POSTBAG

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

From:

JANE INSLEY. Plymouth Cruse branch secretary

I read the article on the elderly bereaved and Dr. Murray Parkes' comments (Winter issue, 1982) with interest. Our branch of Cruse opened just three years ago. Our counsellors were trained and we anticipated that our main work would be bereavement counselling, in the home setting.

However our experience has been different. We have few requests for home visits but our social group, which originally met only four times a month grew rapidly and within six months met for weekly evening sessions as well as on two afternoons.

Now,three years later, we have added a Young Widowed group which meets twice a month. During the autumn we had to run a course to train extra counsellors to work mainly in the **social**group situation as we felt this had become our main concern.

Our aim has always been to provide a bridge from the loneliness of early bereavement to the fulfilment of a new life and we are therefore delighted when our members move on.

Loneliness is usually the besetting problem of any widowed person. People can cry at our meetings. No one stares, no one comments, but everyone understands. Where else could this happen?

We do reach out to people with special needs as we have several members who have come as referrals from a psychiatric clinic. Cruse has often helped where other ways have not succeeded.

Cruse has another unique facet, appreciated by the widowed. It is possible to come to a meeting where, although there are both men and women, there *is no pressure* from the opposite sex.

We continue to be concerned that we do not reach the many who might be helped if only they knew Cruse existed, but meanwhile in our branch we endeavour to provide a place where the newly bereaved person (of any age) and those who still have to come to terms with bereavement, often after several years, can meet and be helped and help others. I am sure Cruse must be prepared to use its resources in the community in the best possible way even if Dr. Murray Parkes does not think this is ideal.

JANE INSLEY

Dr. Parkes replies **Jane Insley makes out an excellent case for the provision of social activities and group counselling by Cruse branches. She is rightly proud of the success of her branch in providing these services, and I have no doubt that the people who come to it for help are well satisfied.**

I remain convinced, however, that the provision of individual or family counselling in the home is an important part of Cruse work and that there are many bereaved people in need of this kind of help. Research in England and Australia* has shown that personal counselling, early in bereavement, is required by up to a third of the widows and widowers who have been studied. Within this vulnerable group, counselling will reduce the incidence of psychosomatic symptoms and reduce the need for tension-relieving drugs (including alcohol and tobacco) to about the same levels as those of the remaining two-thirds of widowed people. It probably also reduces the risk of suicide.

Although widows and widowers at risk need help they are often too depressed or too frightened to ask for it. It is, therefore, essential for Cruse to find ways to reach out to these people. The onus is on us to convince general practitioners, social workers and others who are in contact with the newly bereaved, that we are responsible, caring people whose only interest is to help the bereaved and who will not exploit, undermine or otherwise harm those whom they refer to us.

The editors of Bereavement Care would welcome further comments and suggestions on these important issues.

*Parkes, C.M. (1980) Bereavement Counselling. Does It Work? Brit.Med.J. 281: 3-6.

From:

SUE JOSLIN, Chairman,Cruse North West Surrey branch

I was interested to read (Summer issue, 1982) that branches are finding the schools are turning to Cruse to learn about loss. We had the daunting experience of being allowed one hour (20 minutes' talk, 40 minutes in groups of about 12) to 'do' bereavement with about sixty 15/16 year-olds. My initital reaction was to say it was impossible, but I was persuaded we should try and in the event we had an interesting and, in general, stimulating session.

It was enlightening to hear how many of the young people had memories of a fundamental loss in their lives and how keen some of them were to try to understand its effect on themselves and their families. I feel if we can give only the briefest understanding of the normality of the reactions engenered by loss we will have done some lasting good.

May I also thank Gil Parker for her sensitive, straightforward and helpful article on supervision(Summer issue, 1982). Your readers may be interested to know that at the last Conference of Branches there was a workshop on Support and Supervision for all Cruse workers. We found ourselves recognising that this meant not only counsellors, but also supervisors, committee members, helpers at social events, Friends, Patrons and indeed anyone involved in the workings of a Branch. The skills Mrs. Parker discusses are

relevant to the giving of any type of support. The various styles will be used in differing degrees according to whom we are supporting and the depth of help needed, but I am certain this article will be of value not only to Supervisors, but also to Area Organisers, Committee Chairmen and anyone in a Branch who is in the position at some time of offering support to others.

SUE JOSLIN

From
HARRY GREENWAY,M.P. House of Commons, London S.W.1.OAA

I have had the honour recently to present to Parliament a measure entitled The Disposal of Dead Bodies Bill*. The Bill seeks to give the next of kin the right of disposal of the body when the deceased person has left no instructions to the executor.

A very elderly constituent came to me sometime ago explaining that he had recently lost his son. The son had died distressingly of cancer and his deathbed wish to his old father was that he bury him in his mother's grave. Upon coming to implement his son's dying wish my constituent found that he was barred from doing so by his son's executor. The executor determined that the body in question be cremated and the aged father had no redress in that situation since right of disposal belonged to the executor alone.

This seems to me to be a situation containing anomalies. If a person leaves clear instructions to an executor as to how he wishes his or her body to be disposed of, then that must be acceptable to everyone, including next of kin, as I see it. If however, no wishes in this direction have been expressed to the executor but yet have clearly been expressed to next of kin, then I feel that, in all humanity, the law should favour the next of kin who should have disposal rights and I am seeking to persuade Parliament of this.

HARRY GREENWAY MP

***The Bill is due to have its second reading in the House of Commons on April 22.**

From Dr. S. H. A. Henley, Lecturer in Psychology, Department of Psychology, University College London, Gower Street, WC1

I have been asked by the Research Committee of Cruse to review the literature on Bereavement in Adolescents.

To my surprise, in view of the significance attached to this stage of development by at least one major theorist, and the fact that adolescence is regarded by many as a period marked, at the best of times, by turmoil, extensive searches (including a computer search) have revealed a dearth of studies specifically concerned with bereavement in this particular age group. Moreover, evidence from investigations of the effects of early loss, in which teenagers have constituted a subsample, appears to be conflicting in various respects.

I should very much appreciate hearing from any of your readers who may have research ongoing in this area, or who may hold views on the subject.

DR. S. H. A. HENLEY

***Editor's note*: more on Adolescent Bereavement on p.12**

From
JOHN FARR, M.P. House of Commons London, S.W.1. OAA

Your readers may be interested in the Ginns and Gutteridge, Leicester (Crematorium) Bill, which secured its Second Reading in the House of Commons on February 14.

Ginns and Gutteridge are an old established firm of undertakers in the City of Leicester and they have noticed amongst all the different ethnic groups which make up the City's large immigrant population, a demand for specialised cremation services.

Each particular group has its own particular customs, and at the moment, with the City only served by the municipal crematorium which operates from 9 am to 3.30 pm., Monday to Friday only, many of these special requirements simply cannot be met.

The requirements include 'the hand on the casket', or the ability of relatives to safely place the deceased into the cremator themselves, as well as the requirements of some particular groups whose customs require cremation within 24 hours of death.

Again, other groups are used to evening cremations, and Ginns and Gutteridge aim to provide a service on their site which will enable a cremation to take place using the most modern equipment, at any hour of the day or night and on every day of the year, except Christmas Day, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

My colleagues supported the Bill because we feel it is important to give people a choice so far as possible in these matters. We no longer believe that people should be required to accept rules and regulations laid down by some municipal authorities, and we firmly believe that these immigrant groups have the right to dispose of their dead in the manner which they are accustomed to doing.

This new Bill would not have got through its Second Reading Debate successfully if those of us who have supported it had not been convinced that modern cremating equipment can operate silently, invisibly, and without external trace on sites adjacent to homes and houses in our big cities and suburbs today.

JOHN CARR MP

*** The Bill had its second reading last month in the House of Commons and is about to start its committee stage.**