

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 4. Number 1

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From the Editor

Have you ever been on the receiving end of "expert" proclamations about working with groups? Sometimes the repetition of authoritatively but unexamined messages leads one to believe they are true. That is, until you stop and think. "Groups are more cost effective" and "Groups are easier to run with a co-worker" are two such messages. Have you heard these before? What do you think? Sounds right at first blush. Yes? I don't think so.

1. "Groups are more cost effective"

I've always wondered what this really means? I guess if you can herd five to ten kids together for an hour or so and can generate a fee for each of them you can make out pretty good. If that's all there is to it, that is. However, suppose you spend considerable time on planning before the group actually begins and before each group meeting, as one should. And suppose you have regular contact with parents and relevant others from the school and various systems, as one should. What happens when you take the number of hours spent on planning and add that to the hours of collateral contacts per group member and add that to the number of actual group hours? Yes, it comes out to more than an hour, significantly

more. The problem with the "groups are more cost effective" propaganda is that no group worker worth his/her salt spends his/her time solely in the hour or so that the group meets. Maybe we should be asking which groups are more cost effective from whose perspective, and at what expense? If a quality group service is truly more cost effective, that's great. However, when it means cutting corners, the kids will pay dearly.

2. "Groups are easier to run with a co-worker"

The more is better argument goes beyond cost effectiveness. I've always found co-working more demanding, even when my partner and I know and respect one another. At a recent symposium of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups Julianne Wayne, a professor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work wondered whether co-leadership should be considered an advanced skill. I think so. Chances are that co-workers have had somewhat different training and experience with groups. Knowledge and understanding of child development might vary in depth and emphasis. Tolerance for physical movement and noise in the group might differ. Feelings about what constitutes acceptable balance of verbal and non verbal behavior may be in conflict.

Personal values often influence comfort level with the use of language (i.e. swearing, slang). Academic degree, years of experience, job title, and discipline can influence perceptions of who holds what status in group. Gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family history, politics, and socioeconomic status influence worldview. How difference and conflict are handled often differ. Are groups with co-workers really easier? Could be. But only when there's a mutual commitment to making the marriage work. There also needs to be a firm understanding at the leadership level of the agency about what it takes to build such a partnership. When such commitment, openness and support exist co-working can be really exciting and fulfilling. Anything less is an invitation for disaster.

Heard any other "expert" proclamations, propaganda or myth-information lately. We would love to hear them and report and comment on your experiences from time to time in HUH?!

Andy

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Report from the HUH?!? Staff to Our Readers

During the past year, the HUH?!? staff has been delighted to respond to our ever-expanding subscription base. Our regional professionals here on Long Island have supported the newsletter from the very beginning and this year that support has expanded far beyond our New York Metropolitan Area home to include such far flung places as (in no particular order) New Orleans, La.; Wilton, Ct.; Shelton, Ct.; Bogota, N.J.; Sacramento, Ca.; Boston, Ma.; Louisville, Ky.; Somerville, Ma.; Miami Lakes, Fla.; Chicago, Ill.; La Mesa, Ca.; Carmichael, Ca.; Plymouth, Minn.; Miami, Fla.; Sioux Falls, SD; Brookline, Ma.; Ladysmith, Wi.; San Diego, Ca.; Canterbury, NH; Lawrence, Ks.; Rockville, Md.; Atlanta, Ga.; Denton, Tx.; Elmhurst, Ill.; Newington, Ct.; Harrisonburg, Va.; Orville, Oh.; San Francisco, Ca.; Beverly, Ma.; Washington, DC; Andover, Ma.; Austin, Tx.; and Toronto and Montreal, Canada, to name only a few.

As each day brings in new subscriptions from all over America, and now Canada, we are all gratified that our efforts are being recognized. From the art and layout department to the subscriptions and financial departments, we would like to extend our thanks to our subscribers for your support and loyalty. Let's make the next year even better as we grow, learn, share, and develop together!

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.



Looking Back...A Reminiscence True Confessions: I Was A Teenage Group Worker by Bessie Pine

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

It was almost by chance that my long odyssey with group work began more than sixty years ago as a fifteen-year old during the Great Depression in my native Toronto. I started as a volunteer at St. Christopher House, a settlement house serving immigrant families and was assigned to a group of ten year old girls with whom I met weekly. I felt good about what I was doing. The following year as a University of Toronto freshman, I became a volunteer at the Community House then located downtown near the University. I continued my volunteer work with groups during the school year and at its first summer Home Camp. They began to pay me, first as one of several Sunday supervisors in charge of a dozen group leaders from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. I received \$10 per month. In my senior year a change in directorship at Community House led to my departure. Sam Gershovitz, a creative, charismatic, visionary who introduced group work to Toronto left abruptly.

Upon graduation from University I became a nursery teacher, but still harbored the

group work dream. Two years later with another change in directors I returned to Community House as the Girls' Worker at the princely salary of \$20 a week.

Community House, the forerunner of the current Jewish Community Center, was a neighborhood facility. No parking lots were needed and for many youngsters this was a refuge, a second home. Our struggle was to try to accommodate all who wanted to come as often as they wanted to come. We did counseling, made home visits, encouraged shy or talented individuals, and yes, prevented delinquency in several instances.

In time I was accepted into the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. I entered a 16 month continuous program. Social workers were in high demand during wartime. I expected school would be "a piece of cake" for me. How quickly I was put in my place! I learned that social work was not an intellectual exercise but an emotional and self-examination process. My teachers included Gertrude Wilson, Gladys Ryland and Marion Hathaway. Ruby Pernel, Helen Northen, and Margaret Hartford were fellow

students, and Gisela Konopka was a year ahead of me. A galaxy of stars! After graduation I continued to use my group knowledge in a variety of settings including the Fresh Air Camp and nursery school.

My husband and I settled in New York in 1949 and I joined the staff of the Educational Alliance. This was an exciting experience - supervising graduate students from Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania as well as several department heads. I also worked with a large, dormant elderly population waiting to die and proud of having cemetery plots. I helped them to make the transition to being individuals who decided that paying advance dues of \$1 per year rather than 10-cents per month was a real bargain. I also helped to transform them from a soporific auditorium audience to putting on their own performances.

I was fortunate in the early stages of my career in having dynamic and encouraging mentors. In time all of my formative work experience - camp, group leader, nursery, administration, professional supervision prepared me to for my twenty-five plus years as

Associate Director of the Personnel Bureau of the Jewish Welfare Board, known today as the Jewish Community Centers Association. Being forthright and open with people, respecting individual differences, treating all people fairly and honestly, not betraying trust, and above all maintaining my integrity were hallmarks of my practice; and I was a strong advocate for the value of group work training.

The Jewish Community Center field has grown and changed, with new disciplines playing key roles. Group work, which in the early years had given it professional legitimacy, is no longer prominent. This is regrettable. The Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, recently celebrating its twentieth anniversary, has been a revival force for group work. Today Toronto is a "hotbed" of group work. Closer to home the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Social Work, whose group work department is led by Dr. Martin Birbaum, continues to do a remarkable job and is working to bring back group work as an important element of Jewish Center work.

Bessie Pine



BOOK BRIEFS

BUZZED: The straight facts about the most used and abused drugs from alcohol to ecstasy
by Cynthia Kuhn, Scott Swartzwelder, and Wilkie Wilson,
1998, Norton, 317 pages, \$14.95 paperback.

Buzzed takes the current psychological and pharmacological research on the use of legal and illegal drugs and makes it accessible to the general public. The book is divided into two parts, the first providing a wealth of information about drugs. The following general categories are included: alcohol, caffeine, enactogens, hallucinogens, herbal drugs, inhalants, marijuana, nicotine, opiates, sedatives, steroids, stimulants. Part II focuses on brain basics, drug basics, addiction, and legal issues. Finally, there is a 30 page glossary of drug-related street terms/slang words that is mind-blowing in what it suggests about this developing stream in our culture.

In a small red circle on the cover of the book, in bold print, are the words, "Just Say Know," a play on Nancy Reagan's famous drug prevention pronouncement of the early 1980's. The need for accurate knowledge is highlighted in the book's early pages, written by two college students. They conclude their reflections with the following, "We believe that when provided with an unbiased and authoritative source of information about drugs and drug interactions, individuals will be empowered to make healthy decisions."

Placing *Buzzed* on your bookshelf is a good start.

sore thumb
 some would call him:
 special
 he was the strongest
 the biggest
 the tallest
 after only 11 years on the planet.
 as the others dribbled
 passed shot gracefully
 he
 awkwardly
 swiped squealed
 shoved and finally
 sunk to his knees:
 breathing heavily:
 out of synch
 with the others:
 on and off the court.
 then he rolled on
 the floor like
 a beached whale.
 while the others dribbled
 around and over
 and through him

as
 if
 i
 n
 v
 i
 s
 i
 b
 l
 e.
 his dad arrived to find him
 rocking on a folding metal chair
 on the sidelines,
 his back to the others.
 he asked him why he wasn't on the court
 dribbling passing shooting with the others.
 the others don't want me to play with them
 whispered
 the sore thumb
 to his dad.
 andy malekoff

From the Steering Committee

I just started a new job as assistant director of social work at Schneider Children's Hospital. Accompanying me is substantial knowledge of child development gained from my year-and-a-half as a social worker at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center. I hope to combine this with my past experience in hospital pediatric units to spark the development of groups in my new setting.

What better place to run kids' groups than a children's hospital? It's a closed, self-contained environment with many potential, if involuntary, group members. Their needs may be physical due to medical illness, emotional due to mental illness, familial/social due to child abuse/neglect, or some combination of these. These are kids who often feel isolated, alienated, confused, and powerless.

Forming a group in a hospital must be purposeful. One common goal is to reduce isolation, fear, and confusion by creating forums in which children with common problems can raise questions and receive information. In an environment dominated by big people who sometimes inflict pain with scary instruments, it is important for children find refuge from the things that are being done to them, and to discover things that they can do for themselves and one another through mutual aid.

Children in hospital groups can share similar feelings and express fears without feeling like victims. They can advise, encourage, and support one another, reclaiming a sense of wholeness as they exercise what they have to offer among others.

I also hope to spark interest in developing groups

for family members of children who require acute or chronic hospitalization or ongoing outpatient medical services. Family members of these children also need to belong to a group of people who know what it's like when a child is ill and needs medical care. The parents and siblings of these children often view the world quite a bit differently than those with children who are carefree and unburdened with the uncertainty of chronic illness.

I hope that the social workers and social work interns that I get to know will "catch the group work fever" (an fever that requires no medication, just dedication!) Whether the larger group at the hospital (medical staff, administration, and so on) will be equally receptive, or should I say susceptible to catching such a fever remains to be seen. But that's another story for another day.

Michelle Laser

CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

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Call for Writers

As you have noticed, each issue of HUH?!? has a special feature called "Looking Back ... A Reminiscence." We are delighted to publish this absorbing and important experiential writing. If you would like to contribute an article for this column, please contact our Editor, Andrew Malekoff at (516) 626-1971.

Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth

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TIPS for: Problem Solving

It has been stated that problem solving and group work are almost inseparable, that one assumes the other. John Dewey, a leader in the early twentieth century progressive education movement developed a model for problem solving. His model includes the following components:

1. Sensing that a problem exists in the group
2. Identifying the problem
3. Exploring the problem in depth
4. Identifying possible solutions and obstacles
5. Choosing a solution, trying it, evaluating it.

TIP: Don't skip over or short change STEP #3, exploring the problem in depth in order to quickly get to solutions. For many children and youth step #3 is crucial in helping them to develop critical thinking and empathy by engaging in dialectical processes, give and takes, in which they thoughtfully consider others' views, opinions and experiences. This provides an opportunity to clarify values and to move towards integrative solutions to problems. It also helps kids practice putting some space between impulse and action.

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: Marion Levine, ACSW; Director of Program Development and Newsletter Editor: Andrew Malekoff, ACSW. Newsletter Design and Layout: Jane E. Mockwood-Yazdpour. Participating Agencies: Coalition on Child Abuse & Neglect, Hempstead; Youth Directions and Alternatives, Huntington; Horricks School District; Sanctuary Project, Huntington; Plainedge School District; L.I. Chapter/Assoc. for Advancement of Social Work With Groups; L.I. Crisis Center, Bellmore; Schneider Children's Hospital, New Hyde Park. Copyright January 1, 1999/USA.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

☒ **Call for Papers:** Symposium XXI - Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG), "Mining the Gold in Social Work with Groups." Deadline for submission of proposals: March 17th, 1999. For information please write to Cathryne Schmitz, GSSW, University of Denver, Denver Colorado 80208. The Symposium will be held October 21-24 in Denver, Colorado.

☒ **Join AASWG Today!** If you are not already a member, you are invited to join AASWG in support of its program of advocacy and action for group work practice, teaching, research, and publication. For application information call 1-800-807-0793 or email: jhramey@uakron.edu.

☒ **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 and \$25 for non-subscribers. This video is ideal for motivating the development of new groups in your agency and/or community and addresses the need for more and better groups for young people. Make checks payable and mail to North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; L.I. Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215; Attn: Jane E. Yazdpour.

☒ **May 7, 1999 8:30 to 11:30 AM: Handling Powerful Feelings Evoked in Children's and Adolescent Groups - A Participatory Workshop for Group Workers.** This workshop will help participants identify some of the powerful feelings that are evoked in group workers, explore how these feelings influence our behavior in the group, and search for ways to find expression for these feelings. Lead by Andrew Malekoff and Michelle Laser, the fee for this workshop is \$35. Please make check payable and mail to North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; LI Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, N.Y. 11577-2215; Attn: Jane Yazdpour.