

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

a newsletter about working
with children and youth in groups

Volume 3, Number 1.

Winter - 1998

From the Editor

In this issue of *HUH?!?* there is a book review on *Our Guys: The Glen Ridge Rape and the Secret Life of the Perfect Suburb*. Reading this book and writing the review made me think about life in the suburbs. There is a long held perception of life in the suburbs that obscures reality, where images of affluence and self sufficiency predominate. One effect is the insulation of those inside the suburbs from those on the outside, including legislators and philanthropists. Many of the young people in the suburbs who are struggling with many the same problems as their inner-city counterparts have become an invisible generation. The issue should not be city-suburb, either-or. We need to hold hands and stand together to erase mythical boundaries and affirm the value of all young people.

In addition to the book review I have written a poem that appears in this issue entitled *invisible kidz on the edge of 5 boroughz*. It is one story about life in the suburbs of Long Island, New York.

Andy Malokhoff, Editor

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.

From the Steering Committee

It is November 1994 and my tenth day on the job. I have just graduated and started my first REAL job at a tiny agency called the YDA (Youth Directions and Alternatives). My job title is Street Outreach Worker. Although the goals and objectives of the position have been explained to me, I don't fully understand its relevance to adolescents until my first Friday night on the street.

It was a November evening and it was pretty cold for kids to be out. I'm fully equipped with gloves, warm coat and a jug of hot chocolate - if kids won't listen to me at least they'll be happy to have something warm to drink. As one searches for roaches in a dark corner of the kitchen, I search for the hangout spot. Where can I find them? I pull up to a strip mall and see some adolescents hanging out around the public phone. I search endlessly for the right words - what do I say? what do I do? how do I let these kids know who I am, who the YDA is, and what we can do in the short time I have before they blow me off for the ride that's coming with their beer supply for the evening?

At first these kids think I'm crazy, or that I'm trying my hardest to find out what they're doing so that I can let the authorities in on it. It is not until months go by that one adolescent invites me to a Friday evening outing. My mouth drops and I run back to the agency pronouncing that I have finally made a connection. I have finally broken down some adolescent walls. But you can be sure that it was a long laborious process, one with an uncertain outcome.

Street Outreach Worker? What does that mean exactly? This is a common reaction that people have when they hear the word Street Worker. In my short career in the social work business I have found this

to be one of the most fruitful and rewarding ways of reaching our "untouchable" adolescents. The work itself is a grassroots approach. These young people are not going to knock down the doors of any office. Street outreach means we bring the office to them, on their turf. We strive to establish trusting relationships and to offer an opportunity to decrease time on the street and to discover healthy and fun ways to spend free time.

One of my first experiences as a Street Worker was visiting a place known as, "The Hole." I was invited by a group of kids with a bad reputation in town. I wasn't quite sure what to expect. However, I never expected "The Hole" to be what it turned out to be - an actual hole in the ground. It had been covered with a tarp and seemed to be soundproof, as I could not hear any noise. I whispered the password as I had been instructed that day in school. The tarp came up and I entered the hole. There were about 8 teens in an apartment sized, smoke filled hole in the ground. There were cases of beer, most of which were empty.

I began with nonchalant conversation and asked one of the young men what happens when he goes home in a state of intoxication. He responded, "There isn't anyone home whenever I get there, or my father is in a drunken stupor on the couch." It became increasingly clear to me that we've been losing our youth because we've been losing ourselves.

So often adults and community members bring adolescents to our agency in order to "fix" them. We see young people who run from home, get drug involved and feel isolated, disconnected and lost. Too many have no sense of belonging to anything. We live in a country in

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For Information on submitting articles to HUH?!? contact:
Andrew Malekoff, Editor at (516) 626-1971.



Looking Back...A Reminiscence A Researcher Weighs In by Neala S. Schwartzberg, Ph.D.

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

Researchers rarely take center stage. We're usually happier sitting amid computer printouts pondering significance levels and trying to figure out how reams of information fit together.

We also rarely have much time to spend with the people who provide us with the data.

So, the Action Research project "A Sense of Alienation or Belonging: Building Bridges through Group Involvement" was both an education and a delight. It was a true collaboration and, at least for this researcher, provided a new and enriched perspective.

It began with the Long Island Institute on Group Work

with Children and Youth creating two questionnaires. One was to more fully understand the experiences, problems, issues and training needs of group workers. The other was to understand the experiences, problems and issues of the children and teenagers who participate in groups.

In the end, over 250 group workers and 75 group members participated. A conference, held on November 8, 1996, enabled us to give the information back to the participants, and gave me the opportunity to engage in a dialogue, seeing the transformation of dry numbers into an enthusiasm to conduct groups with children and youth.

We found that almost

everyone believes it is important for a child or teen to be in an organized group activity, but that workers don't feel quite comfortable and confident in their ability to work with youngsters. Part of the reason may be the level of supervision in group work. Although most agree that agencies support their efforts, only about half report receiving adequate supervision. We also learned about the training which workers feel would be helpful in developing their skills; using activities to enrich groups, building teamwork and mutual support, and problem-solving and conflict resolution.

We heard about the fears group workers experience; boredom of group members,

lack of value of the group, and a concern over loss of control of the group. But we also heard about their joys; that working with groups is uplifting, exciting, and rewarding, even if it is also chaotic.

Perhaps most importantly, we heard their stories; the triumphs of group members spontaneously helping members, and the moments of chagrin when group workers feel lost and ineffective. It was research at its best; full, rich and complex. Providing information, questions and the impetus for change, growth and development.

Neala S. Schwartzberg, Ph.D. is the Coordinator of Research at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center.

Letter to the Editor

To The Editor:

I thoroughly enjoyed the humanity experienced in Ralph Kolodney's article (AASWG Newsletter) in HUH?!? What a gentle reminder that I am capable of assumptions and misguided intentions in my daily practice.

Count me in -- I want a subscription! Enclosed is my check for \$5.00

*Signed: Alison Johnson, MSSW
Louisville, Kentucky*

From the Steering Committee

(Continued From Page 1.)

which youth are too easily ignored and marginalized. How can we expect them to grow up to be happy and productive adults who make a positive contribution to the community when they are so often left to hanging out to dry without the support to protect and gradually introduce them to the harsh winds of adult life?

Through my short years in the field I have come to understand and believe in the value of outreach to adolescents through non-traditional means. This involves reaching out to youth in creative ways to promote youth development and youth initiative. The Street Worker is an integral part of providing young people with a much needed support network to help them climb out of the "holes" they've fallen into.

Maureen O'Connor

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480 Old Westbury Road
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Attn: Jane Yazdpour
- Please Print -

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____ Prof. Discipline: _____

invizible kidz on the edge of 5 boroughz

remember me?
the paperz sed some-one grabbed me
from
the space-plex.
turnz out
they wuz

wrong.

it wuz
uncle john
all along.

he built an
u
n
d
e
r
ground
room for me
with re-moat control
cable tv.

remember me?
i split quite a few
yearz ago.
moved away
far away
in search of

light.
and
hitched a ride
on
the good ship
marshal applewhite.

remember me?
i lived for trainz
lionel, h-o, longislandrailroad.
i uzed to
watch the trainz pull out of the
garden at sun-up
when
dad
headed out.

that iz,
until
that colin-guy blast'd a hole right
through my heart.

remember me?
one summer night
i wuz scoping
the starz
i spotted a great ball of
fire.
it wuzn't hale-bopp.
it wuzn't marz.

a little while later
the diverz came
to search for lost flowerz
in the driving rain.

what about the rest of us?

do you remember the rest of us?
what about me?
no, you don't know us.
you see we're not calebre-teez.
we live on the edge of 5 boroughz
too,
but we don't rhyme.

roll call

i have a guidance counselor who
called me a slut.
i poured insecticide into my dad'z
cola.
i stabbed a kid nine tizez.
i torched a house.
i had an abortion.
i hung my cat.
i have 2 kidz.

i inject anabolic steroidz into my
body to fill in the empty space that
surroundz me.
i am mez-merized by a box that
brightenz my room and cloudz my
vizion.

i throw up often yet the emptiness
inside of me continuez to expand.
i live in a house with a revolving
door welcoming men who touch me.
i do finger-painting in the middle
school bathroom with natural oilz.
i cannot read but i can control
traffic signalz with my brain.
i shave my head and bare my teeth
but never to smile.

i can lower my blood pressure by
slicing my armz.
i had an older brother until he wuz
beaten to death.
i have a boyfriend who punches me
whenever i look the other way.
i can feel strange men crawling
inside of my body and it fealz like i
am on fire.
i drank a bottle of dry gas while
driving on empty one night.
i don't have a regular job so i peddle
ecstasy.

i wuz raped but no one will believe
it wuz him.
i think my mother iz dying of a bad
cough.
i don't smoke but the town
incinerator duz.
i am thirsty but the ground water iz
contaminated.
i went with my dad to see a
prostitute so he could sleep better at
nite.
i failed to avert a passing stranger'z
gaze and so he shot me twice, here
and here.
i don't use condomz because i'm
tired of feeling nothing.
i sometizez sleep in the cemetery.

**Long Island Institute for Group Work
With Children & Youth**

Chairpersons: Joanne Ditchik-Stutz (Nassau County)
Cynthia Cavallo (Suffolk County)

Steering Committee:

Roseline Felix
Michelle Laser
Stacey Levin
Maureen O'Connor
Catherine Papell
Andrew Peters
Carol Sutker

Project Coordinator: Andrew Malekoff

i can't seem to get to sleep.
i take naps in school.
i am always tired.
i will be 15

find
it.

it's the darned-est thing.

soon.

so,
i've been
thinking.
maybe u could slide
over a bit
allen.

y'know,
i remember hearing
about this far out guy named allen
who lived in a village on the other
side of the edge.
he wrote a letter to america. in
his letter he said that he
wuz going to put hiz
queer shoulder
to the wheel.

and then

now that's a pretty cool thing
to say. i wish allen were here
so i could talk to him. here'z
what i'd say:

we can
touch
shoulderz
and
push
together.

okay?

listen allen,
we live inside of a very
complex machine out
here on the edge.
despite what
the smart
people
on the
other
side
think,
we have
no access.
what i mean
to say,
allen,
iz that
we can't
get near
to the
wheel.
we
can't
even

Andrew Malekoff

**"The group is
not a
preparation
for living; it is
living"**

**Norman Goroff
Group Worker and
Co-Founder of the
Brownsville Boys Club**

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TIPS For: SESSIONAL TRANSITIONS

This month's "TIPS for:" column is devoted to sessional transitions: those moments just before and as the group meeting is preparing to begin; and those moments just prior to and immediately after the group meeting has come to a close. What can you do to increase the probability of a smooth transition-in and a smooth transition-out?

☛ **TIP:** In the beginning tune in to the need for members to get settled and to ease into the meeting. There is often a fresh residue of emotion remaining from interactions just prior to the group meeting. This may take the form of a frenetic entrance that is slowly transformed into a more settled state without any interference from the group worker. Or, you can be more directive by making a linking statement to create a bridge from the experience outside to the experience inside the group, in an attempt to affirm the obvious and ready group members for the work ahead. It is also important to allow time for a transition-out so that parents, teachers, or whomever reclaims your young group members won't be bombarded with excessive spill over from the group itself. Engaging the group in devising an ending ritual is one way to ease the members out of the experience in a structured way.

Next time you go to a concert, observe the choice of music in the beginning and end and see if you can discover the thinking of the performer(s) in relation to the crowd. What response are they attempting to evoke, coming and going?



BOOK BRIEFS



Our Guys: The Glen Ridge Rape and the Secret Life of the Perfect Suburb (1997). Bernard Lefkowitz. New York: University of California Press, 443 pages, \$29.95, cloth.

Our Guys is the story of a highly publicized rape of a retarded adolescent girl with a baseball bat and broomstick by a small group of teenage boys in a wealthy New Jersey suburb. Author-journalist Bernard Lefkowitz takes us deep inside a community that is now notorious for a single horrific incident. There is an eerie familiarity about Glen Ridge. It has the look and feel of many contemporary suburban communities. We are brought face-to-face with a small group of predatory male athletes whose distorted sense of sexuality and degrading behavior are tacitly supported by an admiring community with a twisted value system. We also meet a succession of professionals with a penchant for looking the other way. But we also meet the exceptions and the exceptional, the outraged few who fight for a misunderstood and abused young woman who just wants to make friends, to fit in, and escape the loneliness of being different.

What's most disturbing about *Our Guys* is that we know these people. We know them well. *Our Guys* is the true story of the breeding and coming of age of a destructive group culture gone wild but in a protected environment. As one *New York Times* Book Reviewer states, "This is an important book, one that should be read by parents and educators alike..." Add group workers to the list.

HUH?!? is the quarterly newsletter of the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth, a program of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Hgts., NY 11577-2215; Phone: (516) 626-1971 • Fax: 626-8043. Executive Director: M. ...; Director of Program Development and Newsletter Editor: Andrew Malekoff, ACSW. Newsletter Design and Layout: Jane E. Meckwood-Yazdpour. Participating Agencies: Coalition on Child Abuse & Neglect, Hempstead; Youth Directions and Alternatives, Huntington; Herricks School District; Sanctuary Project, Huntington; Plainedge School District; L.I. Chapter/Assoc. for Advancement of Social Work With Groups; L.I. Crisis Center, Bellmore. Copyright January 1, 1998/USA.

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 will be an all-morning workshop to be held at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center in Roslyn Heights, New York from 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM. Contact Jane Yazdpour at (516) 626-1971 for information on how 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 the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth/NSC&FGC and send to NSC&FGC; Attn: Jane Yazdpour; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.

☑ Special Brochure Available: *Children and Grief: A Guide for Parents*. This very special booklet is being offered through the Family Bereavement Program of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center. Send a stamped, self-addressed # 10 envelope to "Children & Grief Brochure"; NSC&FGC; Attn: Jane Yazdpour; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215. Quantity discounts are available.