

What Katharine House Hospice means to me

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I have favourite places in Katharine House. The gardens in summer, the chapel on dark autumn and winter evenings, the day centre on a fresh spring morning. For me, Katharine House has gone from being a place of immense personal sadness to a place of calmness and meaning. I'm grateful for that. How so?

For five days a week I have a normal job, in information technology. For one or two days a week - mostly evenings, when I can fit it in - I am a bereavement counsellor volunteer for the hospice. The only male counsellor volunteer, as it happens.

People say to me all the time: "Do you enjoy your work?" Well I don't "enjoy" it exactly but I do find it very fulfilling. They then go on: "Oh I couldn't do that!". Well they probably couldn't do what I do with information technology either. The point is, we all do what we can. I couldn't be a nurse. Or a chef. Or a gardener. You really don't want to be ill in bed and have me serve you freshly-picked gooseberry and spinach crumble. But funnily enough, my day job is actually IT consultancy - and consultancy involves a lot of *listening* to people before offering advice and guidance. So it's not so dissimilar to bereavement counselling.

It often comes as a surprise to the bereaved that the hospice is still interested in them. All too often, for many months or years, they have been a carer for a sick person. All the focus and support was on that person until his or her death. Now the hospice's attention passes to those bereaved people that might benefit from talking about their sadness. Not everyone needs this support, just as not everyone needs to visit their doctor for a minor health problem. But it's often a good idea to get a check-up from a neutral observer, whether it be a doctor or counsellor. So we offer bereavement counselling to friends, relatives and anyone associated with the hospice (sometimes very loosely).

We contact the bereaved person six to eight weeks after the bereavement. This seems to be the right time; when the immediate outpouring of support from friends and family may have subsided, the probate process is done or almost completed and the bereaved person is sitting thinking "Is this it?" as they face a new phase in their life.

An hourly meeting might be a one-off, or repeated every few weeks for several months or even continue for over a year. It varies considerably, according to the person's needs and how beneficial they find the discussions. They take place either at the bereaved person's home or on site at the hospice, in about equal measure, again depending on the person's preference.

It usually takes weeks to observe a recovery in the bereaved person. Of course we are helped by our ally, Time. But it's a joy to observe the person's improved attitude and outlook, whether or not we've been particularly instrumental in their recovery.

When I drive home after a call on a bereaved person I'm not sad and not happy, just ...thoughtful. It puts one's daily worries in their place. It's a good place to be.

Simon