

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 4, Number 3.

Summer - 1999

## From the Editor

Although professional language is a technical tool, it can be much more depending upon the culture, history, tradition, and values within which it has been forged. For instance, the language of group work can be heard in the music of mutual aid (the rhythm of group members' contributions to one another), a strengths perspective (the steady beat of what each member has to offer), dual focus (an interwoven melody of the individual and the social), and process (the unfolding movement of group development). It is a language peppered with laughter and a spirit of fun and fellow feeling signifying that while group members may begin their journey alone, none leave as strangers.

As a language of theory and technique, group work is at home in the arena of rational thought. But what distinguishes our language is its blend of head and heart, intellect and intuition, and science and art, a blend that often

befuddles others who do not understand the curious paradox of seriousness wrapped in an informal package that so very often constitutes group work.

Recently I made a presentation organized by a university. I stood before an audience of about 200+ people wearing a coat and tie. I opened my talk by recalling that just 24 hours before I was on my hands and knees cleaning up glitter, multi-colored glue, squashed popcorn and crushed potato chips from the carpet in my office. As my colleagues walked by the open door they peered in, finding me on the ground sweating and with a torn piece of cardboard in my hand scraping up Cheese Whiz that only moments before was ejected from its plastic nozzle in giggling fits, as my group of 9- and 10-year-olds tried to hit a series of bullseyes that were the group members' wide-open mouths.

As I stood before this audience of 200+ in my coat and tie, I wondered aloud what my colleagues

from the night before thought of me (and now what these colleagues thought). They couldn't have known that I was cleaning up after a Valentine's Day party. They couldn't have known about the group's decision the week before to make a Valentine for the friend of a group member whose mother was terminally ill. They couldn't have known that the toughest boy in the group, who was trying to make a heart out of colored glue that he squirted from a tube, said only moments before, "This feels good-helping someone." And they couldn't have known how such a serious endeavor by a group of 9- and 10-year old boys and girls could also be so much fun.

What my colleagues did know is what they saw. They saw me with all 25 years of experience, on my hands and knees cleaning the rug after a raucous meeting with a group of so-called troubled kids. And 24 hours later I would stand before a crowd as an expert on such as *this*.

Group work is a language of patience and passion. It is a language of struggle, kindness and celebration. Finding others who speak the same language is rare and a wonderful relief

for both those in practice and in academia.

We who appreciate group work need colleagues who speak our language. With the support and understanding of such colleagues, we can smile together knowingly about the night before when one or the other of us ended the day by scraping Cheese Whiz from the floor.

(This editorial is excerpted from *Social Work With Groups*, 21:3, pp. 2-3)

### Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children & Youth

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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.



## Looking Back...A Reminiscence

"Howie, we can't remember that you were anything."

by Howard Goldstein, DSW

Editor: *Families in Society*

*This is the 11th  
feature in a  
continuing  
series.*

"Where were you when...?" is a conversation-starter as common to old-timers like myself as "Say, what's your sign?" used to be in the days of the singles bars. Interestingly, the answer that question evokes can say as much about the life and generation of the responder as it does about the extraordinary time and place.

Take that infamous Sunday, December 7, 1941 - the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Where, precisely, I happened to be at that fateful turning point - itself, an event that changed our lives as we knew it then, as we know it now - marks a chapter in my youth and my world in general.

On that Sunday afternoon I was at the Jewish Young Men & Women's Association of Rochester, NY, as a fan of Benny Goodman, I was ready to hear a special performance of his recorded music. So easy to remember: it is not a feat of memory or instant recall for, except for school and other distractions, I was *always* at the JY. My Yiddish immigrant parents would shake their heads and ask resignedly - but without offense, "Du lebst der?" (Do you live there?) In effect, I did live there. My home and my loving parents created the safe, simple haven that I was growing out of; the JY signified the identity and maturity I was growing into. Until I received the inevitable invitation to do what I could to help win the Second World War, the JY was - now, in retrospect - the ever-flowing wellspring of whatever was needed to carry me and my countless friends into adulthood. Not that I ever gave that lofty purpose

a thought in those days: the JY in those days was, just the JY.

I can describe the JY easier than I can explain it. Just on the edge of the grubby downtown, it was located between south Rochester where well-to-do, professional or merchant German Jews lived and the neighborhood just to the north, the enclave of our poor, Eastern European Jewish families. We were enclosed by the communities of Italian, Polish, German and other European immigrants who, like our parents, worked in the local clothing factories when there was work or who owned small stores and markets.

It was a large, magnificent structure, built with the ready money that was around at the end of the affluent Twenties. But with the bleak onset of the Depression era, the building stood closed and silent, waiting for the Jewish community to scrape up the funds needed to at last open it to the community. To the kids who, like me, knew only our drab, cramped households, the opulence of the JY with its lobby of marble floors and huge chandeliers gave us a vision of another possible world of grace and beauty: I still remain enchanted by the charms of the art deco style that was the design of the JY. Two floors of the building (the upper floors contained rooms rented to single adults) were fully outfitted with exactly what was needed to cultivate the special skills of what now might be considered an oxymoron - a Jewish athlete. There were game rooms with the obligatory ping pong and pool tables with the most

essential, a basketball court, coliseum. And, as I will mention, there were the many club rooms where - most importantly - we came to understand what friendship, affiliation, and identity truly involved.

Arriving at an explanation of the meaning that the old JY held for us - a very inclusive "us" - is far more difficult. Although that organization may have its counterparts in the structure and activities of contemporary community centers, its ethos and spirit were unique -perhaps peculiar to the people, the time and place. The settlement house of the preceding generation opened pathways into the new world that was America for the recently-arrived immigrants. In its own way, the JY and other community centers of my generation cleared still other pathways. They led us to the discovery of what we might be in what was still a somewhat foreign culture; helped us grasp how we could make the most of the possibilities that this culture might afford us. As the second generation of our immigrant families, we felt "different" - especially when we looked across town and marveled at what seemed to us the good life and high aspirations of the long-assimilated German-Jewish families. Our world was tight and constricted, limited to our ethnic neighborhoods, limited by the narrow futures prescribed by the Depression and its survival mentality. Somehow, we knew we had to resolve a challengingly difficult duality: how to retain the profound identity in what it meant to be a Jew, holding to everything that was so rich in our

Yiddishkeit, while trying to find our special place in the dominant, secular American culture.

I doubt that these serious ambitions were ever codified in a mission statement or statement of objectives by the administration of the JY. If memory serves, we were not subject to lectures or programs of any kind that were supposed to be instructive about what to know or how to be in order to become a successful American citizen. It seemed like we were quietly encouraged to participate in and take from the many activities - sports, social life, knowledge, and play - whatever might be meaningful for us as individuals. Only when I became a social worker (perhaps it was inevitable) that I realize that, within that friendly and informal environment, something very important had been at work. I know now that what really counted was not programs, policies, or organized activities but a secure and dependable climate that expressed the democratic principles of traditional social group work. The virtues of character and regard that these principles exemplified flowed into all relationships - not just between kids and the staff, but by some kind of osmosis, between ourselves.

I think that the more apparent medium that bred and instilled these principles was what we called the Clubs. No one formed clubs; clubs formed so naturally that I cannot describe how. Perhaps the old, enigmatic group work term, "enabled," explains it best. Was it "enabling"

*Continued Page 3.*

when the JY offered the various clubs their own meeting rooms along with an "advisor"? Typically, he or she was someone not much older than us, a member of the Jewish Big Brothers or Big Sisters' organization, who was there to help.

Among the many clubs, the Hermanos, was made up of Sephardic Jewish boys. Another included the more competitive, sports-minded kids. Our club, - consisting of fifteen fairly bright teen-agers, adopted a name that now sounds like Greek fraternity, Kappa Beta Phi (we decided it meant "Keep Being Pals"): Was there something prophetic about our name? In our college years, many of us were awarded those three Greek letters - but in reverse - or similar scholastic honors. We learned something about discipline and ritual in *Robert's Rules of Order*; we elected our officers in a serious and self-conscious democratic manner; and thoughtfully worked out plans for such momentous occasions as our annual prom and other social events. And we learned how to compete with other clubs, on the basketball court, in tournaments, and in dating the more popular girls. We knew who we were, to what we belonged, not just fraternally but as individuals. When I think of my old club, it is not just that intimate group alone that comes to mind but the well-defined individual characters who were (and in my mind, still are) my friends; among

them, Jake, the actor, Sol, the wiseguy, Artie, the smooth operator.

These recollections are not a necessary illusion, I promise you. After an almost sixty-year hiatus, out of sight and sound of my old friends, I recently returned to Rochester for a very grand occasion. I had just published my book (*The Home on Gorham Street and the Voices of its Children*) about the early and elderly lives of children who had grown up in the old Jewish orphanage in Rochester many years ago. I was honored by being invited to address and give a reading to the Jewish community at the modern, totally up-to-date, Rochester Jewish Community Center (the JYMA was long gone) now located in upscale, Jewish suburbia. There to greet me and celebrate the event, and without any advance notice, were many of the surviving members of my old club. One is tempted to add, "as if nothing had changed," but, to be sure, it was obvious that aging has its special price.

Together, after the event, we harked back to how we were when Jake was the actor, Sol, was the wiseguy, and Art, the smooth operator. And so I came away from our grand reunion with some profound insights about my own identity as a youth: when, after respects for my immediate deed were paid, they all shrugged and agreed that, "You know, Howie, we can't remember that you ever were anything."

## TIPS FOR . . .

This month's TIPS for comes directly from the *Project Kidz Talk Group*. They said that if they could tell a kid one thing about going to court it would be:

- Always tell the truth.
- Don't be scared. People can help you.
- You didn't do anything wrong. You are very brave.
- Don't be afraid if you feel like crying. That's okay.
- I would tell a kid to bring some paper to write on. It does get boring at court.

(See *From the Steering Committee*; This Issue)

## From the Steering Committee

October 5, 1998 was the first night of our 10 week group project appropriately named *Project Kidz Talk*. The idea was to get a group of children together between the ages of 5 and 12 who had been sexually abused or witnessed their sibling's sexual abuse to develop a document aimed at helping other kids who may have to go to court. All the kids in the project came through referrals or the Child Victim Advocate Program. These kids had all been to court and their cases were complete.

We planned for months how we would broach the subject without making the group "clinical". Each group was carefully thought out, materials were printed, and interns and volunteers were ready to co-facilitate. I never dreamed that this project would unfold the way it did.

The first night we explained to these beautiful kids that this was THEIR group. They would make all the decisions and we would help them. Right off the bat they decided to make the document a Coloring and Learning Book. They developed rules and signed a contract. We stressed the importance of "what we talk about in this room stays in this room." This was too good to be true. Was it going to be THIS easy? Who ever heard of such cooperation?

The second week went beautifully. "Just as planned" was the common phrase. Next week the kids would begin to draw pictures for the book or work on a story about their own experience in court. We were SO ready (or so we thought). We had markers, colored pencils, crayons, rulers, spirographs and stencils. Hey, we knew what we were doing. This was going to be a piece of cake.

"Stephanie, how do you spell vagina?" WHAT???? As I stared into the eyes of this beautiful little seven year old my mind raced for an answer. "Um, can you think of another word you may want to use? Remember, boys will be reading this book too and we don't have any boys in the group to write about what happened to them." "Ok, can I say c , that's what my Dad calls it." "He does? Well I call it a private part. What does your therapist call it?" One of our volunteers saw the look in my eyes and came over. "Vanessa, can I draw with you?" Whew, I was off the hook. I couldn't wait until 9 AM to call this kid's therapist. I almost called her at home. For this I was NOT prepared. So, this was our group.

It happens. Even to those

with years of experience. Isn't the expression...Kids say the DARNDEST things? This was the first of so many eye opening experiences for staff, interns and volunteers. What a wonderful experience for the kids! Weeks when by, the kids continued to pour their hearts and souls into this coloring book. We let them choose the pictures. We praised each one. Every kid got to put something into the book. This was their project. We could see the progress in the kids as they became more comfortable with us and each other. They weren't afraid anymore. One of the kids said "Did the same thing happen to ALL of us? Even to Amy?" (Amy our youngest member just turned 3.) Each evening as the group closed, we stood in a circle and the kids decided what they wanted to say. Most weeks it was "happy thoughts" about what the group did, or about one of the group members who did a particularly cool drawing. We made sure that everyone got a turn to be on a pedestal. Week number eight, our second youngest member told us that she was really glad that she came to the group. She said she "didn't feel purple in a white world anymore. That's why I like to come." Ok, group over. That did it for me. Where's the Kleenex? How very profound for a five year old. And how very true.

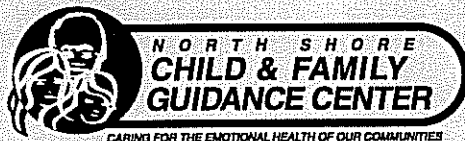
For me personally, I feel as though I have taken the journey with the kids. They are so special individually. As a group they are so powerful. I only hope that they can realize the full impact they had on us and each other one day. I start each day thanking my higher power for my child, my family and the opportunity to work with these kids. I thank the parents for allowing us to work with their children. And I owe a debt of gratitude to the children, for they truly are the champions. Through their drawings and words I have seen what horrors they have each had to endure. And endure they must.....

The book is finished. We gave them a big party. Pictures, cake, presents, hugs and kisses. They didn't want a yellow cover, but I won the drawing for that. I call the color Dandelion. This experience opened my eyes, sharpened my mind and softened my heart. I have truly found this group work to be WAY COOL! (See *Book Briefs* and *TIPS* for columns, this issue)

*Stephanie Navordnik, Coordinator Child Victim Advocate Program Coalition on Child Abuse and Neglect via: Cindy Cavallo, Steering Committee*

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 **BOOK BRIEFS** 

**Project Kidz Talk: We want to spread the word...A coloring and learning book for kids who have to go to court written by kids who went to court.**

Coalition on Child Abuse and Neglect, 229 Seventh Street, Garden City, NY 11530

The concept for this very special book "came from a group of children who have had to go to court," writes the project coordinator, Stephanie Navordnik in her introduction. The participating children range in age from 3 to 13. The book is testimony to the group work principle of moving from support to advocacy. Through sixteen pages of poetry ("Hey I'm Just a Kid..."), advice ("If you get thirsty you can ask a court officer to give you some water.") information ("This is what I learned when I went to criminal court..."), and support this interactive coloring book is an invaluable resource, spreading the word to help other kids "feel less frightened in court." (see TIPS for column)

The book is available at no cost. Please send a self addressed stamped 11.5" X 9" manilla envelope (66 cents postage to the above address and request the Project Kidz Talk coloring book.

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, Garden City; Youth Directions and Alternatives, E.Northport; Herricks 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 July 1, 1999/USA.

## EVENTS & RESOURCES

⊗ Andrew Malekoff's widely acclaimed, *Group Work with Adolescents: Principles and Practice* will be available from the Guilford Press in paperback in July, 1999. 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, 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).