

## Volunteers trained to answer your call

RING the charity Help in Bereavement at any time, day or night, and you'll be speaking to someone who has been trained to help you.

The volunteer you speak to will have been taught about the stages bereaved people often go through, the differences between grieving for a child, an adult and an elderly person, and the kind of emotional support that bereaved people need.

One of their 30 current visitors can make an appointment to see you in your own home within the next few days to talk about it. You might feel angry, depressed, frightened or numb. Your world might suddenly feel very different, and you might struggle to make decisions about the future.

You may also have felt unable to talk about these things with friends, family or colleagues. The charity's volunteers have been trained in how to listen properly and talk you through those feelings until you feel ready to move on. This may, of course, take anything from weeks to years.

The organisation initially covered the entire south-east Hampshire social services division – Portsmouth, Havant, Gosport and Fareham – and it still does. Volunteers in each of those areas work in different teams, each with a mentor in charge. More recently, the charity has formed links with the Rowans Hospice which runs some of its training. It also receives referrals from doctors, social workers and other community workers.

Members are now invited to talk to children in schools if a pupil or staff member has died. They have also been asked to be available in the Queen Alexandra Hospital for a day each week.

Initially, the training was free, but volunteers now pay to go on the initial 12-week course. Those who are trained are encouraged to remain as visitors with Help in Bereavement for two years, if possible. Volunteers are also offered ongoing training. And visitors who suffer a bereavement of their own are expected to stop visiting others for two years while they work through their own grief.

If you have suffered a bereavement, whether recently or some time ago, and would like to contact a visitor, do ring their confidential helpline on 023-9266 8884.

# An idea that has brought real comfort to thousands

**SHE helped to launch the group 26 years ago – and was there to celebrate its silver jubilee as its patron.**

It was Dr Isabel Pine's idea to start a counselling service for the bereaved in 1979. It became the charity Help in Bereavement, which has helped thousands of people struggling to cope with loss and grief.

Volunteers are trained, and visit those bereaved people at home or talk to them on the phone. They listen to those who are grieving and offer support, sympathy and understanding.

And for Dr Pine, who is part of our cathedral congregation, it's an integral part of her faith to make sure bereaved people are helped in this way. She worked as a GP, a hospital doctor and in preventive medicine, and it was her medical background that helped her realise that such a service was needed.

"In 1979, I kept being asked to go to meetings about bereavement," she said. "By the time I got to one at Buckland United Reformed Church, it was the third one I'd been to, with people from churches, the medical profession and social services involved. I said to the minister, the Rev Joseph Story: 'We've had all these meetings about bereavement, but nothing's been done about it'. He said: 'What should we do?' and I said: 'We should have a bereavement counselling service'."

Doctors and other professionals, clergy, community workers and Portsmouth Council of Churches were consulted about whether such a service was needed. Their backing meant that the first training course for around 50 would-be visitors was held in 1980 at Buckland URC, and its



Dr Isabel Pine

minister came up with the name – 'Help in Bereavement'. Isabel was on the steering group and the initial committee, became committee chairman, then president and is now patron – but has never actually been a visitor herself.

But dozens of other volunteers have been on the 12-week course since 1980, each of them receiving a certificate that qualifies them to visit the bereaved. In 2005 alone the charity visited 31 men, 90 women and 15 children, and coped with a total of 1,680 calls on its confidential helpline.

Its 25th anniversary service – which was held over from 2005 until May this year – was a cathedral Evensong. All those involved in work with the bereaved were invited, and the sermon was given by the Rev Ray Chapman, who was our diocese's funeral adviser and has organised training for Help in Bereavement.

"It's difficult for a bereaved person to find people who are really prepared to listen to their grief," said Isabel. "It's not always easy to talk to relatives. Perhaps they might be there for the first fortnight, but then think that the person should have got over it. Our visitors are happy to listen as long as they are needed."

"Even if it is many years since

their loss, and someone has not grieved properly or wants to talk it through, nobody should hesitate to ring. Unresolved grief can cause depression. In the early stages of grief, strong feelings can be frightening. Anger can also be caused by grief."

Although many of the volunteers are from churches, the charity is not specifically Christian and its members aren't allowed to proselytize. But Christians can pray for those they visit if the bereaved person asks them to.

"Befriending someone who is bereaved is a type of Christian service, just like running a lunch club," said Isabel.

She was born into a Christian family in Southsea and initially went to St Simon's Church. She dates her own conversion from her medical training at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine in London. She heard a talk from

better, was baptised by immersion alongside her mother, and began to understand and appreciate Holy Communion much more. She also remembers a dream that helped her enormously in which she imagined herself trying to pull a serpent off an empty cross – it brought home to her that her sins had, in fact, already been wiped out.

After working as a hospital doctor, as a GP, and in public health, she wrote from London to the medical authorities in Portsmouth asking for a job in preventive medicine. She worked as a senior medical officer in the city's Department of the Medical Officer of Health from 1974, and was doing that job when she helped to found Help in Bereavement.

She retired in 1990 and became a city councillor for the St Thomas ward in 1991. She

## my faith

**Isabel Pine's idea 26 years ago led to the creation of Help in Bereavement, a charity that has helped thousands of bereaved people in our diocese. She explains her inspiration.**

a Jewish Christian minister and asked him to explain how Christ's death for her sins actually worked.

"He had preached on Revelation 3:20 – 'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me' – which I hadn't heard before," she said. "That evening, I knelt down in the bathroom and prayed, and I felt as though Christ was there asking to come into my life. I said 'Yes', and then went to bed! It was a real turning point for me."

Isabel understood the Bible

also joined the cathedral congregation, and eventually became patron of Help in Bereavement. Isabel hasn't married, but did suffer bereavements of her own, when her mother, father and – most recently – her brother died.

"It is different when the person who dies is a Christian," she said. "My brother was 80, had been in hospital for a short time and was on a life-support machine. It would have been difficult for him to recover fully, even if he had come off the machine. We made the decision to turn it off, but I look forward to seeing him again in heaven."