flashed a sudden fin.

From A Tropical Childhood and Other Poems by Edward Lucie Smith © OUP, 1961. Published by permission of Oxford University Press.

DIARY

CHANGE OF DATE: For administrative reasons, the Cruse conference on Bereavementt Following Violence will now take place on September 5th and 6th, 1983 at London University Institute of Education, Bedford Way,W.C.1.

Life and Death: Six half hour programmes on Sun. at 5 pm Radio 4 VHF, July 11 - Aug. 15. Rpt. Tues. 11 pm Radio 4 VHF Aug.24 to Sep.28.

Preparing for Bereavement: Oct. 6-8. Weekday course with Rev. Ian Woodroffe. Details: Conference sec. Cambridge Board of Extra Mural Studies Madingly Hall,Madingly, Cambridge CB3 8AQ.

Oxford Cruse

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PROCEDURE FOR NEW HELPERS AT OXFORD

On Arrival: Remember when on duty you are Cruse. Decide who will answer telephone and who will take visitors to the other room if necesssary. Read office Messages Book and Visitor's Book. Fill kettle, find milk, put out cups.

Remember your visitors may have been very hesitant about coming so do make them feel welcome. They may have come in for specific information or may be regulars who have just dropped in for a chat, but if the visitor is distressed or you sense that a lengthy talk is coming it will almost certainly be better to take him or her to the other room sooner rather than later. Arrange a code with your partner. e.g. whoever is not mainly listening to the newcomer can suggest "Why don't you two go next door then you won't be disturbed by the 'phone and I'll bring you some coffee."

Having provided a drink, encourage the person to talk and LISTEN to them. This may be the most valuable help anyone can give. Later provide details and encourage them to come to Cruse functions.

If you feel they have complications and need opportunities to 'talk it through' ask "Would you like to talk to someone who knows more about this than I do?" Explain that they can see someone by appointment or at home if they cannot get here. Stress friendliness and confidentiality of this service. Arrange to inform them of appointment. Try to make appointment.

If they have children, explain they can consult the child psychiatrist attached to the branch. If they have straightforward allowances or mortgage or legal problems make appointment with or take them to CAB.

But if the problem is delicate, complexly financial or unusual tell them we'll seek advice from our experts and report to them in a week or so. Enter details, marked with a star, in red, fully in the book or, if private, in a sealed envelope pinned to it.

Our advertisement states "CRUSE CAN HELP" so we must try to find solutions to difficult practical problems. Don't forget to enter names, addresses and whether man or woman.

When anyone 'phones to book the sitting room for a counselling session or meeting, check that the room has not already been booked and enter this booking on the right hand side of rota book.

Anyone seeking social life should be commended to the community associations and other groups listed in Age Concern's booklet.

Before leaving check your next duty time in rota book and fix a sticker if you cannot come.

● Oxford Cruse held a Helpers' Conference in May which focussed on matters discussed at the annual conference of branches, and ended with a seminar on the present and future needs of their own branch.