

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Center for Crisis Psychology

Bergen, Norway

Atle Dyregrov

Director

The Center for Crisis Psychology (CCP) was founded in 1988 with threefold aims to:

- Undertake clinical work connected with loss, trauma and disasters in the western part of Norway, and provide advice and preparatory training for such events for professionals internationally
- Engage in educational activities, eg lecturing to health professionals and a variety of other groups, both locally and internationally
- Conduct research on various aspects of loss and trauma

From the outset, the heart of our work and research has concerned children and families who have experienced loss through sudden and, to a lesser degree, anticipated death. Over the years we have improved our services by developing models for early intervention and long-term follow-up for working with everyday family loss, as well as after larger accidents and disasters. We have published a variety of scientific articles and books, and contributed chapters to other publications, to inform the general public, clinicians and researchers. Our website (www.krisepsyk.no) gives a reference list of these and also, in the English-speaking section, two information leaflets to help adults after a critical incident, one with advice on coping methods and the other for parents about children's reactions.

Although the CCP was started as a private venture, today most of its projects and the clinical work are funded through the Norwegian government. Much of our daily activity deals with helping children, adolescents and adults with complicated or traumatic grief reactions. Although we base our clinical work on evidence-based methods, we firmly believe that each family and client has unique needs and demands flexible forms of intervention. Both individual help, family assistance

and grief groups are offered to families. Much of our work in the bereavement area has taken place in close collaboration with the Sudden Infant Death Society of Norway and in the later years with LEVE, a society established by one of our centre's staff, Kari Dyregrov, to create more support for those bereaved by suicide.

The unique blend of clinical work, research and teaching has made the centre a much-sought resource for professionals in Norway, Scandinavia and internationally. Although we acknowledge cultural differences, we have found that many of the challenges faced by a child who loses a mother, father or sibling are the same everywhere, and that the methods we have developed in our clinical practice in Bergen can be of use to helpers in Rwanda, Sri Lanka or Bosnia.

Since the early 1980s our staff have been, and still are, involved in work for UNICEF and UNHCR assisting families in war and disaster situations. Two staff members (Atle Dyregrov and Magne Raundalen) have, together with professor Bill Yule from the Institute of Psychiatry in London, formed the Children and War Foundation (www.childrenandwar.org). This organisation works on a *pro bono* basis to secure better help for children following war and disaster. UN organisations, non-governmental relief organisations and others contact us for documentation and guidance concerning children in war and disasters.

Manuals for professionals preparing to work in this area are available on the Children and War Foundation website. CCP staff have been engaged in work for children in war in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Rwanda, Liberia, and many other Middle Eastern and African countries. Recently we assisted the International Red Cross in Beslan to improve the skills of the local health professionals helping the many

bereaved children and families after the violent end to a siege in a local school in 2004. This international work, including the transfer of practical skills to other helpers around the globe, is a very important commitment for us, enabling us to reach out and help many.

From the outset, our staff have been involved in research on, and teaching about cumulative stress and burnout among helpers, and has also helped with the development of routines for managing staff stress and trauma management. We have used this expertise to conduct training and workshops in a variety of national and international organisations, including UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR.

The centre staff currently consists of 11 professionals, all with an equivalent of a PhD and/or a medical degree. We will soon be launching new projects for children and families who live with a seriously ill or dying parent. The centre celebrates its 20th anniversary this year with a major international conference on 2-3 June on Trauma – Understanding and Treatment, with plenaries by Bessel van der Kolk, James Pennebaker, Onno van der Hart and Magne Raundalen. ●

EVENTS IN 2008

Grief in society. Manchester Area Bereavement Forum 15th international conference. 18 September. Manchester, UK. Key speakers: Derek Beeston, Rob Merchant. Contact: tel [+44]161 371 8860; visit www.mabf.org.uk/conference

Living with grief: children and adolescents. Hospice Foundation of America's 15th annual bereavement teleconference. April 16. Visit www.hospicefoundation.org/teleconference/

Then, now and always. One-day conference. 21 May. Edinburgh. Key speaker: Julie Stokes. Further details from elly.alexander@fife.gov.uk

Bereavement care for people with learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders. Five-day course with Noelle Blackman, Linda McEnhill. 15-19 September. London. Visit www.stchristophers.org.uk/education