

Long Island Institute
for Group Work With
Children and Youth
North Shore Child & Family
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HUH ?!?

*a newsletter about working
with children and youth in groups*

Volume 3, Number 2.

Spring - 1998

The Mission of the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth is: To promote and enhance effective group work practice with children and youth through advocacy, education, and collegial support. **HUH?!?** is the Institute's quarterly newsletter dedicated to providing information, inspiration and support for anyone working with young people in group settings.

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From the Steering Committee

What do we mean when we talk about "difference" and "inclusion" in group work? Most often difference refers to the obvious, how things come into view on the surface. Less obvious differences emerge from shared personal histories and as members reveal themselves interactionally in the group. Despite our common humanity we all differ in one way or another and struggle with issues of inclusion everyday in the groups to which we belong.

A children's group is a great place for young people to encounter various levels of difference, confront the impulse to isolate the unfamiliar, and reach for strength amid diversity.

It was an early meeting of the "changing family group" composed of 9, 10, and 11 year old boys and girls, that the themes of difference and inclusion came forth. Each of the seven group members had experienced upheaval in their families. Their parents had divorced, separated, or died. The purpose of the group was for the members from these non-traditional families to reduce their isolation, explore feelings of loss and abandonment, and help each other learn how to cope with these changes.

Near the end of the meeting we gave a homework assignment: "Over the next week think of something that is important to you, something that you really value, and bring it in to the next group meeting to share with the group." Allie, a nine-year-old whose dad had died just months before said, "I know what I'd like to bring but I'd have to dig him up." And then unexpectedly Jimmy, the most physically active and seemingly distractable member of the group who was by then all over the room and into the toys and games on the shelves, stopped what he was doing. He bounded over to Allie and got about as physically close to her without making bodily contact. And then without asking her what she had meant by her statement, Jimmy said to her, "You could bring a picture."

After a moment's pause, Allie reached into her purse and removed a tattered photograph. Her action spurred the other group members to form a semi-circle around her so that each could get a good look at the snapshot she held of her smiling father.

A few weeks later, as Thanksgiving approached, each group

»»» Continued on Page 2.

From the Editor

Whenever I search through the recent literature on the subject of group work with children and adolescents I most often find cookbooks. I find lots of cookbooks - cookbooks with recipes for keeping groups busy and group leaders anxiety free and cookbooks with microwave solutions to deal with complex issues. And there is no shortage of costly workshops and symposia that offer the same.

To their credit some of these authors and workshop leaders provide cautionary notes warning that such books are for experienced group workers who know how to use the tools, who know what they are doing. Of course that doesn't stop the presses from rolling and the marketers from selling.

What constitutes an experienced group worker? At the very least one would need to have a purposeful approach to grow good groups from start to finish, from the planning stage to the ending transition, an understanding of group development that advises thoughtful practice each step along the way.

Unfortunately the state of advanced education nationally in group work is inadequate. Universities, with a few notable exceptions, have all but abandoned group work method teaching over the past three decades. As the demand for group work with children and adolescents increases one finds only a limited supply of competent group workers and group work supervisors.

All of us, whether novices or old hands, need to put the various recipes and formulas that flood the current market into context so that what we have to offer our young group members can be provided by capable hands. This means seeking literature that is well grounded conceptually to complement the cookbooks, finding mentors to fill that gap where good supervision is lacking, and developing groups to provide collegial support to ensure that talented workers don't abandon this difficult and important work.

Andrew Malekoff, Editor



Looking Back...A Reminiscence Providing a "Safe Haven" in a Neighborhood by Catherine P. Papell, DSW

*This is the sixth
feature in a
continuing
series.*

Some weeks ago, in "HUH ?!?", there was an article reporting on a research undertaking designed to show empirical evidence that programs in communities that offer youth a "safe haven" contribute to healthy adolescent development. I read it with much excitement and sent for the full report on the research project (Gambone, MA and Arbreton, AJA (April 1997) *Safe Havens: The Contributions of Youth Organizations To Healthy Adolescent Development*. Public/Private Ventures: 1 Commerce Sq.; 2005 Market St.; Suite 900; Philadelphia, Pa. 19103; 215-577-4400).

Through a study of the literature and research about youth development, the authors identified a set of seven "key developmental supports and opportunities...that are particularly relevant to and beneficial for a healthy adolescence...associated with longer-term positive outcomes for youth". These are:

1. A Sense of Safety
2. Challenging and Interesting Activities

3. A Sense of Belonging
4. Social Support from Adults
5. Input and Decision Making
6. Leadership
7. Volunteer and Community Service

My earliest days in social work (1940...) were spent in settlements and community centers - group work agencies serving children and youth. We knew the importance of our programs for the community and its youth; we presented our convictions in whatever way we could. However, from the 60's on, such programs tended to fade without the support of the professional and funding sources. Federal and community chest grants became available primarily for programs for specialized social and therapeutic needs, and group work as a valued professional method, housed in community centers, faded in the dust of psychotherapy models.

In 1940-41, I lived and worked as a social group worker in a settlement house in Manhattan on the corner of 34th Street and First Avenue - an Irish and Italian neighborhood, subsequently demolished as a residential community by access to the Tunnel, buildings for office and luxury apartments. I remember with pride a program that was developed with the youth clubs and children's groups. The gym was transformed into a street scene with great brown paper murals of the tenements hung from the rotunda to the floor, painted by the members. There was music in the street; people of all ages danced and played or sat on the stoop talking; parents called down to their children; youths called up to their friends in the windows. The neighborhood residents flocked to see the production and loved the picture of themselves.

From 1942 to 1946, the years of WWII, I was the Director of a Settlement House on the corner of Front Street and Fitzwater, a cobblestone street only wide enough for a carriage to go through to the waterfront of Philadelphia. Little if any of the neighborhood remains today, gentrified into Society Hill, the little "bandbox" attached houses transformed into luxury apartments.

Those were difficult days for young adolescent boys since they were not yet old enough for the Army, and were now the senior youth in the community. With the help of parents "to make the neighborhood a better place for the children and youth to grow up in", outdoor movies were held on the vacant lot across Front Street. Another small lot was cleared and fenced for a "Tot Lot". Wartime Price Control was monitored. When the children discovered that the corner candy store had raised the price of bubble gum 100% (from 1 cent to 2 cents) they prepared a petition in protest. The petition, with pages of signatures, was carried to

Washington to the "Conference on Unfinished Business in Social Legislation" by a neighborhood delegation.

One corner was a trolley car stop. When a strike was called to prevent blacks from being upgraded to motormen, President Roosevelt ordered the army to keep the city transportation system moving for the war industry. The teenage girls prepared coffee and doughnuts for the soldiers and the new motormen on the trolleys. When the servicemen began to return from war they organized and rented a furnished storefront as a neighborhood meeting place.

Ten years ago I returned to Philadelphia and walked down Fitzwater Street. Workman Place House was long gone, but I stopped at one door that had not yet been renovated. When I introduced myself to the middle-aged woman who came to the door, both she (whom I remembered as a child) and her mother started to cry, recalling and telling me how important the Settlement had been to them so many years ago when Mrs. Carey was raising her five children.

In spite of our Age of Technology, that so often requires quantitative proof of the value of human services, I know that those Settlement Houses were "Safe Havens" for the children, youth and their families. Yet I was excited that a way to conceptualize and research the importance of such programs now and in the future had been developed. I urge all the readers of this newsletter to weigh, create and support opportunities for our alienated youth to have "Safe Havens" where their needs can be nourished in preparation for the difficult world into which they must grow.

✶ Catherine P. Papell, MSW, DSW is a Professor Emeritus at Adelphi University School of Social Work and Co-Chair of the LI Chapter of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work With Groups.

From the Steering Committee

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member took responsibility for bringing something - food, drink, music - to the party they had been planning. On the day of the celebration Jimmy asked if he could sing a song entitled, "I Believe I Can Fly." His rendition was delivered with an innocent awkwardness that belied his swagger. In the end he seemed embarrassed and critical of his performance and asserted, "I stunk!" But the others praised both his courage and talent. A little later they asked him to join them in a game of "Sorry." He told them that he didn't know how to play. They eagerly offered to teach him.

Allie knew the feeling of difference that came with surviving the death of a parent. She quietly observed her peers with their fathers at the bus stop or at various school and community functions during the year. She also discovered the emptiness of sitting through a grade school art project revolving around the celebration of Father's Day.

Jimmy knew the feeling of difference that comes with being an annoyance to almost everyone. When asked what he thought his teachers thought of him he hesitated and shrugged. But after a moment or two his cheeks reddened and with an ironic smile he said, "They all hate me."

Through a sense of inclusion in the group Allie found a special place where her difference was heard, understood and accepted, and Jimmy found the space to "fly" freely and without shame.

It's funny, neither one looked different.

Michelle Laser and Andy Malekoff are co-workers of the "changing family group" and members of the steering committee.

FROM THE INSIDE-OUT

adolescent moonscape 2000

sheet
 rock
 fists in
 aimless days,
 decade plus
 on terra
 second coat
 give me
 take my
 give me
 so i
 can play
 a
 craters,
 flight,
 dreamless
 three
 non firma,
 of rawhide
 derma.
 liberty or
 breath,
 a quarter
 play a
 video game.

by a. malekoff



Call for Writers

As you have noticed, each issue of *HUH?!?* has, as a special feature, an article written by an experienced professional. This feature is called "Looking Back...A Reminiscence." We have been delighted to showcase this absorbing and important experiential writing.

If you have experienced something memorable having to do with group work or groups in general, please contact Andrew Malekoff, the Editor of *HUH?!?*, at the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth; North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215; Phone: (516) 626-1971 or Fax: (516) 626-8043. Mr. Malekoff will be glad to discuss the possibility of your writing a piece for this feature and give you the Writer's Guidelines.

Long Island Institute for Group Work
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*Letter to the Editor*

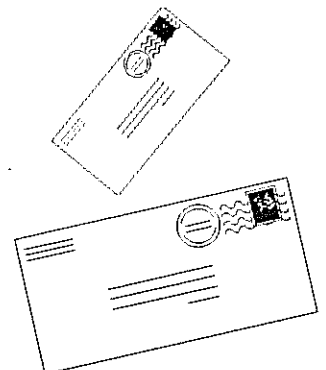
"Life begets life, energy begets energy..." I read this somewhere. I guess it's true, except I get very tired sometimes. I work with adolescents, quite often in groups. Being in a group is often where adolescents prefer to be, maybe because that's where they more often find themselves at this stage of life.

I've learned a lot about the world by being with adolescents. I wonder what Freud would say if he were alive today. Because it's not just about the ego and the id. It's about drugs and alcohol, domestic violence, divorce, not having the money to buy health insurance or even the jeans that everyone else wears. It's about empty homes after school. It's about tattoos, piercing, cutting, bleeding. It's about gangs and girls that carry razor blades on the inside of their cheeks....

Stepping back to take a breath and gain some perspective can be a frightening experience. I used to tell my children that "people are not for hurting". I think they look at me today and wonder, "What was she talking about?"

With all that said, I'm grateful for the wonderful things that happen when I see kids making connections with one another in groups...sometimes in spite of me. Maybe it's the energy.

Michelle Foster, CSW



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TIPS For: FORMING ALLIANCES WITH PARENTS OF GROUP MEMBERS

This month's TIPS for column is devoted to the importance of forming alliances with parents of group members. It is too often that group workers experience parents as a thorn in their "professional" side.

TIP: Carefully build into your group work practice a way to work with parents during these phases of the group's life:

- Pregroup contact with parents as the group begins.
- The ongoing relationship with parents as the group progresses.
- The ending transition with parents as the group ends.

Remember you may be one of the few or only persons that a parent has a meaningful conversation with about their child. Don't hide behind the inviolable cloak of confidentiality to keep parents at a distance and yourself comfortable. This doesn't suggest revealing secrets. What it does mean is that developing trust in the group includes forming partnerships concurrently with parents. And remembering that in the end, parents who you've worked closely with also experience a loss.

EVENTS AND RESOURCES

☑ **Workshop: APRIL 24, 1998 - FRIDAY:** Sponsored by the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth. The theme is: "The Different Child" in the Group: Obstacles and Opportunities. This workshop will focus on the role of the group worker in recognizing fears and finding strengths when addressing the unique child or adolescent in the group. This all-morning workshop will be held at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center in Roslyn Heights, New York and the cost is \$40 per person. Contact Jane Yazdpour at (516) 626-1971 to register.

☑ **Video Tape of the "A Sense of Alienation or Belonging: Building Bridges Through Group Involvement"** conference is now available. The 23 minute video is available to HUH?!? subscribers for \$15.00 and \$20.00 for non-subscribers. It is ideal for motivating the development of new groups in your agency and/or community. The video depicts an intergenerational, cross-cultural meeting using an integrated large- and small-group format to address the need for more and better groups for young people. Make checks payable to NSC&FGC/Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth and send to NSC&FGC; Attn: Jane Yazdpour; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.

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BOOK BRIEFS



Trouble in the Classroom: Managing the Behavior Problems of Young Children (1998). W. George Scarlett and Associates. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 199 pages, \$26.95 hardcover.

Although written primarily for teachers *Trouble in the Classroom* provides conceptual and practical ideas that are suitable for group work practice in a variety of settings. The author espouses a "developmental approach to behavioral problems." Early on this approach is described and contrasted to behavior modification, clinical-medical, and guidance approaches. The developmental approach is one that most closely resembles group work. It is designed to address the whole person.

The book is divided into four parts and thirteen chapters. The initial two chapters describes the developmental approach and details tactics for managing classroom behavior. It is brimming with practical interventions that made good sense to this reader. Part Two consists of four chapters that highlight developmental tasks of the child in the context of a classroom (group) including: feeling connected in the classroom, developing a healthy sense of self, becoming a constructive player, and making good friends. Part Three looks at building just and caring community and chapters on curriculum and programming. The book's final section addresses specific problems and issues of diversity, including a fascinating chapter on working with Haitian children and parents in North American schools by Cynthia Ballenger, a socio-linguist and early childhood teacher deeply involved with issues of equality and inclusion.

According the author / editor W. George Scarlett *Trouble in the Classroom* evolved over a 12-year period. "I was not as aware as I am now of how complex the task is to transform classrooms into caring and productive communities," he writes (p.xvii). Scarlett has transformed his complex task into a profound and elegant simplicity that will prove to be valued resource to both teachers and group workers for years to come.