

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

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

Volume 3, Number 3.

Summer - 1998

From the Steering Committee

When I first began working with our Young Mother's Support Group, I was not prepared for the amount of work, time and effort that was necessary to get the group together. Our purpose in forming the group was for teen mothers to gain support and education. In addition, we wanted to link them to other community resources. The Young Mother's Support Group was a collaboration between Huntington Sanctuary, the Tri-Community and Youth Agency and Planned Parenthood. I was very eager and excited at the idea of the group, yet unaware of the frustrations that I would face.

Our group consisted of four to six girls, all approximately 18 years old and self-referred to the group. All of their children were about two years old. The group met at the Tri-Community and Youth Agency. Transportation was an issue as none of the girls were within walking distance to the center and did not have anyone to drive them. We would need to transport the girls and their children to the group in our agency van. My co-worker and I learned through trial and error that it would be best to call each young mom and give her a good idea of the time that we would be arriving to pick up mom and child. However, we came to realize that this was not a sure-fire way of making sure the young moms were ready to go. Sometimes, things came up at the last minute such as diaper changes, phone calls, and tantrums. Occasionally, the moms informed us after we arrived that they would not be able to make group that day. After discovering this, we often allotted an hour's time for transportation alone. Although the group was scheduled from 4:00 until 5:30 PM, the group really began from the time they stepped into the van.

The group developed with an informal and relaxed quality. The mothers spoke about their children, the issues they were facing and the concerns that they had. I enjoyed seeing the mothers giving each other advice, sharing experiences and learning from each other. The group gave these young mothers the opportunity to feel less isolated. They were able to identify with others experiencing similar situations. At one group meeting, the topic centered around their goals for the new year. One mom wanted to find employment. Another wanted to earn her GED. I was able to link one mother with a free employment service for youth at our agency. Another mom followed suit.

Recently, a former group member stopped by my office. She told me that she continues to work and loves her job. Her daughter, now age 3, is doing well. She told me how helpful the group was. She said that she knew of other young mothers who could benefit from meeting with other young mothers. Frustrations aside, hearing positive feedback like this added to the value and feeling of pride I had in the group.

Although disorganized at times, this experience helped me to better understand that even with the occasional chaos, members can benefit from the special qualities of a good group experience.

*by Francine Norman
Independent Living Skills Counselor; Huntington Sanctuary
(submitted via Stacy Levin, Steering Committee Member)*

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 Editor

Did you ever take the time to think about what it takes to work with young people in groups and what values guide your work? I thought about this (again) recently. It turned out to be good opportunity to clarify my group work values. I came up with seven things for starters. See if you agree.

(1) No group should be formed on the basis of a diagnosis or label. Each group should be formed with the idea of meeting particular needs of prospective members. Felt needs are different than ascribed labels. Understanding need is where we begin in group work with youth. A simple concept, yet foreign to so many.

(2) Groups should be structured to invite the whole person. There is so much talk these days about strengths and wellness. This is hardly a revolutionary concept. But it has been neglected for too long. Good group work practice has been paying attention to people's strengths since the days of the original settlement houses over 100 years ago, mostly without fanfare.

(3) Group work involves the use of verbal and nonverbal activities. Group workers must learn, for once and for all, to abandon the strange and bizarre belief that the only successful group is one that consists of young people who sit still and speak politely and with insight.

(4) In group work losing control is not where you want to get away from, it's where you want to get to. It is when control is turned over to the group and when the group worker gives up his/her centrality in the group that mutual aid can follow and members can find expression for "what one has to offer." This is what is what real empowerment is all about.

(5) Group workers need to help members see both the potential for changing oneself and also one's surroundings, so that children and youth may become active participants in community affairs. Our young group members must see that they can make a difference so that they gain the confidence to one day change the world where we have failed. A group can be a great start for this kind of consciousness development and social action among young people.

(6) Group workers must learn that anxious and angry parents are not our enemies and that we must collaborate with them and form stable alliances if we are to be successful with their children. Many parents suffer from profound isolation and self-doubt. We must learn to embrace their frustration and anxiety rather than become defensive and rejecting. They get enough of that as it is.

(7) Finally, we must learn that a good group has a life of its own, each one with a unique personality, what we group workers call a culture. We must learn to value the developmental life of each group. When those that inhabit the world outside of our groups question the efficacy of our efforts, amidst the noise and movement and excitement of a typical kids' group, and when they raise an eyebrow or toss puzzled and disapproving looks our way or ask us incredulously, "What's going on in there?," we must have the confidence to hang in there and not bail out as too many an adult already has. Understanding and respecting group development can help us to meet this difficult challenge and not abandon hope.

Andy

Looking Back...A Reminiscence A Dancing Teacher's Tale by Marion S. Levine, ACSW



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

My entry into the field of social group work started with the convergence of unexpected events. Like many young women in the 1950's, being a good student meant to me that maybe I could also be a good teacher. I gravitated, as many others of my generation did, into a major in education at Brooklyn College.

Despite the low tuition I needed some living expenses. Financial support from home was not easily forthcoming. My mother was a widow and not particularly sympathetic to college education for girls. She thought I should enter the job market. But I knew that I needed some money to make my way through my school years without burdening my family.

My then boyfriend had already established himself as a children's and youth worker in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. He had befriended the social workers who ran the Brownsville YM-YWHA. He thought that I had the right personality to work with children. His recommendation and my good performance at an interview landed me a part-time beginner's job. I was literally assigned to be a "gatekeeper." This experience, combined with my growing impatience with a very stilted education curriculum at Brooklyn College, was to be the impetus for my entry into the field of social work.

My first job as gatekeeper was an odd one, but it turned out to be a good opportunity to test my talents. The Brownsville "Y" was located in a second floor loft in a so called "changing neighborhood." There had been many disruptive incidents and the administration of the "Y" wanted someone to screen members before they entered the building. In my isolated post on the first floor, I became what amounted to a respite worker for children having difficulty fitting in on the second floor, where most of the programs took place.

Within a few months I was making a noticeable

impression on my bosses. I remember particularly being lauded for taking a very depressed African American eight year old girl under my wing and bringing her out of her doldrums and into a successful group experience (a forecast, I think, of my later second career as a psychiatric social worker).

My supervisors were MSW social group workers from the best graduate schools. They were very impressive role models. I was soon to be allowed to lead groups and be formally supervised by them in "the group process," a miracle to me.

Meanwhile, I had to go through some preliminary steps. I was promoted to game-room worker. The game room was a serious problem area. Chaos reigned. The children would arrive full of restless energy from a day of sitting in school. They ran wildly in circles. I remember picking up a jump rope and funneling their running in my direction into an unending contest of high jumps. I intuitively realized that the rope organized the running. The activity corners that I soon set up were also just the cue needed to engage different youngsters with the diversion of their desires. I was catching on to how one structured an informal setting and was succeeding at it.

To round out my experience, and to earn a few extra dollars, I accepted a challenge from a nearby agency, the Brownsville Boys' Club (BBC). I was asked, "How about taking over their teenage lounge on Wednesday nights." They wanted to see if I could tame the "wild beasts." Not all of these teenagers fit the description, but some did. They were made up of one part social wallflowers, one part genuine juvenile delinquents, one part budding basketball stars and one part good boys with bad influences surrounding them.

I would teach them all social dancing. They would check their weapons at the door, utter no profanities during the evening and behave like gentlemen. They would be dancing with

"Hooker's" girlfriend. Hooker was the nickname of my husband to be. He had been the president of the 2000 member club, was a very popular and respected figure in the neighborhood, a long time boy staffer at the BBC.

The experience with the dance club was extraordinary. The natural structure of teaching and learning to dance and the skill needed to perform well was just what many of these so called "tough boys" needed. The fact that they were learning to relate to "girls" from Hooker's girl was both titillating and esteem-building for them. It was widely noted that Wednesday night, "the night Marion taught the group to dance," was practically the only evening when there never was a fight or a disruptive incident at the club.

I discovered that it was indeed true, as I had been told by others, that I did have some natural talent in directing activities in both informal and formal group settings. I was on my way into the profession of my lifetime.

These early experiences in social group work with difficult children and youth taught me well not to make assumptions about what is or isn't possible, in even the most dire circumstances. I learned to enter a situation with openness. Willingness to do almost anything necessary to prevail was combined, in my mind and heart, with a conceptual value based position that believed passionately in the use of non authoritarian practices. I discovered that this way of thinking and acting can take you far with youngsters. I learned, as we all would, that our children want to do their own thing as well as be given a context in which to do something well. It was this series of part-time jobs working with kids in Brownsville that became the groundwork for my work with groups and individuals in a social work career that has now spanned almost 40 years.

I was well taught by the immediacy of the situation and by the vitality of the groups in these

poor neighborhoods. I learned to reach for strengths, for the potential in children and youth, and to respect and value the power of the group process.

✶ *Marion S. Levine has been the Executive Director of the North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center in Roslyn Heights, NY for almost twenty-five years.*

Chaos Corner

The day, March 30, 1998, was atypical from the start, sunny and warm. I was headed for the local elementary school for the fifth meeting of my children's group. The five seven-year-olds were anxiously awaiting an activity in which they would build their own puzzles. I never made it to the group. Instead, I wound up in the emergency room and spent the next ten days in the hospital after being injured in an automobile accident.

I loved working with this group. Unfortunately I would never meet with them as a group again. The kids were just beginning to disclose more intimate details of their lives, their relationships with loved ones, the impact of losses they were enduring in their young lives. And now they would have to deal with another abrupt and inexplicable loss.

I am still dealing with my own feelings of loss and abandonment, wishing I were well enough to see the group through to its own natural ending. But in an instant my life changed directions. My priorities suddenly shifted and now revolve around my own health and well being, something that I've always taken for granted.

I think the kids were frightened by the news. The get well cards that I received helped me to realize how close we had all become in a relatively short time. One of the members included his home phone number in the card. Several others

continued page 3.

Chaos Corner

continued from pg.2.

wrote, "I love you" and "I miss you." Reading their words brought tears to my eyes. Not only must I heal physically, but mentally as well.

When a worker leaves a group unexpectedly it is important to have someone else reach out to the group and help them to address and cope with the loss. The new worker should be aware that feelings of abandonment often accompany a sudden loss. S/he should proceed cautiously.

Once I have healed I hope to end with each group member face-to-face. I need to do what is in my heart, which is to say "good-bye" to each of them. Often times we underestimate our impact on others, and their impact on us. This experience has made me more sensitive to the vulnerability of others. Saying "good-bye" is the least I can do.

Aimee B. Colton, CSW (1998) just concluded her social work internship at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center, Roslyn Heights, New York.

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Book Briefs

HUH?!? is fortunate in this issue to have a book review by Lawrence Shulman, widely read author and group work educator. Shulman is well suited to review a book on scapegoating, a phenomenon that almost all group workers who work with young people have encountered. He is the author of a classic article, "Scapegoats, Group Workers, and the Pre-Emptive Intervention," which appeared in the April 1967 issue of *Social Work*. Presently, Shulman is working on the 4th edition of his popular textbook, *Skills of Helping Individuals, Families, and Groups*.

Scapegoats: Transferring Blame Tom Douglas

New York; Routledge; 1995; 213 pages; \$19.95 soft cover.

Tom Douglas has provided us with one of the most scholarly and most interesting discussions of the scapegoating process and the way people have historically transferred blame to others than I have ever read. In Part I, he examines the ancient ritual itself and its origins. The three chapters in this section alone would make the book worthwhile and interesting both to professionals and the general public. His scholarly analysis of biblical quotations and their various interpretations as to the origin of scapegoating makes for fascinating reading.

In Part II he looks at scapegoating as a social behavior providing analysis that helps to deepen our understanding of the process of

scapegoating as we experience it in families, organizations and groups.

Part III provides theoretical underpinnings for understanding the process and for explaining why certain individuals or groups end up becoming the victims of the scapegoating process.

In Part IV he addresses the issue of management of scapegoating a section which would be most relevant to practitioners. It is this section which includes chapters on the management of scapegoating and the resolution of scapegoating, as well as scapegoating as rite, ritual or survival strategy that this reviewer would find areas of difference. The first three parts of the book establishes in a scholarly manner, what is essentially a dynamic process of scapegoating. The reader may be surprised to find a more static view of the professional's interventions in this last section.

For example, the group leader appears to take more control of the process of the group, selects interventions based on fact as including whether the scapegoat has behaved in ways which deserves the anger of the group and in general seems to ignore many of the underlying principles established in the first three parts of the book. I am sure there are areas of dispute here but in the few examples provided, which are summary examples and not process recordings, this reviewer had quite a different interpretation of what was happening in the group and what interventions are necessary. One would have expected for example, a greater effort on the part of the group leader to search for the common ground between the concerns of the group members who are scapegoating, and the negative qualities of the individual who is being scapegoated. If one views scapegoating as a dynamic process in which the group is actually acting out a larger meta communication to the

worker, we would reframe the scapegoating process as the group's call for help and would consider alternative forms of intervention.

In spite of the differences on the intervention sections of this book, I would recommend it as an excellent exploration of the history and process of scapegoating. It would be useful and interesting reading for anyone who works with groups.

Lawrence Shulman, MSW, Ed.D.; Professor and Dean; School of Social Work; University at Buffalo; State University of New York.



Call To Writers

Our column, "Looking Back: A Reminiscence" is a column devoted to group workers' recalling their experiences either in the field of group work with children/youth and/or as group members themselves during their childhood or adolescent years. The goals are to provide readers with a look back through the eyes of experienced group workers and to celebrate group work history and tradition in the process. "Looking Back" should include memories/examples/illustrations of actual group experiences accompanied by the author's reflections.

The length of the piece should be between 500 and 1000 words (it is not a problem if it is less than 500 words). The Editor (Andrew Malekoff) reserves the right to edit. Shorter pieces may be included in other sections of the newsletter.

Send all submissions to: Andrew Malekoff; HUH?!? Editor; North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.



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TIPS For: FINDING YOUR WAY WHEN YOU'RE LOST

It is not uncommon to get lost in group work with young people. It is great when a group "takes on a life of its own." Nevertheless, the life the group takes on can be perplexing and detour-filled. The twin anchors can help group workers to find their way, or at least feel grounded in unsettling circumstances. If you will consider that many young people are struggling with the following two internal questions: will I ever fit in? and will I ever be any good at anything? you'll have a clue about what the "twin anchors" are. They are the need for developing a sense of belonging and a sense of competence. Next time you're lost try to remember the twin anchors. They might help you to restore your sense of direction in your quest to help group members to make connections and achieve mastery. (For more on the twin anchors and their relationship to "use of program" in group work refer to *Group Work with Adolescents* by Andrew Malekoff, Guilford Press, New York, 1997, p. 146)

From the Inside-Out

confession to a boys' group at fifteen

i
thought
that it was
my fault. you
see my brother and
i were fighting and my
mother became very upset
with us. she was really angry.
in fact i don't think that i ever saw
her that mad. after she hollered at us
she went shopping. when she didn't return
for dinner i started to worry. then there
was all this confusion. i was certain
that something wasn't right. i was
only nine years old at the time
yet i knew that something
was wrong. and then
i found out that my
dear mother had
suddenly
died

by andy malekoff

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. 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 April 1, 1998/USA.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

☒ 20th Annual Symposium - Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, October 15-18, 1998 at the Hotel Intercontinental, Miami, Florida. This year's theme is: "Strengthening Resiliency through Group Work." For more information call (305) 891-7518 or visit the home page on the world wide web: <http://dominic.barry.edu/~kelly/aaswg/symposia/miami.html>

☒ 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. 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 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.

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