

# HUH ?!?

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

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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 Inside-Out*

By now all new subscribers to HUH?!!? have received the 17-page report, "A Sense of Alienation or Belonging...Building Bridges Through Group Involvement." The research results were first made public at an intergenerational conference organized by the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth. In addition to presenting the research results, the conference was structured to explore ways to make group work with youth more available, comfortable and effective. Through an integrated large and small group format 100 people (parents, group workers, and youth) exchanged ideas, experiences and recommendations. Following are the thoughts of a youth participant and an adult participant during the small group segment of the day.

➤ **Thoughts of a young person:** "The leader wants me to share my experiences being in a group? Where? At school? Yeah right! Everyone there sees me as "bad" and that's all they see. Bad grades and big clothes. That's me. At least through their eyes. That's all they see. But do they really know me? Do they really see me? Maybe I should talk about the lunch group I joined. You know at first I didn't want to give up lunch to sit with some strange kids but my friend kept on bugging me. So I went, but I didn't say one word. Not at first anyway. I could tell that the other kids were checking me out. One kid said her parents were divorced. It sounded bad - like in my house. At least I'm not the only one. And she seemed pretty normal. I decided to go to the next meeting and then after that too. I felt accepted. Everyone seemed to care. Sometimes other kids pointed out things I did wrong but no one looked down on me. Sometimes I helped other kids. Maybe I'll talk about the lunch group in here. Maybe I can help these adults. I didn't realize how difficult things are for them dealing with us. I know I have some good ideas, even if my dog is the only one who thinks so most of the time..."

➤ **Thoughts of an adult:** "No way am I going to speak first. I'm just a parent and I don't know anything about this subject - group work. I've had enough of people laughing at me for sounding foolish. When I first moved to this country I had a lot of trouble with the language. I often felt left out. The people in this group seem okay, pretty open and accepting. I like that the kids are talking so much.

## **From the Editor**

Welcome to the first issue of the new and expanded HUH?!!? As you must know by now HUH?!!? has grown from two to four pages in order to accommodate more features and information. It is our hope that HUH?!!? will become an interactive newsletter. What does this mean? It means that we invite you, our readers, to write with your questions, suggestions, announcements, critiques, and especially with your experiences in groups. We would like to publish short pieces by you and your colleagues and your group members. Those of you who are working with children and adolescents are invited to ask the young people that you work with to contribute. We'd like to feature kids' experiences in all kinds of groups and settings, formal as well as informal.

Are you concerned about your writing ability? Please don't make this an obstacle. We will provide editorial assistance to polish your work. Still concerned? Let me share a bit of wisdom that was once passed on to me: "perfection is not loveable, it is the clumsiness of a flaw that makes a person loveable." More important than one's writing ability is their determination to preserve experiences by recording them. Too many special moments occur in groups to allow them to evaporate from memory as time passes.

Let's make this a mutual endeavor. Let's find a way to spread the word about group work with kids. Let's work together to demystify the experience. Let's make sure that all kids have what they need: safe places to go, worthwhile things to do, a sense of belonging, a sense of competence, and a feeling of hope. And let's make sure that there are adults in their lives who are willing to hang in there to help make this happen.

*Andy Malekoff*

I never would have when I was their age. One of them sounds just like my son. It helps to hear how she sees things, views the world. This helps me to understand my son a little bit better. Good thing my son is in one of the other small groups. Maybe when we get home we'll be able to have more than a 2-word conversation. Okay, I'll talk if someone directs a question to me. I'm not sure that I have much to offer, although other people here seem to think I do..."

The day confirmed the importance of groups and seemed to be an uplifting and enriching experience for all those who attended. The conference was video taped in its entirety and will be edited and made available at a future date. Stay tuned.