

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

Do you ever wonder if the groups that you are working with are benefiting the members? Evaluating group work can include quantitative measures such as before and after behavioral checklists completed by parents and teachers. These might be used for groups of kids in which improving impulse control and frustration tolerance are among the needs addressed. In groups where increasing knowledge about drugs and alcohol, sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases, or violence prevention strategies are goals, pre- and post-test questionnaires can help measure what is learned. Qualitative measures including self reporting by group members, parents, and others can also help in evaluating a group experience and its impact on the member's lives beyond the group. Consumer satisfaction surveys can help group workers to see how they're doing in the way we offer the service.

Formal evaluation is helpful in assessing the value of our efforts. However, sometimes we learn about the value of group work for members by surprise. One example comes from one of our

steering committee members, Joanne Ditchik-Stutz. Joanne is a middle school social worker. She works with multiple groups. One of her groups was composed of boys who gave her a run for her

group formed by the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth, Joanne shared her ambivalence about continuing with this group over the long haul. With the support of the

note to me. She said that one of the English teachers assigned a final project in which she asked students to write a thank you note to a favorite teacher. Joanne enclosed copies of letters written to her by her group members. The boys later gave her permission to share them with you, our readers. (Thank you boys!)

The letters remind me of the universal plight of parents struggling to raise their children, suffering with self doubt, and wondering if their efforts are futile. Yet occasionally there are flashes of empathy, recognition, and gratitude as evidenced by their letters. The flashes come from kids who may otherwise seem to adults to be self absorbed. The flashes as the letters are often delivered unexpectedly and through a roundabout route. Flashes can be missed, overlooked, or underestimated.

However, if you are prepared for serendipitous evaluations of this sort they can be a welcome sign that *just maybe* you have chosen the right path, and would be wise to stay on it for awhile.



✉ Dear Ms. Ditchik,

...I loved the groups. Being able to share with others is a relief, and because of the group, a large amount of my anger and sadness has been vented. Even though the others were too loud sometimes, even annoying, the groups each year were great. Each week I would look forward to missing a class to come to the group. I admire you for putting up with us. After two years with (us)...I find it astounding how you still keep your sanity. How do you do it?...

✉ Dear Ms. Ditchik,

Given the chance to calm down and cool off by chatting with peers about social problems was all I needed to rest my mind. I would like to thank you for giving my friends and myself a period during the week to let loose...the group provided me with a positive experience for me to learn how to deal with social topics. An example would be relationships between friends and nemeses...Even though many chats were off the basic topic of how to gain new friends, I enjoyed the freedom to criticize what I disliked, to complement and comment on what I liked, and to blankly stare at what made no sense in my opinion. Throughout the year you have taught my peers and myself several lessons. The first was to have patience and (have) an open mind. Another was not to mock someone in a cruel manner or without letting them fully express themselves. A third lesson would be to talk with your mouth and not with your hands. Last of all you have given each of us a certain amount of respect for our peers and elders that I feel is very important if you want to succeed in life.

money. In many ways they were typical early adolescent boys. One noted child psychiatrist referred to this stage of development as a time of "normal insanity."

In a supervision

group and her own determination and willingness to put up with some of the boys' antics she persisted until the boys graduated.

After they graduated Joanne sent a



Looking Back ... A Reminiscence "Do You Speak Creole?" By: Roseline Felix, CSW

This is the 13th
feature in a
continuing series

"Do you speak Creole?" asked eight year old Monique as she gazed into my eyes searching for a connection. She waited patiently for a reply. To this day I remember the radiance of her smiling face when I answered, "Yes."

Monique held my hand and proceeded to walk beside me down the hallway. When we arrived at my office I explained my role in the school. Her ears seemed to perk up when I mentioned the part about helping students born in Haiti adapt to their new country. She expressed feelings about her struggle and confusion living in the U.S. with its different customs and values. Especially frustrating, was the task of learning a new language. I told her that the purpose of the group I was organizing was to help the members to do better in school, academically and socially.

After meeting with all of the referred students I made contact with their parents who described similar struggles with their adopted home. I also met with teachers who complained about a lack of cooperation from the parents of these children. The parents, from their point of view, saw the teachers as authority figures with complete control over their children's academic needs. In the group, the students seemed to be confused

with a system of discipline that is much different than that of Haiti. The students also took advantage of the growing alienation between home and school by exercising a sort of misguided freedom to ignore certain teacher directives.

It soon became clear that I had my work cut out for me. My work in the group with the kids would be just part of my role. I decided to form a parallel group for parents to address their acculturation needs. Included among the goals was for the parents to become more knowledgeable of community resources and more adept at accessing them. I thought that a good first step would be to establish a sense of trust with the parents and their children. This could be a stepping stone to a mediating process between home and school that could reduce the widening gap in understanding and improve cooperation.

As a first generation Haitian-American who knows the spiritual nature and cultural values of the Haitian community, I discovered that the road to the parents was through an influential clergyman in town, a reverend who I had come to know. He was excited about my work and plans and introduced me to the congregation. He agreed to co-lead the group with me

and offered the church as a meeting place.

The members of the parent group brought their children to the bi-weekly meeting and games and refreshments were offered to occupy them while their mothers and fathers met. In time, as the numbers grew, supervision of the youngsters was provided.

The parents need for knowledge about the educational system was great. The group agreed to invite guest speakers to present on a variety of topics such as special education and how decisions are made, and what input parents can have. The presentations helped to demystify the educational system and seemed to revive the parents who seemed out of breath, trying to figure everything out, not clearly understanding their rights.

As the group progressed, other needs were addressed such as uncertainty about the transportation system in the county. One mother explained how she lost a good job opportunity because she was not familiar with the bus system. Somewhat embarrassed yet trusting of the group, she revealed that even though she has been here for a year she still doesn't know her way around. Another member offered help and they exchanged telephone numbers. After her disclosure, the tone of the

group changed, with parents more freely sharing opinions and concerns on other matters.

One parent who attended a school PTA meeting told the others about his experience and encouraged the others to follow suit. He said that someone can accompany a parent to translate if needed. Another said that if anything is confusing they could bring the information and/or materials to the next group meeting and the group could try to clarify things. It was clear that they were beginning to see the group as a safe place, a non-threatening environment to express concerns and exchange ideas and a place where they could offer as well as receive help.

The following year at the group's urging, they organized a class to learn English. The class had the dual focus of learning a new language and increasing competence in handling daily living situations. With increased confidence the parents became effective advocates for their children and themselves and, as many good groups do, this group took on a life of its own.

Roseline Felix is a social worker at The Place @ 999 of North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center; Westbury, NY and a member of the L.I. Institute for Group Work with Children & Youth Steering Committee.

From the Inside Out

Presently I am working with a group of 5 to 9 year olds in a group we called: The Poetry Club. This weekly group is composed of kids in an alternative school special education program. We meet in their classroom during the regular school day. The purpose of the group is to learn to share, have fun, and build confidence through the self expression of poetry. Goals for the group related directly to academic goals such as following directions, participating in discussions, and reading aloud and listening. One of the group's projects was to develop a poetry club journal. Here is a poem by one of the members.

Andy Malekoff

Friends for Now!

Once upon a time
 there was a snake
 Who sneaked up to
 every frog to eat.
 One day he shooted
 from the tree
 To eat the flea
 He went to a frog
 And said, "I'm going to
 eat you now"
 He ate the frog
 He ate it whole
 So he was still alive
 But he didn't realize
 That he kills for no
 reason
 So he spit out the frog
 And now he has his
 best friend
 For now!

by Travis

Book Briefs

Adolescent Gangs: Old Issues, New Approaches;
 Curtis Branch, Editor; Brunner/Mazel; Philadelphia, Pa; 1999;
 230 pages; \$29.95 (paper); \$59.95 (cloth).

Adolescent Gangs: Old Issues, New Approaches offers a hopeful message about harnessing the energy of youth who are members of gangs, also referred to in this volume as "street organizations." The editor, Curtis Branch, who provides thought provoking commentary throughout this collection, concludes that there is no single answer to addressing the complexity of gangs. Nevertheless, if you are interested in connecting with the part of a gang that is closer to the center of community life than the part that exists at the edges, and if you wish to learn about the prosocial possibilities inherent in gangs/street organizations then this fascinating collection is a must read and will be a valuable addition to your library.

Mission Statement Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children & Youth

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)
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 Steering Committee: Aimee Colton;
 Roseline Felix; Stacey Levin;
 Maureen O'Connor; Catherine
 Papell; Andrew Peters; Carol
 Sutker; Michael Wise
 Project Coordinator: Andrew Malekoff

rocky mountain writer's workshop*

i have an idea
 i write a sentence
 i crumple the page.
 i have an idea
 i write a sentence
 i crumple the page.
 i have an idea
 i write a sentence
 i crumple the page.
 i have an idea
 i write a sentence
 i crumple the page.

i live on
 a mountain of crumpled pages;

an avalanche of aborted ideas
 blanket me.

there is only one way out:

i have an idea
 i write a sentence.

by andy malekoff

* Presented in a workshop intended to encourage practitioners to write about their group work, on October 22, 1999 at the 21st annual symposium of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups in Denver, Colorado.

Long Island Institute
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TIPS: For Serendipitous Evaluations

As indicated in this issue's editorial there are a variety of means that can be used for evaluating group work. Serendipitous evaluation is the kind that comes our way unexpectedly. Does the unexpected and unstructured nature of serendipitous evaluation make it any less valid than formal evaluation? Don't underestimate the value of these surprise affirmations and critical analyses of group life. The fact that they occur at all should reinforce for group workers who might otherwise doubt the value of their efforts, that the group experience can live deeply within group members even when the group is not meeting or when all surface signs appear to the contrary.

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 Malakoff, 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; Temple Sinai of Roslyn. Copyright July 1, 2000/USA.

RESOURCES...

- **International Group Work Conference: SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS: SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH PERSONAL, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETAL CHANGE.** October 19-22, 2000 - 22nd Annual International Symposium of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For more information contact: Ellen Sue Mesbur or Nancy Sullivan; Phone 416-979-5000 (Ellen Sue Ext. 6219) (Nancy Ext. 6229); Email emesbur@acs.ryerson.ca or navillus@interlog.com - Symposium 2000 Web site: <http://dominic.barry.edu/~kelly/aaswg/symposia/toronto.html>
- **Group Work Certificate Program:** Beginning September 20, 2000, this special Group Work with Children & Youth Certificate Program is being offered at North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, N.Y. 11577-2215. The cost is \$650 for this year-long, 30 hour program. Contact Jane E. Yazdpour at NSC&FGC address (above) to register - Phone: (516) 626-1971 ext. 309 - Fax: (516) 626-8043.
- **Information Wanted:** The Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth in collaboration with Pride for Youth of Bellmore is developing an educational forum for school and agency staff working with gay and lesbian student groups. We are currently looking for feedback from workers and teachers in the schools in order to plan this event. If you are interested in being a part of the project or if you have information that you wish to share please contact steering committee member Michael Wise at (516-679-9000). Or write to: Michael Wise, Pride for Youth, 2050 Bellmore Avenue, Bellmore, NY 11710.