

Long Island Institute
for Group Work With
Children and Youth
North Shore Child & Family
Guidance Center
480 Old Westbury Road
Roslyn Hgts., NY 11577-2215
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HUH ?!?

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

Volume 4, Number 2.

Spring - 1999

From the Editor

In a recent longitudinal study on adolescent health conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development the investigators found that school connectedness - feeling close to people at school - was a key factor influencing adolescents to avoid risky behavior.

In December I attended a holiday concert at an alternative high school for students with special needs, many of them identified as having serious emotional disturbances. These were all students who were referred by as many as 56 local district schools that could not adequately meet their needs. The concert was held in a large and open common area, the hub of several intersecting hallways. There was a makeshift stage adorned with holiday decorations, microphones, amplifiers, guitars and a drum set. In front of the stage were rows of folding chairs arranged auditorium style for the staff and student audience. Some sat and others stood around the perimeter. All of the student

performers were warmly welcomed. The audience sang, swayed and danced along with those on stage. Everyone had smiles on their faces.

As I sat there I imagined these students many years from now, looking back on their high school years with fond memories of times spent together at events like these: concerts, dances, plays and other planned school events. I wondered what their memories might have been had they remained in their district schools isolated, misunderstood, scapegoated and lost.

"Inclusion" has become a catch word for the 90's, something that at its best represents an honest effort by public schools to prevent segregating students with special needs from their so-called normally functioning peers. State and federal mandates may influence the composition of the student body, however they cannot ensure feelings of connectedness among marginalized students.

Currently in Nassau County, New York public

schools have been directed by the State Department of Education to develop a plan to reduce the number of children who have been placed in special schools outside of their districts because the local average number of students in these settings is above the national average. Most educators agree that students should attend school in the most appropriate, least restrictive environment, preferably as close to home as possible. However, there remains the need to protect those students who are likely to have a more holistic and normative experience by attending school outside of their home district.

It may surprise some to know that schools composed of children with special needs must also address issues of difference and inclusion. After all, isn't a student with a diagnosis more than their diagnosis? If you doubt this, take a visit to such a school and mingle with the kids and it should become obvious that everyone is not the same. The faculty and staff have the same challenge as those in "regular" schools of helping the students to gain a sense of belonging.

In large district schools there are often lots of clubs, sports and a variety of activities and programs that foster connectedness

among the students in small groups, including many of those with special needs. However, it is the rare school where a true sense of community transcends discrete clusters of students and incorporates an entire student body. Sitting in my folding chair, soaking up the spirit of the kids and adults in this school, I was struck with the irony of such a normative, joyful, and all inclusive experience generated in this place composed of so many young people who had been labeled and displaced. I was impressed that this "special" population who deeply understands the feeling of rejection were more genuinely accepting than many of their contemporaries in the schools that some would have them return to in order to fulfill a quota.

It felt good to be sitting in a place that had that old time group work spirit and the feeling of closeness that it generates. I was glad that the students could share this feeling with one another and with the adults in the school. I felt certain that it was a time they'd never forget and, more importantly, one that they would want to remember.

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

"C'mon man, would you please respect the dead!"

by Chris Gilhooly. C.S.W.

Group work with adolescents has always fascinated and frustrated me. In addition to being a clinical social worker I am a licensed wilderness guide. One of my goals has been to discover ways to integrate clinical with outdoor work to provide youngsters with opportunities for practical, hands-on experiences in the wild that can be transferred and applied to everyday life.

One such opportunity was a canoe trip. After presenting the idea to a group of five teens, ages 12-14, they unanimously decided to go. Typically, planning includes focusing on the skills necessary for making a safe, successful, educational and fun experience. Without sufficient time for full preparation I wondered how we would fare.

All of the members, four boys and one girl, were known to have short fuses. Their judgment was poor in matters of social etiquette, i.e., appropriate language and actions in social situations. Their understanding and respect for

others' space and boundaries were also areas of concern. The purpose of the group was to assist the members in being more reflective and less impulsive. They were an odd blend with different backgrounds and taste in music and fashion.

The canoe trip was to take place in one of the many inlets of Long Island Sound on the north shore of the island. The day was overcast with some drizzle and fog. However, the kids' attitudes were anything but gray, with the exception of Gerry, who couldn't seem find anything interesting about getting into a wobbly boat and paddling about in drizzling rain. As for the others, they were ready for a day of outdoor adventure.

The group filed into the minibus and we proceeded to our rendezvous point. As with any car trip with teens, squabbles about seating arrangements and music selections emerged. An occasional "shot below the belt" was delivered in retaliatory fashion for some spoken or unspoken slight or slur. Despite a burgeoning coup d'tat, we arrived in good spirits, excitement and anticipation.

As we placed on our life jackets the rules were explained. Prior to leaving I handed out printed lists of canoeing etiquette for review. We covered the

highlights and were ready for launching our boats.

The tide was high which offered favorable conditions and access into the myriad of smaller channels for the young explorers. There were also what seemed like hundreds of dead horseshoe crabs floating on the surface of the water, undoubtedly victim to the tide changes and molting during mating season. The crabs emitted a powerful stench which generated strong guttural responses from the group members. After some kvetching about the rancid odor the youngsters were able to breathe easy again as they wended their way down the network of channels.

The kids chose their own paths. We gathered for lunch, tied the boats together and munched on moist sandwiches and chips in the light drizzle. After lunch we pulled the boats ashore for a bathroom break among the trees and lush undergrowth. We then regrouped for a brief discussion of the trip thus far and the road ahead. Everyone was fascinated by tossing the dead horseshoe crabs by their long, extended tails. They also reveled in striking the horseshoe crabs with their paddles while we drifted out in our canoes. Watching this I found it necessary to ask them if they knew about the history of the horseshoe crab.

My question sparked a discussion of the youngsters' understanding of their environment and the creatures that made that environment their home. In my work with groups I try to anticipate the teachable moment to encourage teens to reflect on their behavior and its impact on others, themselves and the environment. When the crab tossing and crab bashing reached a fever pitch I

shouted, "C'mon man, would you please respect the dead!" All activity stopped. They were surprised by the emotion in my voice. They were puzzled, dumbfounded.

This opened the door for a discussion about taking responsibility for one's behavior and respecting a natural tradition that has evolved over countless years. With a little encouragement the youngsters then recounted some of their own experiences of not being treated with respect, tuning in to how it made them feel. They started to get a better sense of the balance of nature and that they don't have carte blanche to upset the equilibrium, even when it feels like the fun thing to do in the moment. Soon we resumed paddling forward with what felt like a sense of inner calm and a renewed sense of wonder.

Chris Gilhooly is a social worker at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center.

TIPS for: ADVOCACY and SOCIAL ACTION

One of the unique features of group work is what has been described as its attention to the near things of individual change and the far things of social reform. One of the advantages of successful advocacy is the progression from case to cause, the multiplier effect of moving from helping the one to helping the many.

TIP: Good advocacy doesn't have to be loud, in your face, placard waving, militant activity. Good advocacy is thoughtful, studied and reflective. It involves gathering data and entering into dialogues to solve problems. Group members don't need professional degrees to be good advocates. Advocacy is problem solving and all of us are problem solvers.

Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth

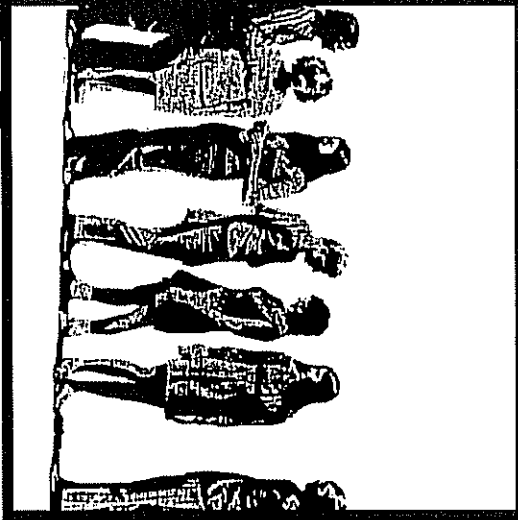
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Roseline Felix
Michelle Laser
Stacey Levin
Maureen O'Connor
Catherine Papell
Andrew Peters
Carol Sutker

Project Coordinator: Andrew Malokoff

Save the Date



PRESENTING

The Power of Group Work With Kids

Across Settings and Disciplines

Friday - Oct. 29, 1999
The Melville Marriott Hotel

8:30 AM to 2:00 PM

KEYNOTERS:

Roselle Kurland, PhD

Hunter College School of Social Work

Bernard Wohl, MSW

Former Exec. Dir. Goddard Riverside

Community Center

Andrew Malekoff, ACSW, CASAC

Author: "Group Work With Adolescents:
Principles and Practice"

Presented By:

The Long Island
Institute for Group
Work With Children &
Youth of

North Shore Child &
Family Guidance Center

480 Old Westbury Rd.

Roslyn Hgts., NY 11571-2215

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From the Steering Committee

Working with lesbian and gay adolescents in groups, I am often reminded that the work of the group extends beyond the half dozen or so teenagers sitting in my office. At times, I experience this as a feeling of helplessness. How can I help these young people in the hour and a half we have knowing that as soon as they leave the office they will re-enter a world full of bullying peers and rejecting parents?

I am also aware of the impact of the media on these young people's lives - the Congressman decries homosexuality as a sin or mental disorder, the televangelist calling AIDS "God's punishment to homosexuals," and the stories of gay men and lesbians being brutally bashed or murdered during a time of rising hate crimes. What impact can a weekly support group have when these teens spend the majority of their lives in a world that fails to understand them and pathologizes them?

Although exemplified best by working with a stigmatized population, reaching beyond the group itself and into the family and community is a core function of group work with many vulnerable populations. In my own work, two examples of advocating for group members come to mind. In one group a young man disclosed that his mother routinely called him "faggot" and lectured him about how he was going to hell. With his permission, I made a phone call to his mother to talk to her about this abusive behavior. In another group, a member told a story about discovering a flyer for a gay

youth prom that he had made crumpled up in his school social worker's trash can. When he asked her why the flyer was discarded she replied, "I didn't think anyone in this school would be interested." Again, with permission, I made a phone call to discuss the matter with her.

There was no simple resolution in either case, but by providing a voice for these kids, I felt that I had done "the right thing." Directly confronting bigotry helped me, and I think my group members, to feel a little less powerless.

Group work with gay and lesbian adolescents provides an arena for young people bearing the same stigma to come together and discover a sense of "fitting in" perhaps for the first time in a long time. It is extremely rewarding to see shy kids emerge from their shells, faces glowing with excitement over having made new friends. It is no less gratifying when the group moves from support to social action as in the following examples: a group of students organizing a gay students' club at their high school, a young person asking his teacher to have a speaker discuss homophobia in his class, and a young woman

convincing her mother to attend a meeting for parents of gay children.

At times it seems as if actions like these happen spontaneously. However, I see that being a member of a group contributes to members' growing sense of confidence. In their own words: the group becomes "a retreat," "a safe place," and "a release after spending the week among the 'straight' world." As individuals the group members may feel overwhelmed by a seemingly hopeless environment filled with parents who will never accept or understand them, and peers who will make their lives miserable. Similarly, as an individual worker, these same barriers fill me with self doubt about my ability to help these young people. But when the group comes together the

central message: "you are not alone," seems to resonate beyond the ninety minutes we have together. Ninety minutes is obviously not enough time to solve all of their problems. I've learned that the work of the group doesn't end after each group meeting, not for the members and certainly not for me.

by Andrew Peters

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newcomers on the edge

standing at the edge of the schoolyard,
pressing against the brown chain link fence,
together they witness the undecipherable
swirling limbs, crashing torsos, squeals,
laughter, threats, taunts, boasts, dares,
snubs. they eye one another. one
will make it in. the other won't.
the insider will learn the secrets
of the rusted cage. the
other will
remain an outsider.
the insider
will look out
from time to time
and he will recall
the day they first met,
sort of.
years later they will meet again.
the one that made it inside
never got out. and the
one that never made
it in found another
place. and he learned
the secrets of that
place. and the
the two newcomers
spoke to each
other for
the very
first time,
and to each
one's surprise
and delight
they became
friends.

by Andrew Malekoff

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newcomers on the edge

standing at the edge of the schoolyard,
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 together they witness the undecipherable
 swirling limbs, crashing torsos, squeals,
 laughter, threats, taunts, boasts, dares,
 snubs. they eye one another. one
 will make it in. the other won't.
 the insider will learn the secrets
 of the rusted cage. the
 other will
 remain an outsider.
 the insider
 will look out
 from time to time
 and he will recall
 the day they first met,
 sort of.
 years later they will meet again.
 the one that made it inside
 never got out. and the
 one that never made
 it in found another
 place. and he learned
 the secrets of that
 place. and the
 the two newcomers
 spoke to each
 other for
 the very
 first time,
 and to each
 one's surprise
 and delight
 they became
 friends.

by Andrew Malekoff

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📖 BOOK BRIEFS 📖

Teaching a Methods Course in Social Work with Groups

by Roselle Kurland and Robert Salmon, Council on Social Work Education, 1600 Duke St., Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3421, 219 pages; \$13.00, softcover.

This is a one of kind text written by long time colleagues at Hunter College School of Social Work, one of only handful of schools that offers group work as a method. Beware, the title of this book is a little deceiving. Although it was written with teachers in mind this book proves to be an equally valuable text for students and practitioners. There are eleven chapters and multiple appendices filled with useful information about everything from planning groups, to understanding group roles, to using program and activity in groups. The exhaustive reference section alone is worth the price. There are numerous illustrations of groups of all kinds that bring the text to life. This book, only \$13.00, is a bargain: two lifetimes of group work teaching and practice experience rolled into one book to benefit an entire profession. Kurland and Salmon have written one of the those rare books that you will want to keep nearby for quick reference and ongoing support.

Don't let this be the one that gets away!

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. Mockwood-Yazdpour. Participating Agencies: Coalition on Child Abuse & Neglect, Hempstead; Youth Directions and Alternatives, Huntington; Horricks School District; 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, Now Hyde Park; Temple Sinai of Roslyn. Copyright April 1, 1999/USA.

EVENTS & RESOURCES

☒ **May 7, 1999 8:30 to 11:30 AM: Handling Powerful Feelings Evoked in Children's and Adolescent Groups - A Participatory Workshop for Group Workers.** This workshop will help participants identify some of the powerful feelings that are evoked in group workers, explore how these feelings influence our behavior in the group, and search for ways to find expression for these feelings. Lead by Andrew Malekoff and Michelle Laser, the fee for this workshop is \$35. Please make check payable and mail to North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; LI Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, N.Y. 11577-2215; Attn: Jane Yazdpour.

☒ Andrew Malekoff's widely acclaimed, *Group Work with Adolescents: Principles and Practice* will be available from the Guilford Press in paperback in July, 1999. Details to follow in the next issue of HUH?!?

☒ **SAVE THE DATE: 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, and Andrew Malekoff. Workshop topics include: prejudice reduction, sexuality, child abuse and neglect, medical illness, loneliness and isolation, and more. 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.

☒ **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.

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