

LONG ISLAND INSTITUTE FOR GROUP WORK WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH

HUH?!?

a newsletter about working with children and youth in groups

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From the Editor

Three months have passed since the tragedy at Columbine High School. Littleton, Colorado may seem far away, but in a way it is very close to home for those of us who live and work in the suburbs.

Did you know that lots of people who do not live in the suburbs think that we have it made, that there are no problems in the suburbs? They think that there's enough money out here to throw at any problem. But we who live and work and play out here know better. We worry about our children and their safety and their future. And our children worry too. They may not show it in the same way as we grown ups do. But they worry too.

When I first heard the news I tried to take a deep breath. Instead, I found myself suffocating from the media onslaught, the endless parade of so-called experts with their easy answers, adding insight to injury. There was the awful spectacle of live microphones like so many rattlesnakes preparing to strike, jammed into the faces of survivors and family members no matter how fresh their wounds or deep their agony. None of it

made any sense to me. But I shouldn't have been surprised. Sadly, the television-interview-as-public-ritual is now a part of the grieving process for thousands of Americans each year.

Two weeks after the massacre I was asked to tape a television program on the aftermath of Littleton and its effect on Long Island, New York youth. I agreed to do it with the proviso that I could control the format so that it would not even remotely resemble the tabloid tableau predominating the airwaves for too many years.

I organized a group of 12 teenagers and 8 adults and suggested that we just have a conversation. The cameras and microphones would roam the perimeter of the group, listening and peering in.

We started with a pre-group warm up in which the members got acquainted with one another. They were all group members from various settings including a high school, a mental health center, a program for gay and lesbian youth, an Hispanic outreach project, a chemical dependency program, and

a street outreach program. The purpose of the taping/group was to explore, identify, and emphasize what youth need in the aftermath of Littleton.

As the 90-minute meeting unfolded the eyes of the adult participants, and few observers, widened. They were caught by surprise as they listened to the young people. Maybe you'll be surprised too. The teens, ranging in age from 13 to 18 said what they needed and wanted was closer relationships with adults in home and at school. They seemed to be starving for someone to simply listen to them. Although really listening is not as simple as it sounds. And being heard is a rare experience for far too many young people. The teens openly admitted that they push grown ups away. When I asked them if this is what they really want to happen, their answer was an emphatic, "No!" They

do not want us to go away. They want grown ups who won't bail out, and who will hang in there for the long haul and not abandon hope, no matter what.

Successful schools and other places for kids tune in to what kids really need. What do they need? It's not that complicated. All kids need to feel safe, they need to feel loved, and they need to feel capable. Feeling protected doesn't only mean better and more sophisticated security and disaster planning. The real challenge is how to create a safe place without inducing fear, anxiety, and alienation. Kids need places where they are treated with respect and dignity, ensuring both physical and emotional safety. Good group experiences can help to make this happen. Group workers have what it takes to lead the way.

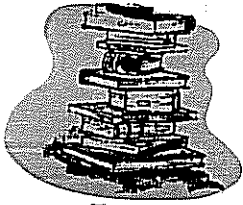
Andy

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.

Steering Committee

Chairpersons: Joanne Ditchik-Stutz (Nassau County); Cynthia Cavallo (Suffolk County). **Steering Committee:** Aimee Colton; Roseline Felix; Michelle Laser; Stacey Levin; Maureen O'Connor; Catherine Papell; Andrew Peters; Carol Sutker. **Project Coordinator:** Andrew Malekoff.



Looking Back ... A Reminiscence

"We Have Determined that You Should be a Group Worker, Mr. Salmon"

In January of this year, the Red Apple Chapter of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups held a one-day conference on current group work practice in the settlement houses of New York City. The conference was held at The Educational Alliance, a venerable social work organization, rich in social work history in general and group work in particular. I had fond recollections of the Alliance as I had worked there briefly in the late 1950's. It was a fitting place for such a conference.

The day's program started with some introductory remarks by Michael Wagner, the Conference co-chair. Michael was a graduate of the Hunter College School of Social Work. He had been a brilliant group work student, and I had the good fortune to have him in my classes. He referred to me in his comments as his teacher and mentor (both true) and as the Guru of Group Work (flattering but not accurate).

However, as I looked out over the audience, I saw a great many individuals who had been my students over the years and other colleagues I had known for a long time. As they responded to Michael's remarks, it seemed clear that they agreed that my professional identity was apparent: social work

educator-group worker. This also was clear to me. My professional identity in my own mind fits me like a glove and is one that I treasure. However, this identity was not always something that I claimed. After the conference I thought about how my sense of identity as a group worker had evolved and about the fact that we all are shaped by experience, proclivity, talent, a bit of luck, and other forces. I tried to reconstruct the influences that shaped my professional identity, and the particular incidents which heightened this identity.

Scouting camps and organizational camps were great influences for many, including me. The camps were a source of fun, learning, and close friendships that endure for me even now, more than 50 years later. These experiences shaped my social conscience and led me to develop my own world views, even if I didn't know it at the time. Starting in my teens I worked in camps--scout camps, private camps, organizational camps--where I learned about the trials and joys of being a group leader. I relished these experiences, but I never thought about social work as a career at that time. Somehow, I did not make the connection between the activities and work I loved and a life-long career.

After college I

entered the world of marketing for a few years, which provided a very generous income for me but little personal satisfaction. I decided to give up this work to return to school to earn an M.S.W and become a social worker. Some friends and family thought I was mad, but I was determined to become a psychiatric caseworker.

I applied to Columbia and was accepted--as a group work student. I protested that I had applied as a casework major. I was told, "We have determined that you should be a group worker, Mr. Salmon." I didn't even know what a group worker was. I was so irritated with the school's attitude that I went to the newly opened school of social work at N.Y.U. They let me be what I wanted to be, right or wrong, and I received an excellent education in casework. I worked in this capacity for a few years after graduation, I liked my work, and my identification as a social worker was permanent.

Then came retrenchment and my immediate hiring by The Educational Alliance where I worked with groups. This was a joy. Then I was hired by The Wel-Met Camps. I worked for Wel-Met for 12 years, finishing as Executive Director of this great social work organization, which provided camping and life

experiences for children, teenagers, and older adults. The organization also influenced an enormous number of people to become social workers. This full-time staff never talked much about method, but it was group work we did.

I left Wel-Met to take my D.S.W. at Columbia. Bill Schwartz was teaching group work to master's-level students. I never had been in a group work class, and I thought that this was a great opportunity to experience a great theoretician and teacher of group work. He agreed to let several doctoral students sit in for the second semester of his year-long class. However, we found quickly that he hadn't discussed this arrangement with the class.

The M.S.W. students were outraged with us. We were polite and respectful as we explained our interest, but they attacked us vigorously for infringing on their time and space. Finally, one of the most vocal of the students said, "Well, I'm feeling sorry for you now."

With real annoyance I responded by saying that was garbage. "We would like to stay, to learn," I said, adding, "You can let us stay or throw us out, but don't tell us you feel sorry for us." They let us stay and later welcomed us. Schwartz was amused. After the

Continued from Page 2.
 class he said, "Bob Salmon, you ARE a group worker--to your bones." I believed him.

After the doctorate, I joined the faculty at Hunter, where I remain to this day. In my entry interview, Hal Lewis, the Dean, said, "We need you as a group work teacher. I know you haven't taught this before, but you CAN do it." He was right. I could and I do.

Thank you, Bill Schwartz. Thank you, Hal Lewis.

Robert Salmon, DSW; Professor; Hunter College School of Social Work; New York City, N.Y.

chaos corner

from mutual aid to social action

it happened to us and now to you can learn from our stories are sad but we are better be careful now we have to go on with our lives are a struggle together with us.

by andy malekoff

From the Inside Out

A group of four young children sit around a circular wooden table. A small basket of crayons is in the center of the table and each child is drawing a picture. One child does not like her picture and tells the group, "I never draw anything right." A boy talks to no one in particular, ignoring other conversations. A third group member is silent. The fourth frequently demands things of others: crayons, permission to copy others' pictures, a change of activity, for example. I sit near the table, observing their interactions and tentative steps towards growth.

Group work with young children (4 to 6 year olds) can be exciting, challenging, frightening, and extremely rewarding. Preschool children are often transparent in their emotional expression, lacking complex defenses to hide and disguise their true feelings. It's not unusual for children in groups to fall on the floor shaking with anger and bursting into fits of tears.

In one group we were approaching the end of a meeting. A five-year old girl started to wiggle in her seat. She announced that she was going to the bathroom. I asked her to wait so that I could contact her mother to accompany her down and around the hall to the bathroom. She just stared at me and pleaded, "Don't call my mommy." I was a bit perplexed and replied, "It will only take a moment to get mom." She persisted, "Don't call my mommy!"

I wasn't sure what to do except to verbalize the feelings she seemed to be expressing. I said, "Catherine is very angry." She then clenched her fists, shaking and struggling with her experience, and finally exclaiming, "I'M NOT ANGRY. I'M SCARED!" She paused and then continued, "I'M SCARED MY MOMMY WILL TAKE ME OUT AND THEN I'LL HAVE TO GO HOME!" Finally I realized that Catherine was afraid she would miss the end of the group because her mother tended to rush her home.

I tried to be reassuring, "I'll make sure to tell your mommy that the group isn't over yet and that she should bring you back as soon as you are finished in the bathroom." Catherine took a deep breath, calmed down, and replied, "Okay."

All of the group members, at this tender age, were able to later talk about what happened and to see that sometimes angry expressions hide scared feelings. I took down the matruska nesting dolls from a higher shelf. The group members played with the little wooden girls with yet other little girls inside of them. They all fit together neatly. However, from the outside it was hard to tell that there were others inside.

Elizabeth Allured, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist with North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center



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 **BOOKLET BRIEFS** 

New Standards for Practice of Social Work with Groups

Published by the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, Inc. (AASWG). 8 pages.

This eight page document, developed by the Practice Committee of AASWG is divided into five parts: I. Core knowledge and values, II. Group work in the pre-group phase, III. Group work in the beginning phase, IV. Group work in the middle phase, V. Group work in the ending phase. Each of the latter four sections are divided into two parts: tasks and knowledge needed.

Standards identifies the unique and distinctive features of social work with groups, however it is written so it may be applied to the various models of practice and teaching of group work. Alex Gitterman, President of AASWG, says, "Standards is one of the most important documents the Association has produced. We hope that you will find it helpful to your practice. Until now there have been no published standards for social work with groups."

◆ Obtain copies from AASWG, Inc. c/o University of Akron; Akron, Oh. 44325-8050; 800-807-0793; Fax: 330-836-2136; jhramey@uakron.edu.

**Tips For ... Addressing Agency
Context in Group Work**

How often does one work with a group of children or adolescents in a system that is unsupportive and inhospitable to our efforts? Some group workers who value emotional growth work in places that value social control above all else. Activities aimed at fostering emotional growth in groups often lead to full expression whether unbridled joy, sobbing, or bursts of anger. Full expression may not fit neatly into the social control box that too many would have us occupy.

✦ **TIP:** Don't simply complain about a system and colleagues and policies and regulations that don't share your values or approach. Enter the system with the idea that the target of change doesn't end with your group members. More often than not, the context is where it's at.

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 Lavine, 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, Garden City; Youth Directions and Alternatives, E.Northport; Harricks School District, Albertson; 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; Temple Sinai of Roslyn. Copyright September 1, 1999/USA.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

☒ **Andrew Malekoff's** widely acclaimed, *Group Work with Adolescents: Principles and Practice* is available from the Guilford Press in paperback. To order call Guilford Publications Toll Free 1-800-365-7006; Fax: 212-966-6708; E-mail: info@guilford.com; Website (secure online ordering): <http://www.guilford.com>.

☒ **October 29, 1999.** Major Conference on *The Power of Group Work With Kids Across Settings and Disciplines*. Keynote speakers include authors and international lecturers Bernard Wohl, Roselle Kurland, Catherine Papell, and Andrew Malekoff. Sponsored by the L.I. Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth the conference will be held at the L.I. Melville Marriot Hotel. The cost is \$65 per person and the program includes keynote addresses, choice of workshop, and lunch. For registration information contact: Jane E. Yazdpour; North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215. Phone: 516-626-1971; Fax: 516-626-8043.

☒ **Save the Date: Symposium XXI Mining the Gold in Social Work with Groups, October 21-24** in Denver, Colorado. For details write to Dr. Sue Henry, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, Denver, Colorado 80208.

☒ **Group Work With Children & Youth Certificate Program:** Beginning Wednesday, September 22, 1999 - Evenings from 6:30 to 9:00 PM at North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Hgts., NY 11577-2215. Tuition for this two year, 60 hour certificate program is \$1,250. The program aims to build competence and confidence in the practice of group work with children and adolescents across settings and disciplines. Contact Jane E. Yazdpour at address above for registration information or call 516-626-1971 (Fax: 516-626-8043).