



LONG ISLAND INSTITUTE FOR GROUP WORK WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH **HUH?!?**

a newsletter about working with children and youth in groups

Volume 7. Number 4.

September 11th Memorial Issue

Fall 2002

From the Editor

This issue of HUH?!? marks the one-year anniversary of one of our saddest chapters. In an earlier issue of the newsletter I wrote, "I believe that the culture of our formal (and informal) associations must accommodate to a new reality. In other words, we need to get to know one another in a new way. How this happens is critical. We need to integrate 9/11 into the fabric of our relationships, consciously and purposefully" (7:1).

I think about 9/11 everyday. I don't talk about it with everybody. I wonder if others think about it as much as I do. I don't mean only the people who were most directly impacted. I mean other people both nearby and far away. Especially kids. I wonder how often and in what way kids think about it.

I recently asked my 17-year old son Jamie who just graduated from high school if he still thinks about 9/11. He said he tries not to. Then he said, "What was supposed to be the best time of my life is no longer."

I asked my 13-year old son Darren who just

Fate or Fantasy

6:00 am
alarm goes off
wake up
do the usual
shower, brush teeth, drink coffee
get on the train
arrive at Penn Station
Take subway downtown to
chambers street
Look at my watch
Late
its 8:30
Try to get on every elevator
All used
Wait
5 minutes go by
finally get on elevator
100th floor
it's 8:35
in my office
turn on my computer
8:37
I put my head on my desk
The building shakes
I thought I was asleep
Immediately I look out my
window
All I see is a man in mid air
Tumbling
Screaming profanities
People crying
People screaming in shock
Rushing to get to stairs and
elevator
I hear the cry of children
I take another glance out my
window
More smoke and debris
People lying on the ground
Fire fighters and police officers
every where
Finally I get a feeling
We've been hit
A jet has hit the World Trade
Center

I Realize I don't have much time
So I jump
Down
And down
100 flights
I look in the windows as I go
Crying faces
People panicking
As I fall and fall it seems like an
eternity
Above me falling is my brother
He calls to me
What are you doing here
You must realize
Is this fantasy or your true fate
O my god
Sweating
I'm late for work
its 9 o'clock
Turn on my television
ABC
Lying in bed
Eyes closed
I hear "This just in...the North
tower has been hit by a jet
Plane"
I open my eyes and realize
Fate or Fantasy...
These words now haunt me until
I start to recover
Years have gone by
Therapy isn't working
I can't take it any more
I jump off of the empire state
building
While dropping
I hear
Fate or fantasy...you choose
once again my worst fear has not
yet ended
But it has just begun.

by Darren Malekoff, 13
June 2002

This poem appears in *Captured Visions*, a poetry chapbook published by Captured Press of Long Beach - publisher@capturedpress.com

graduated from middle school if he thinks about it. He reminded me, "Remember Dad, I saw it in school live on TV. Do you have any idea what that does to you?" He didn't elaborate. Later he showed me an "extra credit" poem that he wrote for school in June. He calls it *Fate or Fantasy*.

I know that across the US and around world there are more than enough awful things for kids to think about, to try to cope with on a daily basis. I know that there is more suffering in the world than what 9/11 has wrought. But I still wonder, do the kids you know still think about 9/11? What do they say? How do they say it? Who listens?

Andy

Special Note: Photos that appear throughout this issue were taken of artifacts placed around St. Paul's Chapel at Trinity Church, adjacent to Ground Zero in New York City. They are just a few of the contributions made by groups, world-wide, who took action to lend their support in the aftermath of 9/11.

★ Photos By Andrew Malekoff

Tools of the Trade: *The Grief Box*®

The Grief Box is a group activity that was created in an effort to help the children of the 9/11 disaster (ages four to sixteen) label and understand feelings associated with grief and to separate grief feelings from normal, everyday feelings. For example, there were times that group members would put "anxiety" in their box. When we discussed it we discovered that is wasn't anxiety they were feeling, but fear. Then again, the anxiety might have been in the box because they were worried about a test they would be taking the next day in school. This would then open the door to discuss the differences between grief feelings and other feelings and how grief feelings can complicate the other feelings. The activity was used each week and helped members to think about how their feelings are driven and how the intensity of these feelings can change. Following is a description of the Grief Box.

Goal of Activity: To identify the various feelings associated with grief; to conceptualize the concepts of containment, change, and varying intensities of feelings; and to provide a concrete tool for a very elusive concept that can be used weekly, does not require verbal participation, and can provide the group worker with an ongoing evaluative device.

Recommended Population:

Children and teens ages five - eighteen years
Recommended Number of Participants: 1 to 12+
Length of Time Allotted: First session 1 - 1½ hours. Each succeeding session 15 minutes maximum.

Supplies Needed:

- 1 Ziplock, Soup & Salad 24 fl. oz. Storage Container With Lid per individual
- 1 Large Box for Storage of Fabric Strips
- Paint Pens
- 1 12x15" Cardboard Sheet to Create a Master Grief Feelings Chart
- 1 Mini Grief Box Feelings Chart per Box
- Fabric coordinating with the grief feelings chart, cut into strips approx. 1 ½" wide and 4" long.

(The amount of fabric needed depends on the size of the group but we began with ½ yards per color and this accommodated approx. 20 children.)

- Fear = Black, Charcoal, Grey
- Anger = Red, Dark Pink, Lt. Pink
- Sadness = Navy Blue, Blue, Lt. Blue
- Loneliness = Dark Purple, Purple, Violet
- Anxiety = Pumpkin, Orange, Peach
- Jealousy = Forest Green, Green, Mint Green
- Guilt = Earth Brown, Lt. Brown, Tan
- Numbness = White
- Hope = Golden Yellow, Lemon, Pale Yellow

Detailed Instructions: The group worker needs to prepare for the project by:
 (1) Cutting the fabric into the appropriate strip sizes,
 (2) Creating a master grief

feelings chart for group use, and (3) Replicating the master grief feelings chart into individual "mini grief feelings charts" for each child's Grief Box.

The activity proceeds by orienting participants to the concept of grief feelings. Various feelings associated with grief are discussed. The nature of these feelings are described as dynamic, sometimes changing from day-to-day or week-to-week. Examples are drawn from group members' personal experiences to illustrate.

Group members are introduced to the idea of conceptualizing their grief as a box that exists within themselves, a box of feelings over which they can have some control. The group worker discusses how the feelings in the box can overflow if they are ignored, enabling them to grow in size and intensity. It is emphasized that the box will never be empty, as we never get completely over our grief; but by understanding and identifying and working with grief-related feelings,

they can become softer, more familiar, and less powerful.

Each week when group members come to group they start by looking in their grief box and thinking about the feelings they have represented in it and think back to the past week to determine if those feelings still represent how they feel. It is important to help group members note when they do make changes, providing they are willing to talk about their feelings. If they feel a lot of a specific feeling they should put as many strips of the representative feeling color as they want into the box. For example if anger is described as boiling, they may fill the whole box with red strips. Discussion about the feelings in their box can be very helpful for young group members, but it is not essential to the effectiveness of the activity.

Alternative Goals: This tool helps participants build a better understanding of feelings in general, of understanding the ever changing nature of

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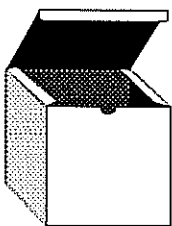
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feelings, and of building a vocabulary that enables them to identify and express their feelings.
Alternative Designs: The Trauma Box, The Feelings Box

General Comments:

Experience with this activity has revealed that feelings of anger and fear predominate. It is recommended that extra fabric representative of these feelings be available. It also may be helpful to have the group members create other feelings/states they experience by creating color combinations that they feel are representative. For example, in a 9/11 Children's Bereavement Group (ages 8-12), they created 2 feelings, 'Happy' which they felt was represented by pink and purple stapled together, and 'Being More Adult' is a state they represented by red, white & blue stapled together.

Kathi Morse
is coordinator of the Schnurmacher Family Bereavement & Trauma Center at "The Cottage" of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center and coordinator of the crisis counseling component of the agency's Project Liberty services.

Grief Box © Kathi Morse, ACSW, 2001.



On the Bookshelf

We are now alive in a time that will forever be known as "Post 9/11." The events of the past year will be etched in our consciousness for the rest of our lives. Some of our children will also carry frightful images with them throughout their lives - the very youngest may be spared this burden. But, life as we knew it just one year ago can never return. Innocence is lost and the culture in which we live is now one of vulnerability.

When we think of all that we have lived through this year, it seems most fitting that those among us who are gifted artists and talented professionals should come forward now to make a permanent record of these historical times. And that is exactly what is happening. Artists and front-line professionals from all disciplines are working - contributing their impressions, insights, and talents as chroniclers of a finite moment in time.

One such journal comes to us in the form of personal memoirs of those who responded to the call for help that fateful day. A special memorial issue of "Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping," edited by Alex Gitterman and Andrew Malekoff, is a dramatic body of narratives collected from human services workers. These narratives from persons who experienced and responded to the victims of 9/11 offer stories of great courage, unfathomable human tragedy, and professional empathy coupled with skill and expertise. When reading these pieces one can only feel a sense of thankfulness that professionals of this caliber were there at the time they were needed most.

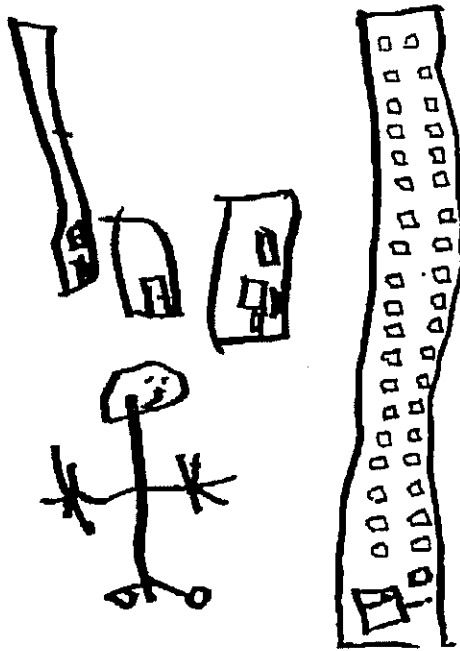
Just as the professionals responded with descriptions of their work and feelings, several artists have joined together to present a soft cover book called: "9/11 Artists Respond," and a second book from the world's finest comic book writers and artists entitled "9-11 Stories to Remember." These collections are powerful, astonishing, and completely heartbreaking. We all know the power of art but these books fulfill the artists' promise in multi-faceted ways combining a kind of dark humor, with pathos, and a way of revealing humanity that will forever be tied up with the overwhelming human tragedy that was September 11th, 2001.

If you can bear it - read these accounts - if you can bear it. It will not be easy. So often we live through events that, in retrospect, are thought of as "history" but we never pay attention to them in the actual moment. This time we are forced to pay attention. Perhaps that is as it should be. This time it is different. Perhaps it is time for everyone to be "on the front lines" - paying attention - even as we weep.

Jane E. Meckwood-Yazdpour

- ☐ The memorial issue of "Reflections" will be available after 9/11/02 from: California State University at Long Beach; Attn: J.Jimenez; 1250 Bellflower Blvd.; Long Beach, Ca. 90840; Softcover Copy: \$10.
- ☐ "9-11 Artists Respond"; Chaos! Comics, Dark Horse Comics, and Image; January 2002; Milwaukee, Oregon; Softcover, \$9.95.
- ☐ "9-11 Comic Book Writers and Artists Tell Stories to Remember"; DC Comics; 2002; New York, NY; Softcover, \$9.95.

Chris wants to be an Architect.



by Chris DeBique, 5, Uniondale, NY

This drawing was composed in the Spring of 2002 for Chris' preschool yearbook. According to Chris' mom, after 9/11 his play included making buildings out of Leggos and knocking them down with toy airplanes. Now he wants to be an architect.

I'm Better! Thank You

Ten months ago, September 11, 2001, my world came crashing down around me. In the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt, it was "a day that will live in infamy". I live in Manhattan, not far from ground zero, and I witnessed, first hand, the acrid smoke, the thousands of people wandering around aimlessly, and the frightening continuous wail of police cars and fire engines. This all paled when I learned that my beloved son-in-law perished on the plane that crashed into the Pentagon. He was a 40-year-old attorney, my daughter's husband, and the father of their 11-year-old twin sons. Everything I held dear was ripped from me. My country was attacked, my family was shattered, and the security that we all hold so dear, was shaken. I never felt so helpless in all my life.

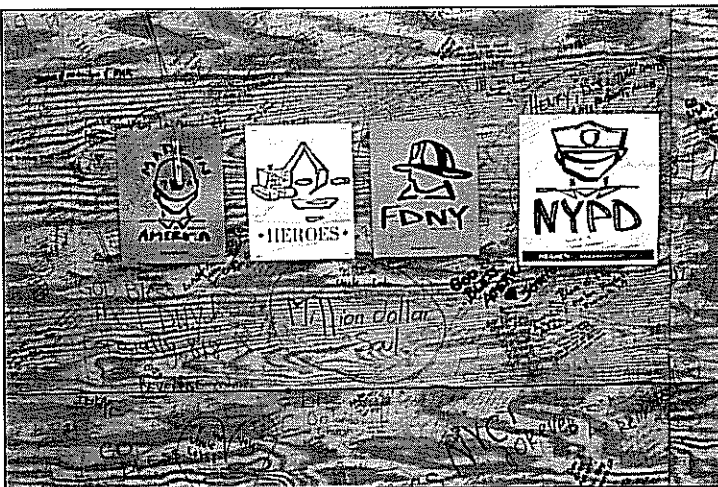
Desperately, I tried to find some way to put the pieces together. I found out about a bereavement group sponsored by Project Liberty at the North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center. At my first meeting, I saw a group of devastated and disconnected parents who had lost a child or child-

in-law. Each of us was so deep in sorrow that we hardly noticed the person sitting on either side of us. Men and women spent the whole time crying and agonizing about their terrible loss. Even though we spent the major part of our time together in tears, we were driven to come back again and again. We expressed our anger. We expressed our desperation. How could we help the surviving mate, fiancé, sibling or grandchild? At each session, Michelle Spataro (group worker), would ask, "How have the past two weeks been for you?" We answered one by one. What we said ranged from "awful" to "worse" to "worse than before" to "how much worse can it get?" Everyone lamented, "Nothing is helping!"

At first we got advice on immediate ways to get past the nightmares, the sleepless nights and the constant images of our lost loved ones that flooded our minds. Some wrote journals, some wrote letters and some snapped the rubber bands on their wrists to bring them back to reality.

We got through Easter/Passover, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Birthdays and

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Mission Statement: Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children & Youth

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.

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

Steering Committee: Aimee Colton; Roseline Felix; Toni Kolb; Michelle Laser; Stacey Levin; Nicole Mogavera; Maureen O'Connor; Catherine Papell; Andrew Peters; Carol Sutker

Six Brave Children and the Magic of Group Work

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anniversaries. We expressed joy when babies were born into families of group members. We expressed sorrow at other deaths that occurred in the families. That devastated group, so very disconnected 10 months ago has become a cohesive group, almost like a family. In spite of our very busy lives we all still make a concerted effort to attend meetings. We miss each other if we are not all present. Michelle calls us if we do not let her know that we will be absent.

Now instead of crying, we await positive news of how we have fared since the last session. It is not always a steady uphill track, but we are healing those very deep wounds, which 10 months ago seemed to be unhealable.

Had we not had our group, which is almost like family, we would have been alone, and not had the power to realize that many individuals have the same sorrows, fears, and inadequacies that we are struggling with. We can now offer comfort to each other. We share all news and information regarding 9/11. Talking about our experiences within our families brings smiles and sometimes a few tears. We have learned that painful situations are not unique to the one who is living it. We all have those painful situations.

We have a long way to go, but speaking for myself, I think I have hit bottom and I am now on the way up.

Gabriele Levy

Their moms said, "I'm very worried ...they're not talking about what happened... I don't know what they are thinking and feeling... they don't really want to be in the group... they said they're not going to talk."

"Great, this should be easy," I thought. "Then again, isn't this what most group workers face when starting a children's group." I was concerned. It had only been 4 months since the attack on the World Trade Center. Although the literature recommends that a 4 to 5 month period pass before beginning bereavement counseling, this felt different. In hindsight I realize that many of us, adults who hadn't lost anyone on 9/11, were still numb. What kind of pain were these children dealing with? I had some idea. My father died when I was a young adolescent. Could a group really help? I started to question my faith in "the magic of group work."

Group meeting one: six children ages 7 through 11 are present. There is no pretense about why they are there. They share the same pain, more than they ever should have to feel. A brave little girl introduced herself. Without hesitation she said, "My daddy was down at the World Trade Center on September 11th. That's why I'm here - so I can be with other kids whose daddys died there too."

As the group meetings progressed the strength, empathy,

resilience, fear, grief, determination and, most of all, hope shined through. They spoke of the possibility of future attacks, concerns about whether their moms could handle the loss, and their own feelings of fear now that daddy isn't around to protect them.

They shared wonderful memories of family, mementos that remind them of dad, dad's favorite colors, and activities and hobbies they enjoyed with dad. They struggled with their dads' bodies not being found, their dads being hailed as heroes, and feeling different from "kids who have dads."

The young group members helped each other tolerate the overwhelming sense of hurt in the room. They stressed to each other that they ARE kids who have dads. "We just can't see them anymore," one of the children said softly.

They talked while they played. There was rarely a lull in the conversation. They spoke in ways that no 7, 8, 9, 10, or 11 year old should have to. They also laughed, danced, and sang. Friendships formed. They made sure that a member going to sleep-away camp would have the

materials necessary to complete her section of a memorial quilt that the kids would be creating over the summer.

The group members reminded one another that their dads would be so happy and proud to see them able to laugh and have fun. They said they hoped that their moms could have fun again - some day.

So what happened to the kids who didn't want to be in a group and said they'd never talk? The "magic of group" changed that. And what of my questions and doubts? Six extremely brave children restored my faith.

Judy Esposito
is triage coordinator at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center and crisis counselor in the agency's Project Liberty program.



"First 9/11 and now this...": When Tragedy Strikes the Classroom

I was at my desk when I received the call. "A priest was shot and killed in church. The students in the (parochial) school attached to the church are in lock-down. The police are trying to apprehend the suspect." "We could use your help in working with the kids tomorrow morning."

"Sure," I instinctively replied, "just tell me where and when?" (Oh my God, now what?, I thought to myself.)

I gathered staff from our triage and early childhood services and started to plan with our Executive Director. We agreed that we would meet with the students in their naturally formed groups – their classes. This made perfect sense. Kids are most comfortable in groups of their peers. We thought this setting would help them to defuse, a safe place where they could talk and listen.

We requested that teachers be present. On the day following our meetings with the students we would return to debrief the faculty.

The experience was powerful. The murder of their beloved priest and a faithful parishioner occurred only months after 9/11. There had also been a neighborhood robbery-hoisting incident a few weeks prior to the shooting. Even before that students were shaken as a sense of safety in their secure, cozy community gradually eroded.

My co-workers and I divided the ten classrooms, pre-K through

8th grade. We introduced ourselves and stated the purpose of our meeting: to provide an opportunity to talk about the tragic event. Some of the questions we asked were: Where were you?; What were you told about what was happening?; What were you thinking, feeling, and experiencing physically?

One by one their stories unfolded. "I was scared, we couldn't leave the class." "I knew something bad happened, I thought someone fell... I saw emergency workers outside." "I knew someone had died, the flag was being lowered to half mast." "I knew my Dad was worried, he was outside, he came from work." "I was worried about my sister in the kindergarten class." "I was angry at my teacher for not telling us what was going on." "I thought this priest was going to marry me when I grew up."

In time the larger, contextual trauma emerged. "First it was the World Trade Towers, then the neighborhood store, and now our priest in our school... It doesn't feel safe anymore.... This used

to be a safe neighborhood." "The world's not safe." "My parents were crying last night, I couldn't sleep." Some children couldn't speak and were allowed to "pass." Frequently though, they would speak up later as the supportive feeling of participating in a mutual aid group took hold. The children felt like they were "in the same boat." Some drew pictures and others spoke. One boy drew a picture of Jesus Christ with one teardrop running down his cheek. We encouraged the children to use all forms of expression: music, art, poetry, dance, writing, talking, and moving.

Our experience of the world has changed. Trauma has a cumulative effect. We know that trauma can make one feel helpless, hopeless, and isolated. Group work can be an effective counterforce. It can help members feel empowered, hopeful, and connected.

Some of the students' initial feelings of anger at teachers quickly changed to appreciation, as they recounted feeling protected in their

classrooms. They felt a sense of community as they shared stories of their experiences and reactions. We identified helpers in the school during this crisis, as well as community helpers past, present, and future. This is similar to what we did with children and youth in schools in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. We explored coping techniques and ways that the students could transform their individual pain into action.

Many considered writing letters to the media to express their outrage regarding the intrusiveness of cameras and reporters. They discussed acts of kindness that could be taken to support the widower of the murdered parishioner. They spoke of ways in which they could memorialize their beloved priest. To my amazement regarding the power of groups with kids, a student who had been identified as "a very troubled kid, schizophrenic(!)" and who was distracted during the group discussion (he had a nosebleed), raised his hand with tissue to nose and suggested, "Why don't we have a Father _____ Day?" Everyone nodded in agreement. Once again, a student's strength emerged and hope sprang from tragedy. That's what keeps us going. Thank God and ...thank group.

Michelle Laser
is director of school-community collaboratives at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center and coordinator of the outreach component of the agency's Project Liberty services.



Report: PROJECT LIBERTY

As the anniversary of September 11th approaches it seems an appropriate time to reflect on what we've learned about therapeutic interventions from the research conducted as part of Project Liberty.

Program evaluation is an important part of the research program at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center. Quantitative data, the kind most researchers collect, is useful and reasonably objective. It provides counts of the number of people who agree with different statements and allows the researcher to provide hard statistics. But it is usually the softer qualitative data that fleshes out that portrait and turns numbers into people. It is also very useful in providing context and insight.

• The Children

The Numbers

We know that the average age of children receiving services as part of Project Liberty was 11 years of age. Females were somewhat over-represented (58%) compared to males (42%). The children were receiving services because they had lost a parent (93%), almost always someone who had worked in the Towers. Many of the children were exposed to the events through the media (79%). As a result of their experiences the children were reported (usually by the mother) as having at least somewhat severe problems (71%).

Parents reported being very satisfied (71%) with the services of Project

Liberty, most often group counseling (93%). They further felt that the services were helping the child in several areas. Children were judged to be at least somewhat better in controlling their anger (50%), feeling more in control and hopeful about the future (62%), being in a more positive mood (64%), relating better to friends (50%), feeling secure (50%). In addition, 57% were judged to be functioning overall at least somewhat better as a result of receiving services.

Children don't cope with this kind of tragedy alone. When asked about the support their children were receiving significant levels of support from friends, school, parents, and siblings were reported. Over 90% were judged to be receiving at least good support from these sources.

• The Comments

Their comments told us something about the way these mothers (and most were the sole surviving parent) were handling the situation. Some talked about the importance of counseling for preventing future problems. Another parent noted "There was no apparent problem. My child is functioning daily, but I don't think she is truly facing what happened." And several others echoed the sentiment that the children just weren't talking about the loss of their fathers. A similar idea was that the services were important because their children were able to talk to others who were in the same situation.

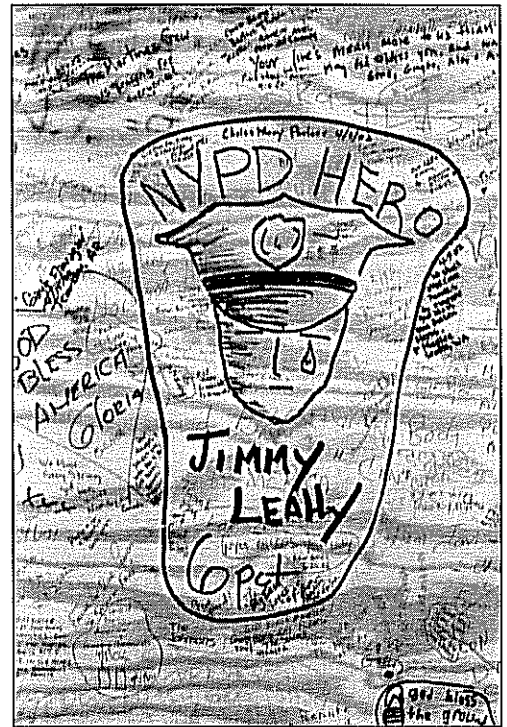
• The Adults The Numbers

The adults receiving services through Project Liberty were women (94%) who had lost a husband (59%), although some had lost a child (18%). They were receiving group (94%) and individual counseling (47%), and were very satisfied (94%) with these services. As a result of these services the respondents reported being at least somewhat better able to control their anger (53%), pay attention (41%), be in a more positive mood (53%), and generally function at a somewhat better level (56%).

• The Comments

Not everyone came to help themselves. Several reported that they were concerned with helping their children cope and not all of these children were youngsters left fatherless. Some were adult daughters who had lost a husband. One mother reported that she was trying to "keep my emotions stable" and to "help my daughter through grieving."

Several mothers indicated that they knew this was not going to be a "quick fix" situation. One mother who had reported that she was feeling worse since receiving services noted "I feel worse because the shock is wearing off. I look



forward to our group meetings. They make me realize I'm not going crazy." Another noted "Basically it is good knowing the support is there at the Guidance Center, but day to day functioning is still in a 'treading water' mode."

• What We Have Learned

In some ways, we've learned the obvious. Services are helping as parents struggle to cope for themselves and to be there for their children of all ages. But we also suspect that services can't fix everything instantly. Grief has to be faced and worked through, and being with others walking the same road helps.

Neala Schwartzberg
is coordinator of Research Services at North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center.



