

## Support Groups for Self-harming and Bereavement



In a previous blog, I wrote about self-harming amongst teenagers in Cambourne brought on by all the normal causes such as stress, insecurity, etc. Last week, I visited Pinpoint, a charity that provides independent information, support and networking for parents in Cambridgeshire and, especially, focuses on those with children who have additional needs and disabilities. One of their new support groups is for parents of young people who self-harm. As with all support groups, attendees soon realise that they are not alone in trying to cope with sons or daughters who self-harm as a release, a coping strategy, a way to get control over life, a form of communication, an attempt to feel or avoid emotions. Parents often blame themselves for their child's self-harming and feel guilty. Pinpoint has been running self-harming monthly support groups since July 2014 where parents can share their experiences and learn coping methods from the support group coordinator and other attendees. Particularly, there is a focus on not feeling guilty and to blame but to work through and support the child's journey through this difficult time. They also make available to attendees a book entitled 'The Parent's Guide to Self-Harm' by Jane Smith as an extremely useful source of information.

As a regular visitor to support groups receiving grants from Cambridgeshire Community Foundation, I have seen, and been mightily impressed by the power and impact of these groups on people's lives. Even during my own recent surgery, I gained tremendously from a national support group just talking to others experiencing the same problems and hearing about how they coped with what I was about to experience. I remember a telephone call to a very helpful gentleman in Wales, who was just 2-3 weeks ahead of me in treatment, giving me advice on the next steps of my procedure.

The day after I was at Pinpoint, I made a visit to CRUSE Bereavement Care in Huntingdon to meet attendees at one of their Friendship Groups being held at the Methodist Church. Over 20 people of all ages and at various stages of bereavement were meeting together over a coffee and cake. As it was nearly Christmas, there were mince pies too! All of them appreciated the friendship of others who **really** knew what emotions they were going through. Some had received 1:1 counselling before attending the Friendship Group but others were yet to do so. Everyone I talked to told me that this group was a vital appointment on their weekly schedule providing a focus for their lives. Most had found new friends and went to different new activities, such as bowls, church, etc. as a result of the Group. It was wonderful to see a thriving support group making a real difference to the lives of those who had experienced the bereavement of a wife, husband or parent and, along with Pinpoint are good examples of the various support groups that CCF assists through the generosity of its many donors.