

EDITORIAL

When GROUPWORK was first published, various professionals asked us if the journal was to be a forerunner of a groupwork association in Britain. In particular many people knew of the Family Therapy Association and suggested that maybe groupwork needed a similar organisation. However, as editors of the journal, we felt that developing an association was well outside our plans (and energies), it was perhaps not needed as the NISW network was alive and thriving and we guess both of us were somehow resistant to the idea of an 'organisation'. However the recent decision by NISW that it could no longer maintain financial support for the groupwork network, or sustain a lectureship specialising in groupwork, throws into stark relief the question of who is responsible for the development of the groupwork method or, indeed, any other methods social workers use?

The difficulty is that the more you look at the question, the harder it becomes to provide an answer. It is certainly not CCETSW (The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work). In their April 1989 paper, *Statement of Requirements for Qualification in Social Work* CCETSW concentrate on the outcome criteria for the new qualification, the DSW, but say virtually nothing about how students are to acquire the social work skills on their 'shopping-list'. Whilst groupwork appears quite prominently on their syllabus, for example if it listed as a *particular area of practice* specialism, it seems that CCETSW do not see it as their role to identify what a training in groupwork, or indeed any other social work method, should constitute. They may well argue that that is not their responsibility, so where do we turn to next? The professional association, BASW (British Association of Social Workers), would seem a very appropriate body to take responsibility for practice methods and practice skills, but apart from one or two short lived attempts at a 'special interest group' in groupwork, no guidance has been forthcoming from that direction either, and groupwork would not appear to be very high on their list of priorities.

The situation appears to be little better in many practice agencies. A recent research report by Wandsworth Social Services (Wandsworth Study and Review of Supervisory Practice, 1988) agreed that the abilities and skills of supervisors were at their lowest when it came to groupwork. It was clear that, whilst it might not be necessary for every supervisor to be a groupwork specialist, getting any supervision in either of these areas would have proved difficult.

Does responsibility for methods lie with social work academics? If so, it would rapidly become a theory looking for a practical application. Any method, from gastronomy to Gestalt requires a theory and a practice if it is to remain dynamically alive and flourishing.

Whilst we recognise that social work is a diverse and complex 'pot pourri' of skills, tasks and duties, we would argue that it must have established methods of practice somewhere central to its heart if it is to continue in existence. Such methods need to have a theoretical base, a practice methodology, and be capable of evaluation, replication and implementation by trained staff. Our question is, can groupwork achieve this without the help of some parent body or even an organisation of its own – an association? Or should the question be, can social work afford not to have such organisations? The Editors would welcome your views on the matter for potential publication in the journal.

One source of evidence that groupwork is alive and well, notwithstanding the absence of a national organisation, is the range of innovative articles that we are able to publish in **GROUPWORK**. In this issue we lead with a major theoretical statement by Audrey Mullender and David Ward on 'self-directed groupwork', sometimes known as 'social action groupwork'. This new and emerging model, locating groupwork as a springboard for creating change in the external environment of the group members, offers an important challenge to traditional methods. The approach is being tested and developed in practice agencies, and the article from Nottingham by Bill Badham and colleagues, on an ambitious and apparently controversial project in a penal institution, illustrates both the potential and the hazards of challenging traditional methods.

The next two articles tackle core groupwork issues; Michael Preston-Shoot discusses and illustrates the importance of contract, arguing that negotiated group agreements offer increased say to users of social work services; and Julie Phillips reminds us of the importance of targeting activities in group programmes to meet the needs of different kinds of users. Barry Daste, drawing in part on the available research material, and also on his own practice and personal experience, provides practice guidelines for running effective groups for people with cancer. The final article in this issue focuses on the rather neglected topic of decision-making in groupwork. The author, Marian Fatout, concentrates on therapeutic groups, but we think that much of what she says is equally applicable to a whole range of groups in which social workers are involved.
