

The history of Lichfield and Cannock Cruse 1981-2011

Contents

Chapter 1 The National Picture	page 1
Chapter 2 How Lichfield Cruse got started	page 3
Chapter 3 First Services	page 5
Chapter 4 Training volunteers	page 8
Chapter 5 How Cruse was funded	page 11
Chapter 6 Clients' views	page 15
Chapter 7 The Telephone Helpline	page 17
Chapter 8 Timeline	page 19
Chapter 9 Why do people volunteer?	page 21
Chapter 10 The Future	page 25
Postscript	page 28

Chapter One – the National Picture

“Cruse Bereavement Care exists to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable anyone suffering a bereavement caused by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss.

“Our policy is to treat each person as an individual with their own needs and to offer the support that, together, we believe is appropriate for them at that particular time in their life”

Established in 1959, the charity Cruse Bereavement Care ‘takes care of the life that’s left’ providing advice, information and support to anyone who has been bereaved (children, young people and adults), whenever or however the death occurred. The service is provided by trained, experienced volunteers, is confidential and free, and is available for anybody irrespective of their age, religion, ethnicity, class, or disability.

Cruse is the UK’s leading bereavement care organisation and operates through a network of approximately 135 local branches across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has its own independent organisation. Cruse draws on its expertise in the field of bereavement to influence Government policy and improve society’s understanding about grief and the needs of bereaved people.

The first point of contact for information and support about bereavement is via local and national telephone Help Lines. Word of mouth recommendations come via GPs, health professionals and others who have used the service. Help Lines also respond to professionals needing advice and guidance.

Cruse has pioneered a successful specialist website for children and young people for whom this method of shared communication is sometimes preferred. Methods of supporting clients via E-mail are also being developed. With increasing computer use there has been an increase in numbers using the Cruse website. Cruse also produces an extensive range of leaflets and publications on bereavement.

Where did the name come from?

The founder Margaret Torrie, a social worker in Richmond, Surrey, noticed that new widows frequently fell ill and needed to see their GPs. In 1959 she set up the first group in Richmond with the help of her husband, Dr. Alfred Torrie, a consultant psychiatrist. News of this group soon spread and new groups began to be set up all over the country. The name was chosen from the Old Testament Bible story in 1 Kings 17 of the inexhaustible jug of oil (or cruse) belonging to a widow, which was symbolic of the ever-flowing care that Cruse* Provides.

In 1984 the Queen became the Patron of Cruse in her Silver Jubilee Year. In her Golden Jubilee year Cruse was chosen by her as one of the charities to benefit from donations given instead of presents. In 2011 Cruse will benefit likewise from donations made to Prince William and Kate Middleton upon their marriage.

The Head Office of Cruse is in still Richmond, where the Chief Executive, Debbie Kerslake, and a small staff team are based. Cruse Council is responsible for the drawing up and maintenance of standards and policies. Each year there is a three day residential conference now held at Leicester University which attracts international research scholars and practitioners in bereavement studies. The national Annual General Meeting is held in London with an elected member from each region being represented on the board.

Footnote.* *the name was undergone several changes since its beginning but has always retained the word Cruse in its title.*

Chapter 2

How Lichfield Cruse got started

The idea for setting up a branch of Cruse arose from a series of public lectures held in Lichfield in the late 1970s. These were organised by the Lichfield Mental Welfare Committee which comprised a group of like-minded people with an interest in the improvement and better understanding of mental health. Many of these were local professionals such as a psychiatrist, general practitioners, social workers, local clergy as well as several other interested people. It was an informal and open group which met in members' homes.

Each year the Lichfield Mental Welfare Committee organised an open conference focussed on a particular mental health issue. These conferences were held in the auditorium of the Friary School. One of the keynote speakers invited to address one of these conference was Dr. Colin Murray Parkes, the eminent psychiatrist, who gave an inspirational talk on bereavement and loss. He also spoke eloquently about the work of Cruse with which he had become involved and recommended that a branch be set up in Lichfield.

A steering committee was set up in 1980 by the Lichfield Mental Welfare Committee. Key roles were played by Chris Baker, a college lecturer and Chairman of Lichfield Magistrates, his wife Hazel, a child psychiatrist, Ursula Wills, a social worker, Katherine Duncan-Brown, a nurse, Christopher Lockwood, a GP, Paul Brothwell, vicar of St. Chad's, Valerie Senior, a social worker, Anne Kerr (Johnson), Gwen Slater, a teacher, Derek and Sylvia Marchant..

Advice in how to set up a new branch was provided by Mrs. J.Caudron, Area Organising Officer from Rugby, and Avril Redman from Coventry who succeeded her.

The first AGM was held at St. Chad's Health Centre on 27 August 1981. Valerie Senior was elected Chairman, Sylvia Marchant, Treasurer, and Mrs.M.Thorpe, Secretary.

The 1970s and 1980s

There was a lot of synergy around in Lichfield at the end of the 1970's and early 1980s, a decade which also saw the building of St.Giles' Hospice and the St.Mary's Centre. Lichfield Festival was also launched in 1980.

Other key people in the voluntary sector scene at that time were Joan Maule-Finch whose husband, Patrick, had founded the Citizens' Advice Centre. Marriage Guidance (later renamed Relate) had been set up by Valerie and John Haggett, both solicitors. Other notable and active citizens such as Gillian Eggleshall and John Kibble also worked tirelessly as volunteers. Gillian became the first coordinator of the Voluntary Services Bureau. The Bureau's main task was to recruit volunteers for other voluntary groups; however it was also itself responsible for starting up other voluntary services groups such as a Transport service, and home visiting of housebound and elderly people. John, amongst many other endeavours, was one of the driving forces behind the opening of Lichfield's first women's refuge, as well as the Lichfield Science and Engineering Society. All of these organisations are still thriving today.

Informal lunch-time meetings inaugurated by Derek Prosser, then Principal Area Officer of Lichfield District Social Services, were held at an upstairs meeting room at the Smithfield public house in Church Street (demolished in 2008 to make way for the new Tesco store). These meetings brought together a mixture of professionals and volunteers with an interest in social issues in the Lichfield area. Over drinks and sandwiches, members listened to a short talk by a chosen speaker followed by questions and discussion. People from a variety of organisations such as Probation Services, Citizens Advice Bureau, Marriage Guidance, Victim Support, the Council of Voluntary Services, Social Services, and Health Authorities etc. got to know each other and form useful networks.

The Smithfield lunches were a successful attempt to narrow the gap between the statutory and voluntary agencies to promote the better social conditions for the citizens of the Lichfield District. It was a prime example of people doing it for themselves, and not waiting for it to be done by others, well before the notion of the "Big Society" had been proposed by David Cameron. All these activities provided the basis for the vibrant voluntary sector which exists in Lichfield today.

During the past 30 years the local Cruse Branch has, like all organisations, had its difficulties. Some of these have been when the branch was running low on funds others were when the branch management committee disagreed about how things should be done. In spite of these the branch has survived and continued to provide a high quality service to bereaved people.

The 1990s and 2000s

Ian Watson was Chairman from 1990 to 1993. Ian, a businessman, became interested in helping Cruse through his wife Helen, who had been Vice-Chairperson but had not wanted to become the Chair. Ian immersed himself in the branch by volunteering for training, becoming a counsellor and later a supervisor. The Watsons made their roomy old farmhouse at Stonnall available for training courses and many other events. One of the hardest things Ian remembers having to do was deciding that a volunteer was not suitable for accreditation. Helen's death from breast cancer in March 1995 was a blow to the branch.

Following Ian's departure there was a four year gap before another suitable chairman could be found. Haydn Poulson, a retired chemistry teacher, was persuaded by Jill Brennan to take on the Chairmanship of the branch, a task he fulfilled with expertise and commitment until Jill returned following her marriage and a well-earned seven year "sabbatical" from volunteering for Cruse.

Sue Williams, a retired deputy Head Teacher, is the Chairperson elect at the time of writing. Like Jill she has extensive experience of working face to face with clients, being a supervisor, as well as of heading up the training team.

Chapter 3

First services for clients – social support groups, support for children

The energies of the first Cruse committee in the early 1980s concentrated on running support groups for bereaved widows, organising training courses in bereavement counselling for volunteers, and fundraising.

Social groups

Monthly meetings were held at the recently opened St. Mary's Centre in Lichfield where bereaved people could share their feelings and experiences of loss with like minded companions in a safe and confidential environment. In attendance at these meetings were volunteers who were either trained, or in the process of being trained, to become bereavement *counsellors. These meetings were essentially social support events and provided limited opportunities for individual "counselling".

The October 1982 meeting attracted 40 people. The minutes of 15th Oct 1982 speak of the difficulties of coping with such a large number as there were not enough volunteer "befrienders" or committee members to welcome newcomers.

The first Social sub-committee in December 1982 was comprised of Sylvia Marchant, Peter and Stephanie Moody. Dorothy Beaumont, Chris Baker, Kathryn Duncan Brown and Monica Carter.

Due to the sprawling area served, and transport difficulties, it was decided to hold additional meetings in members' homes. One volunteer held social support meetings for widows at her house in Burntwood but later transferred the meetings to the Oakdene Centre in Burntwood when the numbers attending increased. Similar meetings were also held at members' home in Lichfield. (Margaret Torrie had originally started with Cruse groups meeting in her own house.) In Tamworth social groups were started up by Jo Simister and

Flo Rishton at the Carnegie Centre in Tamworth and at an out-of-town venue. **Derek Marchant was also involved running social groups and went on to do the counselling training course with Monica Carter, Katherine Duncan Brown and Gwen Slater.

Social groups served a vital function by providing friendship and activities such as walking groups, visits to places of interest, and talks by invited speakers. Many members of such groups went on to become trained volunteers and leaders themselves. Margaret Moore, a school head teacher in Tamworth, joined after being widowed and found friendship and support by attending a group in Burntwood. Margaret became very active in organising successful outdoor activities for members, and eventually trained to become a counsellor herself.

Another person closely involved with the organisation of social groups was Betty Wood who had been involved with Walsall Cruse before she moved to Lichfield.

Social groups continued to be active until 1999 when they ceased due to falling numbers and the rising cost of hiring the meeting place and arranging the transport. Another factor was the diversity of clients now seeking help. Groups attended only by widows were not necessarily suitable for people who had lost sons, daughters, parents or partners. However it should be noted that many of the friendships struck up at the social groups continued well after their closing down. By this time the branch had enough trained counsellors and the preference of new clients was overwhelmingly for one-to-one counselling.

Widows and widowers calling the Help Line who were seeking purely social support rather than counselling were told about the new branch of the National Association of Widows set up in Lichfield by the late Phyllis Armitage, herself a widow. Phyll, as she was better known, was also largely responsible for setting up a new branch of the University of the Third Age in 1994. Both these organisations offered meaningful opportunities for widows and widowers to socialize and pursue meaningful activities in a supportive social setting.

Name changes and extension of services

When Margaret Torrie started her clubs for widows at her home at Richmond in 1959 the title of the organisation registered as a charity was Cruse Counselling Service for Widows and their Families. Ten years later the name of the charity was changed to Cruse – the Organisation for Widows and their Children. By 1977 Cruse changed its title again to include widowers. By 1985 Cruse extended its services to “all those bereaved by death” not just widows and widowers***.

Over the years the age range of clients has fallen. The biggest age range today is that between forty and sixty years of age. Referrals from adults who have lost parents have increased in number as well as adults who have lost children. Referrals have become more complex and often involve clients with mental health issues, as well as calls for help from survivors of bereavement by suicide.

Requests for support for children have risen over the years and the branch was fortunate in 2003 when it recruited Jeanne Downton, a retired Principal Social Worker in the Birmingham Education Department’s Children’s Advisory Services.

Before moving to Lichfield, Jeanne had been an active member of Birmingham Cruse. With this experience, Jeanne set up a small specially trained team to work with children. She also became a supervisor and has played a significant role in training.

Footnote.

***A word about the use of the term "counsellor."**

In the beginning Cruse referred to its trained volunteers as "counsellors" – a term which everyone at that time understood as meaning a person or therapist who offered their services as a mentor, confidant or guide. Over the years the term has acquired a more specific meaning associated with professional psychotherapy.

Cruse is in fact an organisational member of the British Association for Psychotherapy and shares its ethical framework

Some clients of Cruse, not all of them by any means, are put off by the term "counsellor" which may imply that they need "treatment" even though this is not what real counsellors do.

Cruse has dropped the use of the word "counsellor" and replaced it with the term "Bereavement Support Volunteer".

Bereavement Support Volunteers are trained to recognise models and theories of bereavement as well as the skills of how to be constructive and empathetic listeners. They do not prescribe but help a bereaved person find a way through their own grief. Knowledge of theory is helpful and is essential for Volunteers. What is important is that they do not force the client into any pre-conceived models.

An appreciation of this approach is illustrated by the feedback from clients who are asked to evaluate the service they have received: "I felt cared for and felt that my feelings were validated. It provided what I had been unable to find at home and channelled my feelings and thoughts".

***Derek later left Cruse to take up a position at HM YOI Swinfen where he eventually became Coordinator of Chaplaincy Services until his retirement in 2010.*

****(Statistics for 2010/11 show that women clients still outnumbered men, by a ratio of four to one*

Chapter 4

Training Volunteers

A method of recruiting, training and approving volunteers to a nationally approved Cruse curriculum has always been required. The very first internal training course was planned in great detail with advice from the Regional organiser, Avril Redman. It was decided that the first course should include small group work as an integral part of the training, and that each session should be divided into two, with a subject speaker followed by small group discussion. How to select the counsellors was also discussed at length by the committee.

Speakers included Dr. Hazel Baker, (on children), Colin Fishwick (on counselling,) Dr. C. Lockwood and Dr. Hall, care of the dying, Dr. Leibling, Dr. Foukes and Dr. Anton Stevens (all psychiatrists).

The choice of speakers, not surprisingly, was heavily biased toward a medical model of grief. Everyone involved was on a steep learning curve and soon realised that Cruse was not there to promote bereavement as an illness but as a process of adjustment and adaptation, rather than total recovery or complete closure.

Kathryn Duncan Brown and Anne Kerr attended a Cruse training course at Rugby to find out how it should be done. They reported back that it was a very thorough course and some of the main factors to emerge were: group leaders were key to the success of the course and needed to be chosen with care; commitment to the whole course was vital; and the selection process had to be thought through very carefully.

An introductory course held over two evenings was held in March 1981. It required a great deal of organising for an inexperienced committee. The course fee was fixed at £2. Kathryn Duncan Brown agreed to chair the meetings which were held at St. Chad's Health Centre.

The first meeting was attended by 50 people, there were fewer at the second meeting but also some new people. The group leaders were asked to keep notes of the attendees who wished to become counsellors.

As a result of these two meetings 17 people put themselves forward to be trained as counsellors. Eleven of these were finally selected. The first proper training course took place in the autumn of 1981 at St. Chad's Health Centre in Bloomfield Crescent, through the good offices of Dr. C. Lockwood, GP, a member of the steering committee.

It is useful to remember that the inaugural AGM of Lichfield Cruse only took place on 27 August 1981 at St. Chad's Health Centre. The steering committee had worked very hard to reach this situation

Meanwhile, Joyce Caudron, who was the new Area advisor, suggested the branch should get the social side of the branch started before the training of the counsellors was finished.

The second training course for counsellors was put on in 1982 and further courses have followed whenever there was a need to recruit more volunteers to meet the growing demand and to fill vacancies left by retiring volunteers. To help in running some of the early courses professional social workers, from Staffordshire County Council with a particular interest in mental health, attended the training evenings at St. Chad's. Among these were Anne Smith and Edda Harvey in addition to both Ursula Wills and Jill Brennan who were already members of the branch.

Cruse training courses have always attracted a great interest not only from individuals who wanted to go on to "counsel" bereaved people but also from professionals in allied professions seeking to add to their knowledge, skills and development.. Dr. Clare Pilkington completed the training course but due to her responsibilities as a GP was not able to commit time to Cruse clients. The primary intention of the branch, however, has always to recruit new trained volunteers for the branch.

Over the years until 2008, apart from those mentioned previously, many people assisted in organising and putting on training courses notably Jill Brennan, Ian and Helen Watson, Pat Robinson, *Audrey Lees, Avril Green, David and Valerie Thompson and Margaret Freaan. In Tamworth, Reg Clarson, and Roy Kirby helped run successful courses to recruit and train volunteers for the new independent branch.

Until 2008, training courses were put on by the branch following the guidelines and the curriculum laid down by HQ. This had left quite a lot of discretion to local branches. In Lichfield's case the original pattern was followed and worked very well. An introductory course in bereavement was offered to anyone interested. These comprised 10 weekly meetings with specialist speakers, followed by small group discussions.

A further skills course was offered for people who wished to apply to become Cruse volunteers. Ned Williams, a college lecturer from Wolverhampton and also a member of Wolverhampton Cruse, put on courses for Lichfield Cruse at The Old Mining College, Burntwood. These courses were validated by the Open College of the North and highly esteemed by the participants. Not everyone who completed the course proceeded to work with clients. Josie Boughton successfully completed the course in 2003 but decided her interests and talents lay in development and funding. She made a considerable contribution to the management by improving office procedures and persuading the branch committee to think more strategically. Unfortunately she was forced to retire for health reasons in 2008. Prior to her involvement with Cruse, Josie ran the Lichfield branch of RoadPeace a national charity for road crash victims.

A new training nationwide course introduced in 2008

From 2008, the training of Bereavement Support Volunteers was standardised throughout the country. A 60 hour Awareness in Bereavement Care course delivered by a professional and accredited Cruse Trainer was introduced by National Cruse. These courses are also accredited by the Open College Network. They are popular and attract many applicants, amongst whom are many students on Further and Higher Education Counselling Courses taking certificates, diplomas and degree courses. Cruse is able to provide the "hands-on" experience which is missing from college and university courses.

In 2009/10 a record number of three courses were put on to train new Bereavement Support Volunteers in order to reduce the waiting time for clients to be seen as well as to fill vacancies due to retirement.

Supervisor training

Robust supervision of all the face-to face interventions by BSVs underpins the credibility of everything the branch does. This serves to ensure that the client is safe (not harmed) by contact with the volunteer, and is also aimed at developing the expertise, knowledge and insight of the volunteer.

The branch is proud that in recent years it has been able to nurture and "grow" its own talent. In recent years Clive Gunner, Rosie Penna, Val Thompson, and Sue Williams all Bereavement Support Volunteers with considerable experience of face-to face work with clients have undertaken the Supervisors' Training course. Val, unfortunately, had to retire recently due to ill-health. The only Supervisor recruited from outside to assist when the branch was desperately short was Lindsay Murcott, who, until her recent resignation from

the branch due to the pressures of her own work, was employed full-time by the Walsall Bereavement and Loss organisation. Lindsay also brought with her valuable experience of working with bereaved children.

Putting on Training courses

The cost of putting on courses to train BSVs is a costly activity both in volunteer time and paying for the professional trainer. Applicants have to be interviewed prior to being accepted to ensure that the course is right for them; and then interviewed again once they have satisfactorily completed the course before being accepted as Bereavement Support Volunteers. Fees for the course have to be paid by the candidates – but concessions may apply. The hope is that newly trained BSVs will make a commitment to stay with Cruse for at least two years. Local charities such as the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Staffordshire County Council and the Mary Slater Charity have been generous in supporting the costs of putting on these training courses.

Those who work with children have to undergo advanced training before they are allowed to fill these roles.

All volunteers are required to attend for regular training sessions in addition to the close supervision they receive from their named supervisors. It is a tribute to all the volunteers in the branch that training is not seen as a chore but as an enjoyable part of their continuous professional development. This says much about their commitment to supporting bereaved people.

**Audrey Lees, a retired GP and stalwart supporter was also the volunteer branch statistics officer who collected and collated all the information needed to audit the activities of the branch. This task was taken over by David Thompson when Audrey retired. Audrey also acted as Allocations Officer for some time before handing over the task to Avril Green.*

Chapter 5

How Cruse is funded

Cruse branches do not get any funds from the Head Office. Each branch is responsible for finding its own funding. The only exception was in 1981 when a start-up grant of £100 was received.

In order to open a bank account, members of the original steering committee all made an individual donation. Kathryn Duncan Brown was the first unofficial treasurer. Sylvia Marchant became the first official Treasurer elected at the first AGM on 27th August 1981. She and her husband Derek were early pioneers on the branch committee.

To get started, funds were raised at coffee mornings, a summer bazaar, and jumble sales, from donations and from membership fees. In 1982 a publicity and fund-raising committee was formed, this was in addition to the executive, counselling sub-committee, and social sub-committees. Since many of the committees were attended by the same people there were a lot of meetings to attend.

Many committee members were well-connected, public figures in Lichfield. For example Pauline Duvall, a Lichfield City Councillor and who later became Mayoress, was successful in getting publicity about the branch by appearing on local television. Ann Kerr (Johnson) another member became the first Administrator of the St. Mary's Centre was also a local councillor and later Mayor.

When Beryl Hammersly became Treasurer in 1985 and she highlighted the need for Cruse to have a regular income. It was then decided that local authorities should be approached for funds.

Since this time the Branch has been successful in obtaining regular grant funding from County, District and Parish Councils. All local councils have discretionary funds available to support charities in their area. Staffordshire County Council through its Social Services, its Children and Family Services, and Local Communities Fund, has made grants for specific projects, such as training of volunteers and purchase of books. Lichfield City Council has been a regular funder in addition to the many other smaller Parish Councils who make occasional grants. The Baron Davenport Charity has been a staunch supporter throughout Lichfield Cruse's existence.

Other organisations which have responded to appeals for funding over the years have been the Rotary Clubs, the Round Table, Lichfield Mental Welfare Committee, the Bower Charity, local churches, the Chase Terrace Townswomen's Guild, the Patients' Aid Association, Police Mutual Assurance Society, Lichfield Methodist Church, the Co-operative Society, Home Zone, Mary Slater Charity, Burnt wood Town Council, Rugeley Town Council. ...

Keeping the Cruse name in the public eye is essential for fundraising efforts. An unusual method was used by Avril Green in 2009 when she won a slot for Cruse on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square and sat holding our banner on a chilly morning in 2009.

At the very beginning in 1980 both volunteers and clients paid a membership fee which enabled them to vote at the AGM. This was an indication that they supported the aims and were entitled to use the services of Cruse. In 1984 the fee was increased from £2.50 to £3. No record could be found in the minutes of when membership fees ceased to be payable.

Today no membership fees are charged but all Volunteers of Cruse must be accredited by having their names registered on a central register at Head Office; this entitles them to vote on decisions proposed by the branch Committee.

Service to clients is free and unconditional although encouragement is given to clients who feel they wish to give something in return for the services they have received.

In 1991 an individual donation of £100 was received by the son of a client in gratitude for the services his father had received from a volunteer after the death of the latter's wife. More recently Cruse has received a voluntary donation of £1000 from a behind the scenes supporter. A few volunteers re-gift their expenses back to the branch. This is not an expectation, however, and all volunteers are urged to claim all their expenses as this gives a true figure of how much it costs to run the branch.

In 1991 the branch also received a donation of £300 in memory of the Pauline Ford. Pauline had been had been an active counsellor until her untimely death. Unsolicited cheques of varying amounts from clients often arrive in the post.

Some funders like their donations to be used for a specific purpose, for example, a cheque donation from the Patients' Aid Association, Hospital and Medical Charities was useful in buying books needed for training. Other grants have been specifically for training courses for new volunteers. Nowadays this can cost in the region of £5,000.

In 1996 the new Treasurer, Randolph Williams, urged more grant aid should be applied for, noting that it had been difficult that year to obtain donations. Most of the expenditure that year went on counsellors' expenses. The expenses of the branch grew with the increase in the services it provided. It was becoming difficult to survive on small, sometimes irregular, donations even though these were greatly appreciated. More substantial funding was called for.

In 1997/98 an application for Joint Funding from South Staffs Health Authority (Voluntary Sector Bidding Round) for 1997/8 was successful and resulted in a grant of £1,100. Regular PCT funding has been received annually since that date

A previous successful application had been made in 1991 to help set up the Tamworth branch. Tamworth functioned well as a branch from 1992 to 2004 until its unfortunate closure due to lack of management volunteers.

Nancy Leslie was elected Treasurer was elected in 1999. Although she was originally trained as an accountant, Nancy was better known for her previous role as social worker for the Staffordshire Association for the Blind, and also as an active member of Achondroplasia.uk. Although small of stature she brought energy to the job and to fund-raising just when it was needed. Bank balances improved to meet growing costs during her watch. Sadly Nancy had to retire due after a long illness in 2007. Until then she had done all the fund-raising for the branch, almost single handed.

Finding a replacement for Nancy was not easy. A funding crisis ensued. A new Funding Team was set up at very short notice team composed of four of the branch's own volunteers, Avril Green, David Thompson, Shirley Robinson and Lindsey Tonks. Aileen Stanners had recently been recruited as a new Treasurer, but was unable to do any fund-raising due to a demanding full time job which involved much travel. She completed the accounts for the years 2007 and 2008 until work commitments forced her eventually to resign. Valerie Shaw, with experience in the voluntary sector, came to the rescue and filled the gap as Treasurer by completing the 2009 accounts. For a short and worrying spell the branch was without a Treasurer until the recruitment of Sue Marshall who was confirmed in the post at the 2010 AGM, having completed the accounts for that year. Sue brought with her valuable knowledge and experience of the voluntary and statutory sector from her work with the Birmingham Children's Hospital Charities, the University Hospital Charities and an NHS Foundation Trust.

The Fund raising team succeeded in keeping funds flowing into the Cruse bank account. However in 2009/10 there was a change in the composition of the Fund-raising team. Following the resignation of Avril and Lindsay, David and Shirley carried on by themselves for a while. In 2010 Ray Beecher a new volunteer was recruited to the branch committee. Ray brought with her with knowledge of management and fund-raising in the voluntary and

statutory sector gained from her job as Chief Executive of a charity in Sheffield, as well as her involvement in various other health, welfare and homeless charities. Ray has become the branch Development Officer.

Fundraising for voluntary, or Third Sector organisations as they are now referred to, has changed from the early days when it was sufficient to write a begging letter asking for financial support. Today funders, quite rightly, require hard evidence that the service being offered is of actual benefit. Anecdotal evidence is not sufficient. This is particularly true of Health and Local Government sources. Cruse nowadays must demonstrate that its interventions really do reduce the number of GP visits made by their clients; that fewer prescriptions for anti-depressant drugs are being written, that people of working age are getting back their jobs, that clients are functioning better in most or all areas of their lives.

The Lichfield branch has been good at keeping costs low without impairing the quality of its services. The branch does not have an office, but rents space as and when needed. As yet there are no paid staff to undertake the ever increasing demands made of its virtual “back-office”. The time is coming when this may have to change as there is a limit to the amount of time and pressure which can be sustained by volunteers. This is our challenge for the future.

Cruse Benefactors

Baron Davenport Trust
Blake School Cannock
Bromford Living (Homezone)
Burntwood Lions
Burntwood Town Council
Cannock Chase Council
Cannock Chase Townswomen Guild
Cannock Wood Parish Council
Chase Terrace District Council
Chasetown Townswomen’s Guild
Cheslyn Hay Parish Council
Free use of Pavilion’s Meeting Room
Great Wyrley Parish Council
Hammerwich Parish Council
Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Parish Council
Hednesford Town Council
Huntington Parish Council
Lichfield City Council
Lichfield Conduit Trust
Lichfield District Council
Lichfield Methodist Church
Lichfield Round Table
Mary Slater Charity (applied 3/11)
Norton Canes Parish Council
Parish Councils in Cannock
Parish Councils in Lichfield
Rotary Burntwood
Rotary Club Lichfield St Chads
Rugeley Town Council

Shakespeare in the Park
South Staffs County Council LMI
South Staffs PCT
South Staffs Wellbeing Fund
St Luke's Church Cannock
Staffs Children's Trust
Staffs County Council
STIP Chair admin@sitp.org.uk
Toyota
Various private donors/clients voluntary donations.
Whittington and Fisherwick Parish Council

Chapter 6

What our clients think about the service they receive

There is no typical Cruse client. Each person's response to bereavement is individual to them alone. Briefly here is how one 35 year old woman whose partner had committed suicide was supported by one of our volunteers:

When she contacted Cruse her grief was such that she could not hold down her job. She had lost weight, was not eating, and was on anti-depressants from her GP who had recommend she contact Cruse. Her Bereavement Support Volunteer shared the range of issues raised by the suicide – in particular the pain of the loss, the guilt she felt that she could have done more, and then the anger at her partner.

The need for basic support for her body was discussed and an action plan including regular meals and exercise was drawn up, as well as gradually preparing for her life without him. In time (after 8 one hour sessions) she started to feel better and began to plan the next stage of her life, came off her medication and returned to work

Anecdotal stories of clients which are backed up by hard evidence (in the above case coming off medication and going back to work) tell us that the Volunteer's intervention had made a real difference.

Below are some more comments obtained from clients when they have ended their sessions with their Support Volunteer.

.What was helpful about your first contact with Cruse?

"When I spoke to someone from Cruse on the phone, I felt protected. All I said and felt was accepted with understanding in a non-judgemental manner. I did not have to be or do or say anything to suit somebody else, I could concentrate on my own grief. They made me feel that I was not losing my sanity"

"The very sympathetic response I had from the person who took my first call and heard about my situation"

"Taking the first step in being able to admit to myself that the input of others is something that could be valued rather than viewed as a weakness."

Comments about the service

“It seems that the service in general is an all round package helping and supporting the bereaved person in all ways he/she might need She remembered everything I had told her about the main people and events surrounding me at the time.”

“I felt cared for and felt my feelings were validated. It provided what I had been unable to find at home and channelled my feelings and thoughts.”

“My counsellor helped me by allowing me to talk and identify the areas which have been bothering me and how to handle them”

“The counselling was excellent, I felt at ease with her and she was understanding and empathetic. She gave excellent advice which has helped me in the time since my session with her I would like to thank her again”

“Just to say that that you all do a brilliant job and keep up the good work in helping people in understanding “

In what ways do you think that the volunteer helped you

“Helped me to understand and helped me to control my anger and temper”

“By giving me strategies to be able to deal with my grief. By positive thinking when negative thoughts pop into my head.”

How often I saw my volunteer

“I know that these visits were planned carefully i.e. was visited just after the inquest which was important”

Chapter 7

The Telephone Help Line

This was, and still is, the first point of contact for members of the public seeking support or contact with Cruse. The number is listed in the telephone local BT directory and can also be found on the Cruse website: 01543 433479 as well as local directories of voluntary organisations.

The volunteer taking the call has to be able to listen empathetically to the caller’s needs, provide immediate emotional support, discuss available resources and, most importantly, reach a mutual agreement about how to continue the support offered. Help Line volunteers also have to be aware of information about local services and other agencies which could

also help. Callers in need of individual help are subsequently allocated to their own Bereavement Support Volunteer.

The first ever telephone referral was received on 9th November 1981 and was from a bereaved woman in Rugeley; a second referral followed shortly afterwards from a widow in Boney Hay. Appointments were made for both of them to be seen “as soon as possible” according to branch the minutes.

Before the branch had its own telephone number two volunteers, Gwen Slater and Valerie Senior, offered to receive referrals on their own personal telephones. Later another volunteer Joy Repper had the Cruse’s telephone phone installed in her house. Callers received an immediate live response from a real person rather than an answer machine.

However by March 1983 a 24 hour telephone answering machine had been installed. The machine suffered from teething problems and had to be repaired and eventually replaced.

In 1984 a referral was received from St.Giles, this was before The Hospice’s own bereavement support had not yet got into its stride. *(There has always been a complementary relationship between the branch and Nikki Archer, the Hospice’s first Bereavement Services Co-ordinator.)*

Initially there was some unwillingness by callers to leave messages on the answer-machine. This reluctance has disappeared to some extent as most people nowadays are more accustomed to the idea. If callers are distressed when listening to the message they are given contact details to obtaining more immediate help. The branch has a standard whereby callers leaving their numbers will receive a call-back within 24 hours.

In 1986 Monica Carter dealt with all enquiries to the telephone Help Line.

Today the Help Line telephone answering machine is in the home of Pat Gibson (Evans), a long serving and experienced trained volunteer. Thanks to modern technology it is possible to access the answering machine by remote control thus enabling a team of Help Line Volunteers, (Pat Gibson, Tracey Mittens, Lynne Wayne, and Sue Williams) to share what can be an arduous but rewarding task.

Nowadays many calls are from mobile phones – which did not even exist or were a rarity when Cruse was started. This advance in technology has its advantages but the downside is the increasing cost to Cruse of long calls to cell phones, sometimes lasting for up to an hour if someone is particularly distressed.

Over half of clients receiving long-term help from Cruse have been told about the organisation by a health-care professional. Cruse rarely accepts third-party referrals. If the person feels unable to make contact they need to give their permission before they are referred.

Clients sometimes present with mental health problems. These may vary from mild to complex. It is the task of the Referrals Officer to spot clues so that the most appropriate help can be offered. Support Volunteers sometimes work in a supportive partnership with

another health professional such as Community Psychiatric Nurse – but only with the client’s permission.

A similar situation exists where clients have complex social problems and the volunteer may find him or herself complementing input from a social worker.

Chapter 8

Timeline

Key incidents in the history of Lichfield, Cannock and Tamworth Cruse Bereavement Care.

1980 Steering Committee set up by Lichfield Mental Welfare Committee.

1981 Inaugural meeting launches Lichfield Cruse. Area covered included Tamworth First course to train volunteer counsellors.

1982 Social support groups offered to bereaved people. Second training course put on to train volunteers. 42 paid up “members”.

1983 first dedicated telephone helpline installed. Service offered to any adult who is bereaved

1984 Queen becomes patron of Cruse. Social groups thriving group in Tamworth district which was then covered by the Lichfield branch.

1985 Cruse nationally approves extension of its services to “all those bereaved by death”. Until then service was aimed at “widows, widowers and their children.

1986 Training course put on in Tamworth.

1987 One-to-one service to clients in their own homes becoming the preferred option by clients – made possible by increasing in numbers of trained volunteers.

1988 Counselling sub-committee formed. Idea for “Young Cruse” in Tamworth suggested – children already being seen with their parents.

1989 New training course attended by 35 people. 58 paid-up “members” i.e. clients and volunteers. Supervision course attended by four branch volunteers.

1990 170 nation-wide branches of Cruse with 5,000 volunteers.

1991 Successful application made for Joint Funding to help set up a separate Tamworth Branch. Lichfield put on a short course “Bereavement in Adolescence”. Training course put on in Tamworth”

1992 Tamworth launched as a separate branch.

1993 Shortage of supervisors noted. 20 volunteer counsellors (not all active). 40 requests for counselling in Lichfield – average age of clients 48 years, age range of 20 -80.

1994 Shortage of management volunteers noted. Walsall branch of Cruse disbanded due to shortage of management volunteers.

1995 Public open meeting in Lichfield to publicise Cruse. Another Training course put on.

1996 10 new volunteer counsellors accepted from Training course (from 13 applicants). Social group still running but fewer members.

1997 Training course put on jointly with Tamworth branch 46 applicants. The number of referrals of bereavement by suicide was seven, the largest number on record in one year Client evaluation forms introduced. New standards of supervision introduced.

1998 Audit and Enquiry register completed. HQ Standards met. New social support group set up. Cannock Branch closes. Increase in referrals of children and young people. Branch taking on some Cannock referrals.

1999 New 60 hour training course introduced. Branch representative attends West Midland Region Committee set up to look at development plan for whole country.

2000 Branch extends its boundaries to Cannock District. Successful training course run in Cannock to recruit new volunteers. Social support groups cease.

2001 Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire guest speaker at AGM. Shortage of supervisors again noted. 14 new counsellors recruited from last training course. No waiting list.

2002. CRB checks introduced for volunteers. 30% increase over past year in number of enquiries received by Lichfield and Cannock Branch

2003 Bereavement support to children offered for the first time by experienced volunteer. New training course put on.

2004 14 new volunteers recruited from training course. Telephone enquiries up by 17%. Tamworth Branch closed due to management difficulties. Shortage of supervisors and management volunteers at that time prevented Lichfield from re-merging with Tamworth.

2005 Training course put on. Shortage of supervisors noted.

2006 Branch celebrates its Silver Jubilee.

2007 Waiting list grows. 22 volunteer client contact volunteers. The title Bereavement Support Volunteer replaces that of "Counsellor."

2008 Branch puts on two of the new training courses Awareness in Bereavement Care run by Cruse- accredited trainers which is now mandatory for all branches. Committee redefines areas of responsibility of management committee.

2009 30% increase in referrals. 29 BSVs. Two new supervisors trained. National Cruse celebrates its 50th Anniversary.

2010 Restructuring of branch commences.

2011 30th anniversary of branch. New business plans being worked on to stream-line the branch management.. Branch volunteers number 34. Three year plan includes extending services back into Tamworth.

Chapter 9

Why do people volunteer?

Our volunteers have always come from all walks of life. Some have family commitments, are in full or part-time employment, and some are retired. There is no set profile or a typical Cruse volunteer. The motives of why people volunteer are as varied as the people themselves

Why did they join Cruse?

Many of our early volunteers were themselves bereaved people who had survived the pain and distress of the loss of someone close with the help of Cruse. They were often motivated to give something back; and with proper training they were enabled to support others through similar experiences.

Today many of our volunteers are studying for counselling equalisations and value the practical experience which Cruse can offer.

Until recently most new volunteers were not interested in administration and were reluctant to serve on committees. This has fortunately changed. Within the past year or so the branch has attracted as volunteers people with specific knowledge and experience in administration in the voluntary sector. This has enabled the branch to implement strategic planning objectives and move into a new phase of developing services to clients..

Why do people become volunteers? The best way to find out is to ask them and here are some of their comments.

I was on a college counselling course looking for a placement initially, and Cruse quickly got back to me, and was also putting on a course in September of that year (2000). I was impressed with both the speed of the response and the professional approach of the organisation.

My motivation comes with the knowledge of being able to make a difference to a person's life. Knowing that in some small way that I have helped them get back to a more stable way of living. It is a most rewarding and humbling experience. *CG.*

I attended an introduction to counselling course at the local night school, there I met a member of Cruse who said I would make a good counsellor, although it took about two years before I saw the advert in the local paper for volunteers before I applied.

I am motivated by the people you meet both clients and other volunteers, although most people think this is a morbid subject all the courses I have attended have contained lots of laughs and to leave a client feeling better than when you arrive is just an amazing feeling.
KP

My brother was drowned when he was 18 and for years I was numb with unexpressed grief. 30 years later I decided to try to support others during the pain that is like no other. When I retired it became my second career. Far from being depressing, it is one of the most fulfilling experiences you could hope for. To be trusted with profound emotion, to walk with someone on their grief journey is an honour. To have a 13 year old boy say I'm glad you came to see me is a special gift. I feel lucky to have found a place in Cruse. SW

By the time I retired as a social worker, I already knew that one of my greatest satisfactions was in meeting, trying to understand and, where possible, help people of any age, any group, to cope with difficulties in their lives. My husband's death, a few years earlier, had taught me something about the effects of grief, and the need to go on talking, not just about the death, but the circumstances of his – and our – life. I had family and friends who listened and talked; I knew I was fortunate, and that, for many different reasons, others were not so lucky. Recruited by a friend, much involved with Cruse, I found an absorbing use for my personal and professional experience, especially in working with children, whose needs and reactions are so often overlooked or misunderstood in a family's pain.

Many people have said to me 'I don't know how you cope with all that sadness', but in truth, it is a privilege to share that journey through bereavement, sometimes to be able to reassure ('Am I going mad?' – so often heard), sometimes to accept 'unacceptable' feelings, and to see our clients begin to remake their lives. Support is there, too, if we need it, and the mutual understanding and friendship which often results may explain why, on the occasional Branch night out or party, Cruse workers seem to enjoy themselves so much.

JD

Little did I think as I responded to the Cruse advert in the local free newspaper in 1984 that Cruse would still be a part of my life nearly 30 years later. The advert was inviting anyone who wanted to learn more about bereavement to attend a course at St Chad's Health Centre in Lichfield.

At the time I was in the process of a divorce, and had the full-time care of my two young children. I had previously worked as a social worker in a Birmingham hospital, where I had become aware of the usefulness to bereaved family members of a sympathetic ear.

Following the course, we were accepted as 'bereavement counsellors', and our journey had begun. I still recall the trepidation I experienced at the point of telephoning my very first client! However, as I gained in confidence and experience I found it such a privilege to be in a position to offer support and understanding to our Cruse clients.

Within a short time, some sudden resignations from the management committee followed by excellent support from the Midlands Area Officer Caroline Bernasconi meant that some of us – Sheila O'Dowd, Helen Watson and myself, to name a few, were catapulted somewhat prematurely, we believed, into taking more active roles in the organisation. Soon, we found ourselves, with others recruited from a variety of sources, counselling courses, running the helpline, seeing clients, and running support groups and training meetings, and of course, the inevitable fundraising.

For me personally, Cruse became a very big part of my life, and my children (I hope!) accepted the fact that they would sometimes come home from school to find a social group in full swing in our lounge, or their mother seemingly endlessly on the phone on Cruse business.

I have fond memories of many kinds – social events, such as walks and garden parties, networking and publicity events, courses to recruit and train more volunteers, including presenting the counseling skills part of the official Cruse training course, prior to the advent of the current ABC course to name a few. And of course, some of the friendships formed within Cruse have lasted literally for decades.

It was with mixed feelings that I relinquished my involvement with Cruse in 2000 prior to my re-marriage in early 2001, as Cruse had been a very significant part of my life for so many years. However, I accepted the invitation to return as Branch Chair in 2007 and it was good to renew my relationship with Cruse, and also to return to work with the bereaved, facilitated by attending a Children and Young People's Course.

I am proud to have been a part of such a well-respected organisation for so long, and to have been part of the branch in this area for the greater part of its life. We have seen, and are in the midst of many changes and have weathered a few storms along the way, but we are still here, and the need is as great as ever. My hope is that Cruse will go from strength to strength, and continue to provide a high quality service to the bereaved in this area. JH

I must confess that it was my own curiosity which led me to become interested in Cruse over 20 years ago. My training and background was social work. Over the years social work became more specialised and when I retired in 1995 I was a team manager for Adult Services at the Lichfield Office of Staffordshire Social Services Department. As a manager I missed

the satisfaction of meeting clients face to face and was looking for some voluntary work to give me this opportunity.

I had heard about Cruse and wanted to know how creditable it was as an organisation in providing a service to bereaved people. Thus it was that I attended a Cruse information meeting in 1989 at St. Chad's Health Centre and found myself signed up to the training course to become a Cruse counsellor. Following this, I counselled clients in their own homes, trained to be a supervisor, organised several training courses and eventually became vice-chairperson, all this while doing a thousand-and-one other jobs to help keep the branch running.

The things which have kept me going in Cruse have been: knowledge that Cruse can and does make a difference to bereaved people's lives; the camaraderie of my fellow volunteers; and the stimulus provided by having to keep oneself up-to-date in how things are being done. But one of the most satisfying aspects of my work has come from observing the personal and professional development of our volunteers. MF

I joined Cruse after I lost my husband with cancer - to be able to talk about my feelings to someone helped a very great deal. My family were a help but they were grieving too. There are some things you cannot say to those who are close to you – they would not understand. I am grateful I had someone who would listen to me at this time in my life.

After reading about Cruse and the help they gave to bereaved people I applied to join, and train to become a volunteer. It is very rewarding to know in some small way you have been able to help at such a devastating time, at the loss of a loved-one or friend. I have learned a lot, and made many friends in Cruse and say thank you for all the support given to me at Cruse.

I have happy memories of going to Birmingham in 2002 with a group from Lichfield and Cannock Cruse for an open-air BBC broadcast of Songs of Praise with Aled Jones, Pam Rhodes, the Gospel Choir and singer Michael Bolton. There was an interview with Arthur Negus and Ian Lavender talking about the Crown jewels. It was to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee and, as Cruse is one of her charities, we were invited to take part. We had red, white and blue hats and flags. SR.

The Future **Chapter 10**

Lichfield and Cannock, a small and comparatively "independent-minded" branch of Cruse, has always been proud of the way it has made good use of its modest resources.

All the "back-office" functions have been performed to professional standards by highly motivated and committed volunteers. In most other branches/Areas this work has been done by paid staff. Information Technology has helped enormously in this. But the true costs perhaps have often been hidden. The branch owns only one lap-top computer, the others all belong to its volunteers. Rent is paid on an ad hoc as and when needed. This keeps costs down. Every year training and travel costs get bigger. The branch's official

address is c/o the Lichfield Council of Voluntary Services. Its main assets are its volunteers, whose hours spent on Cruse activities (quantified in the annual last audit 09/10 at 2799)

The need for belt-tightening in the current economic climate is not an excuse for not expanding or planning ahead. Strategic priorities for the future have been identified in the new branch development plan. These are

- increase access to Cruse services, improve services to children,
- continue to improve the supervision and skills of volunteers,
- raise the profile of Cruse locally,
- strengthen our governance, and
- take full advantage of the new GP Commissioning system.

A new impetus is required to achieve these important changes. In the past small branches of Cruse throughout the country often struggled to keep going mainly due to a shortage of management and administrative volunteers. Head Office then decided that a bold move was needed to stop this happening. The idea was that a group of branches or even one branch – if it was big enough- should form itself into an Area. This Area when formed would have a Committee, a well-equipped office, an Employed co-ordinator, and possibly other staff with services delivered locally from bases acceptable to the local population.

Areas would normally be based on County or Metropolitan areas and would provide

- Good liaison with other agencies
- A focus for fund-raising
- Effective use of resources

The criteria for the establishment for an Area were to be:

- a population of no less than 400,000 (ours is approx.181,512)
- a geographical area of not less than 1,000sq.km (ours is more than this)
- The total number of deaths in the proposed Area should be no less than 4,000 in the year last recorded. (ours is approx.1,900)

At least two of the above criteria are needed to form an Area. With these in mind the development plans presently in hand (Spring 2011) envisage a move back into Tamworth. Even though the statistical criteria do not exactly match those shown above it is expected that this will be a viable proposition and demonstrate that Lichfield and Cannock is a dynamic branch not stuck in the past or resisting change.

How decisions are made

All the important decisions of the branch are made in the Branch Committee which meets bi-monthly and receives reports from its sub-committees, which is where much of the hard executive work is done. The smooth running of the branch relies heavily on the efficient services of its Branch Secretary.

**See footnote for committee structure as at May 2011.*

To achieve its strategic aims the branch's 3 year plan is intent on increasing and improving its services to children; being more pro-active in raising the profile of Cruse in the local community; continuing to maintain and improve the support for clients and skills of our volunteers; strengthening our governance; and taking full advantage of the new GP

Commissioning System. Development work is also under way to extend services back into Tamworth.

The Lichfield and Cannock branch has never depended on having all its eggs in one basket. Funding has always been from a variety of sources. This has its pros and its cons. It means that fundraising is hard-work but on the other hand the branch is not reliant on just one or two main funders, like some Third Sector or Voluntary organisations. With the present economic uncertainties nobody can afford to sit on their laurels.

***Footnote**

Branch structure May 2011.

Branch Committee:

Chairperson: Sue Williams (casting vote)

Vice-Chair: Rosie Penna

Treasurer: Sue Marshall

Br. Secretary Emma English

Communications TBA

Funding Ray Beecher*

Training Lynne Wayne

Supervisors' rep. Jeanne Downton

Helpline/Allocations Pat Gibson

Vols. Rep Shirley Robinson

Non-voting

Statistics: David Thompson

CRB/Child Protection: Ursula

Wills

Development Planning*

Co-opted members: Margaret

Frean and Jill Hairsine

*¹. The Branch Committee is currently seeking a Funding Team Chair. Ray Beecher, as a member of the Funding Team has kindly agreed to fill the Funding representative role on a temporary basis. She is also the Development Planning Officer

Other teams

Training:

Lynne Wayne (Chair), Myrtle Kennedy, Barbara Nicholson, Rosie Penna, Lorraine Roberts, Shirley Robinson, Sue Williams.

Funding:

Sue Williams (Chair), Ray Beecher, Maureen Hillman, Sue Marshall, Barbara Nicholson.

Supervisors:

Jeanne Downton, Clive Gunner, Rosie Penna, Sue Williams.

Helpline:

Pat Gibson, Tracey Mittens, Lynne Wayne, Sue Williams.

POSTSCRIPT

Writing about recent and contemporary events is a challenge particularly when the author has been part of that story. It is far easier for historians writing about past centuries, but even then there are opportunities for different interpretations of the same events – that after all is the job of historians.

This is a very personal memoir garnered from listening to some of the memories of the early founders, from reading minutes of meetings and from my own memory of being a volunteer for well over 20 years. What to include has been my own choice. I leave it to future writers to take up their pens (or laptops) to describe and explain what has been omitted and what followed. If some of my own personal comments appear from time to time I hope I will be forgiven.

When Lichfield Cruse started the World Wide Web had not been invented, and all contact was by mail, telephone or face to face. The branch now has its own website and I am pleased that this short history will be one of the first contributions.

Margaret Freat.