

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

a newsletter about working with children and youth in groups

Volume 6. Number 1.

❖ Sixth Year of Publication ❖

Winter 2001

From the Editor

In a recent issue of *HUH?!?*, *From the Editor* was devoted to evaluation of group work. Following is a response and point of view from one of our readers.

Dear Editor,

You raise a perennial and most important challenge about our work with groups: "Do you ever wonder if the groups you are working with are benefiting the members?" (*HUH?!?*, 5:3, Summer, 2000).

I started working with a group at Madison House on NYC's Lower East Side in 1937. I learned something vital from that meaningful experience that has been part of my group work philosophy and practice ever since: Time is an important part of the process.

By time I do not mean the here and now, rather the need to view the member's growth developmentally to determine what impact the group, the worker and the agency has had upon this individual. Or what did these relationships and experiences mean to the member and how has he/she incorporated such learning into his/her social functioning. (Of course) there are many problems in terms of measurement, the major one being how much change can be attributed to that group experience.

In my settlement work I formed lasting relationships with adolescents and came into frequent contact with their families and them in the community. They shared their experiences, hopes, problems

and joys with the adult they perceived was interested in them. It was an opportunity to hear, see and feel growth and change.

I worked at the NYC Association for the Help of Retarded Children as Director of Group Work and Camping from 1958 to 1964. Our group work and camp program was integrated in the many community agencies serving the five boroughs in NYC. Since 1964 I have attended the agency's annual banquet and meet and renew old friendships with these young adults and adults and their parents. I listen to their accounts of their jobs, their vacations and their community and family life. Empirically I feel that X (group work) has made a positive difference in their lives. But how do I, all of us, measure their social construction of their reality? One of my greatest areas of learning was that for these individuals with cognitive and physical handicapping conditions what was important was their social skills. It was here that group work really made an impact.

A recent experience offered another perspective. I worked as a counselor at Surprise Lake Winter Camp (often called Eddie Cantor Camp), a nine month program for pre-adolescent and early adolescent boys who were sent to "camp" for

health reasons or as a wonderful substitute for foster care as their families were under stress. As a result of my ongoing contact with several of the campers we organized a reunion which was held in the fall of 1998. Men and their families came from all over the country, men who had not seen each other since the 1930's and early 1940's.

The meaning and significance of these experiences of 50 and 60 years ago, where groups played a crucial role, was delightful. The men shared with each other and the family members presented the joys and delights of living in a small, caring community located in a beautiful valley near Cold Spring, New York. Obviously more rigorous measurements must be taken for another reason, to see if monies were properly spent.

My criticism of today's group work scene is that there is too much turnover in staff thereby limiting the development of more meaningful relationships. And there are limited continuing opportunities for furthering these already established friendships.

In teaching undergraduate and graduate social work students I always stressed that our purpose as group workers was not to develop a "good group" but

rather to create opportunities for individual growth that would sustain the members in their progress through life.

Meyer Schreiber, DSW, is a retired academic who was a group work practitioner in settlements, community centers, unions (the United Auto Workers) and community agencies and institutions serving individuals with developmental disabilities.

Dear Reader,

In our last issue we asked our readers to subscribe to *HUH?!?* and we said that this subscription would be a vote for *HUH?!?* to continue. Your response was very positive and, as we begin our sixth year of publication we would like to extend our thanks to our many devoted

readers. (A subscription application can be found on page 3.)

Now, we are delighted to introduce a new feature called the "Parental Pause Page." This will be an occasional feature in *HUH?!?*. We hope that it will be of interest to our readers. An idea of the Board of Directors of NSC&FGC, the "Parental Pause Page" begins with this issue.

Editor



Looking Back ... A Reminiscence Youth Groups: Groups for Life Reminiscing and Moving On By: Judy Lee

This is the 15th
feature in a
continuing series

It has come full circle. Natural and formed groups were my haven as a child and teenager. Soon I moved from the receiving end to the giving end of normative group services for children and teens. I began my career working with children's groups and I am working with them now. Ironically, I sometimes feel less able now than I did when I was only a few years older than the group members. Then, I felt too young! Now I feel too old at 57, crossing decades to get into their shoes with expanding feet that are too large. Yet the kids are good about reaching out to help me.

I am learning about living in Southwest Florida through the eyes of children who face poverty

I am learning about living ... through the eyes of children who face poverty and violence on a daily basis while vacationers enjoy Gulf beaches, breezes, and paradise a few exits away.

and violence on a daily basis while vacationers enjoy Gulf breezes and paradise a few exits away on I-75. Antoine, a dark, tall, heavy-set, somewhat slow adolescent is an Assistant Leader in the AFCAAM Community Day Camp in Fort Meyers. On an outing that required a lot of walking in the heat, Antoine put

his arm around my shoulder half leaning on me and half holding me up while he shared his wisdom. (The Southern, distinctly Florida, dialect that poor kids of all races and cultures speak here is different than Northern "Black English" and requires effort to understand.) "Miss Judy you gotta watch the bugs here cause yo' leg is all et up. Put on some big ol' socks. You good wit the kids cause you don't take no stuff but you love them. And you and Miss Judy B. (my partner who is on the AFCAAM staff) always be takin kids our for a treat in yo van. I love my neighborhood but I hate the gun shots. We gotta teach the kids not to be so violent to stop this mess. I fittin to leave when I turn 18 but I don't know where to go. I wish

we could stay on this outin' foever." I told him that I remembered that feeling very well cause I felt

that way about my neighborhood growing up too. We both sat on the ground to rest and he rested his head on my shoulder as the others gathered around. I told about my favorite group, my church group growing up in Brooklyn, New York.

I said I was my mother's only child and

the youngest in my grandmother's household and I was sometimes lonely for the company of other kids, especially as a teenager. Antoine said he felt that way too. I said that my friends were like brothers and sisters, and they still are, as almost all of my family have "passed." My best friends were Bubba (now Dr. Barbara Jean Ballard, Professor of History at

Marymount Manhattan) and Willy (Dr. William Wallace, MD, PhD.) Willy lived in the Projects two blocks away and Bubba lived across the street. The Projects had gangs and one day we saw a schoolmate shot to death by a "zip gun" right on our street. I explained "zip gun" adding that guns are worse now and so are drugs, but all guns kill. Our church group kept a lot of kids away from violence, a specter hovering over all poor neighborhoods. "You all wuz really poor?" they asked. "WE were," I answered "in money, but not in love." I said, one lean year none of us had winter coats, but Willy started to work when he turned 14 and brought us lots of goodies. (Barbara worked at 16 and I started at 17 as a youth worker for the Parks Department and the PAL.) We all

belonged to the church youth group that met every Saturday night and we also took a lot of outings.

Our leaders were Dave and Mel, a dynamic and loving black and white co-pastor team, and Grace Thorpe, a first generation Bajian-American woman a few years older than our

I love my neighborhood but I hate the gun shots. We gotta teach the kids not to be so violent to stop this mess. I fittin' to leave when I'm 18 but I don't know where to go.

oldest youth. Strong, brilliant, and beautiful with energy and faith that shined in her eyes when she smiled, Grace and our Pastors and a host of elders like Mrs. Violetta Bowman who mentored me in teaching Sunday School when I was 14 and still mentors me today although she's almost 90, became our role models for faith, for serving others, and for going to college. We had up to eighteen to twenty kids in our group, but maybe twelve of us who came all of the time.

Taking trips by car was a rare treat for this inner city youth group. A very old church member gave Grace his long outdated, but large, Ford and this was a magic car. Like the clowns endlessly emerging from the VW at the circus, the whole group could fit into this

» *Continued from Page 2.*
 car. It gave new meaning to the concept "close." Grace was a new driver and we would roar as she ran up a curb onto a sidewalk or sped down a one-way street. ("Y'all had sidewalks? What's dat?") I added "thankfully we lived through it and became (almost literally) cohesive - stuck together. "Forever?" asked Gene wrinkling his nose. "Forever," I answered. "Just this year we had a party in New York and some of the group was there!" "Awesome," said Devonda, "they must be as old as you!" "Old as water," I said and laughed.

A scientist, Grace

loved nature and our favorite trips were to the New York side of the Palisades or Pelham Bay in the Bronx. We had picnics and waded in the water and climbed forbidden cliffs, once getting a JD ticket from the police. "Wuz dat bay like the Caloosahatchee River, Miss Judy?" "Yes something like it." "Did y'all go to jail?" "No." "Did y'all stay 'til dark time?" asked Fernando. "Yes, and most importantly, we got out of the hot city where you could fry eggs on the sidewalk. "Hot like here?" asked Rogelio. "Nothing's hot like here," I answered to their

laughter. "Why you turn purple in the face in the sun, Miss Judy?" asked Laura. "She's jus gettin usta here," said Antoine. "And you are all helping me a lot. Thank you!" I answered.

Although I can no longer fit into their shoes, I thoroughly enjoy working with the young people at AFCAAM Community. I've worked with a co-ed preteen group and another natural group of six boys (seven through 13 years old) (and two little sisters) that I co-lead with Judy. As when I grew up in the Church, there are many outings. What is different now is the wisdom of years, including clinical wisdom that I bring to this normative setting. The kids' issues range from elective mutism to profound grief over a murdered father to living with racial and cultural discrimination, poverty, poor schools, violence, sex, drugs, and just plain adolescence. I am happy

to join a team that provides the love, empowerment, inspiration, and place to grow that I experienced as a teen in a similar setting. We are building the beloved community from the bottom up. It has come full circle.

Dr. Judith A.B. Lee is Professor Emerita at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. She has recently completed a revision of "The Empowerment Approach to Social Work Practice: Building the Beloved Community" to be published Fall-2001 by Columbia University Press.

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.

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LOOK

APRIL 18, 2001; 9 to 11 AM - A special workshop presented by the L.I. Chapter of AASWG - *Activities in Groups: A Clinical Perspective*. At Adelphi University; Garden City Campus. For registration information contact Catherine Papell (718) 461-7043 or Loretta Hartley-Bangs (631) 226-2866 or online at: LIAASWG@YAHOO.COM

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TIPS: For promoting group work when you are a guest in a host setting

It is not always easy to work as a guest in a system that has an unfamiliar institutional culture. A group worker who spends part or all of one's day in environments outside of their home setting may feel isolated, misunderstood, and off balance from time to time. This is especially so in places where experience with group work is limited or restricted to programmed curricula and cook book approaches to addressing a laundry list of social ills.

TIP: Go slow. Study the culture of the foreign setting. Identify obstacles. Seek allies. Find common ground. Be prepared to articulate group work principles and gradually introduce your ideas about potential groups. Be ready to offer a trial run at forming a needed group. Include a means for evaluating and reporting on your work to those who have the potential to be influential in sanctioning future group services. Go slow.

RESOURCES

♦ For information about HIV/AIDS peer education presented through theater, song, dance and interactive modules in language that a young adult can relate to contact: Alicia Figueras, coordinator of S.T.O.M.P. (Students Teaching Others Managed Prevention) at the Nassau County Department of Health, HIV Bureau at 1-516-571-2019.

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Literature Corner

"The Power of Group Work with Youth: Creating Activists of the Future"
by Bernard Wohl, *Social Work with Groups*, Volume 22, Number 4, 2000, pp. 3-13.

Bernard Wohl, formerly Executive Director of Goddard-Riverside Community Center in New York City, originally presented this paper as a keynote address at a conference organized by the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth in Melville, NY (October 29, 1999). Wohl's plea is for a blending of the near things of individual change and the far things of social reform in our group work with youth. He describes the NIKE give back campaign as an illustration of social group work-social action that strengthens individuals. In his own words, "Youngsters fighting city-wide for a youth budget commensurate with their urgent needs is a long stretch. Fighting the exploitation of Asian women by the Nike corporation, giving back their sneakers as a signal they reject complicity in that injustice, is an even longer stretch for kids today. But the global world is upon them, and upon us who work with them, to weave together the near and the far." (For information about *Social Work with Groups*, a quarterly journal, contact Haworth Press 1-800-342-9678 or check with your local university library).

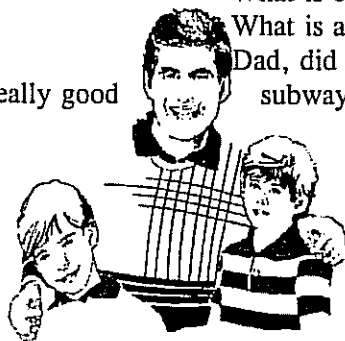
PARENTAL PAUSE PAGE HUH?!?

Parental Pause Page (PPP) is an occasional page dedicated to parents of teens and pre-teens. PPP is a brainstorm of the Board of Directors of North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center who are regular readers of HUH?!? We thought that readers could share the PPP page with parents. After all, collaboration with parents is a key ingredient of good group work. As PPP takes shape we hope to provide parents, as well as group workers, with a little inspiration and a few tips. To kick it off for the New Year here is something autobiographical that I wrote for a parenting workshop a couple of years ago. Our two sons were 9 and 12 at the time.

Two weeks in my life

Can I take the bus to the mall?
When are you going to take me off restriction on AOL?
You don't trust me, do you?
Why don't you trust me?
I want to make a web page.
 Who is that girl who has been calling you?
Oh, just someone I met at a concert.
 Tell her not to call after 10:00 p.m.
Will you drive me and my friends to a concert in
 Elmont?
It's okay there's no alcohol at this one.
 Who are you talking to on the computer?
My girlfriend, she's 15.
 Oh?
Yeah I have lots of girlfriends on my buddy list. They're
 all older.
 Why would they want anything to do with you?,
 you're only nine.
I tell them I'm 15.
Can I take the train into the City?
Why did you rent me Hercules? That movie sucks.
I told you that I don't want any movies that are
 under PG13.
 Why is that?
Dad, because I'm not a baby.
 But the video store guy said it's really good
Oh yeah sure. Who is he anyway?
 What's wrong?
Nothing.
 It doesn't look that way.

I said nothing. Leave me alone.
 Is your book bag packed?
 Look at your room.
 Who carved these initials in your chair?
 Don't you have any respect for your things?
 If you don't then maybe we shouldn't get you
 anything.
Can I get a better stereo?
Can I have money for CDs?
 Who bought this big bag of candy?
I need it for snack for after school.
 I don't want you buying all this candy.
Why not? I won't eat it all at once.
What's for dinner?
Chicken again?!?
How come I never get to choose when we go out to eat?
Are Carl and Mary next door divorced?
I never see the blue car in front of their house anymore?
 I told you not to eat gum with your braces.
My stomach hurts. Can I stay home today? I'm going to
 throw up.
Is grandpa going to die?
What is chemotherapy?
What is an unveiling?
Dad, did you hear about the guy who put germs on the
 subway in New York City and killed some people?



andy malekoff

Why group work is a threat

group work

makes **noise**

looks m

e ss y

mo ves a bout

shares = clout

gets close

creates space

welcomes fears

frees tear

s

u

stands p

speaks **out**

respects c h o i c e

gives voice

by andy malekoff -- October 2000



I Crossed the Bridge

In the 35th year of my life
I crossed the bridge.
It was the year I became
The mother of a teenaged daughter.
And the world became different
because I saw it through new eyes.



And suddenly
furs were murder instead of
fervently desired and

cigarettes were cancer instead of
"cool" and

diamonds were "yucky" but
turquoise had "resonance" and

everything was turned upside down
because things were no longer
"groovy" but instead they were "phat"

and I heard myself saying things I
swore I would never say and

why couldn't she please at least
drive the car in the parking lot before
she turned 16?

That was the year I crossed the bridge
that went from "hip" to "wack"
And nothing would ever be the same

Jane E. Meckwood-Yazdpour

CLIQUEs

*They're snooty and conceited.
They think that they're all that.
They make me want to puke.
Will I ever be like that?*

by Tori Neu, 10 years old