

# Editorial: A welcome from the new editors

## **Editors past and present**

We are delighted to have been asked to continue the work of editing this journal and are mindful that we follow a line of distinguished editors. Allan Brown co-edited an incredible eight volumes (1988-1995), first with Andrew Kerlake and then with Nano McCaughan. Nuala Lordan, Tara Mistry and Claire Wintram co-edited Volumes 9 and 10, and from 1999-2003 the journal had its only sole editor, Oded Manor. We are indebted to all of these people, whose dedicated work is an inspiration to us both. This is the 40th Issue of the journal and, as we take over the helm, we are keen to build on the excellent work of editors, board members, peer reviewers and, of course, all those who have contributed articles to this journal. In particular, our thanks to *Groupwork's* publisher, David Whiting, for his unfailing support for the journal.

We continue a tradition of co-editing which is particularly apt for a journal about groupwork. As co-editors we share a background in practice going back to the early 1970s and though we are social workers by training and experience, we are both steeped in interprofessional work and will build on Oded Manor's push to encourage contributions to the journal from across professional disciplines. As well as many commonalities (including a Lancastrian upbringing), we also bring differences to the editorship, ones which we value and which we feel will be a source of strength.

Our commitment to groupwork runs long and deep, based on the knowledge that groups can breathe life into notions of empowerment and partnership, notions that are much more easily spoken than

enacted. Groupwork means taking risks, too, not least the risk of making mistakes in a semi-public forum. Groupwork also allows for more creativity in our professional lives. If we are honest, part of the attraction of groupwork is also the fact that it is not mainstream, which probably explains why both of your new co-editors view groupwork by numbers with a degree of scepticism.

At this point please allow us two short anecdotes to illustrate some of these themes.

Mark's first post-qualifying job in the UK was as a generic social worker in a Social Services Department (remember those!) Not long after starting, Mark canvassed the need for and interest in groupwork in his area and was told in stern terms by the area officer that he must make a case for groupwork to the full area office (three social work teams) before any groupwork could be considered. The case was made (with supporters primed) and, happily, accepted. In some respects this could be seen as a good example of ensuring the best and proper use of resources, but - as remarked at the time - since when was casework ever scrutinised with such rigour?

Since then, Mark has led and facilitated groups with a wide variety of service users, and with students and practitioners.

Pam's experience of groupwork began in the 1970s, when she worked as an unqualified social worker for Birmingham Social Services. Like Mark, the case for groupwork had to be made, and to be undertaken in addition to her normal caseload, with no workload relief. Pam's first experience was running a weekly intermediate treatment group, in the evening, for girls aimed at preventing admission to care. Since then, Pam has run groups in a range of different roles – residential social worker, education welfare officer, statutory field social worker and manager. Much of her experience has been focused on work with women, particularly women suffering from depression, but she has also run groups for young people and is currently running a group for women involved in street prostitution.

## **Editorial board and peer reviewers**

We are not alone in our work for the journal. Indeed, we are extremely grateful to those who have provided continuity by remaining on the

Editorial Board and to those who have joined the Board and have brought new perspectives. The Board is still composing, and we will introduce the members, new and established, in a future issue. Our aim is to have an active Board membership which reflects current concerns and opportunities in groupwork.

We have a new group of peer-reviewers (assessors,) to whom we are also indebted. We describe later what you can expect from us if you submit an article for publication to the journal. Suffice it to say that the quality and speed of turn-round has been highly commended by our recent contributors and for this we thank our peer reviewers.

### **About this Issue**

We start Volume 14 with an Issue which crosses many boundaries. First, we are delighted to have articles from the Republic of Ireland, the UK and the US in this one issue. It is encouraging to read these articles and to realise how much we have to learn from one another and to appreciate the relevance of groupwork across national boundaries.

This Issue also reflects the immense variety of groupwork with a wide range of people. The groupwork of Wilson and her colleagues is located in a school setting with 16-18 year olds with learning disabilities; that of Berry and Letendre is with families in the child welfare system and women who have been abused; Argyle and Bolton consider three groups - with single parents, teenage parents and a drop-in centre for people with drug and alcohol abuse; Lange's groupwork is with a parenting group; and Doel's focuses on a training group with groupworkers in Children's Services. Groupwork is one of the few areas in which practitioners from a range of settings, working with people in every kind of circumstance, can talk each other's language and know each other's practice. As specialisms become yet deeper, groupwork becomes increasingly important as a bridge between these professional groups.

As well as this great diversity, there is also a unifying theme in this Issue. All of the articles describe and reflect on an *educational* dimension of groupwork. The groupwork of Wilson *et al.* is located not just physically in a school, but also structurally in the school curriculum. In addition, the groupwork is a resource for student

social workers' learning whilst on placement. Berry and Letendre consider 'psychoeducational' groups, which go beyond the usual skill development of parenting groups to work with parents' social relationships and collective strategies. This theme of mutual aid through mutual learning finds a resonance in Lange's focus on 'narrative work', in which group members learn to be the 'reflective team', a role usually reserved for the clinical experts. Learning is at the centre of Argyle and Bolton's blurring of the dichotomy between activity-based and discussion-based groupwork, as participants in the three groups develop art skills not just for public presentation but also as a means of enhancing social relations. Doel's educational setting is a series of workshops for groupworkers, in which participants learn a process to consider the meaning of difficult behaviour in groups and to develop strategies to work *with* it rather than against it.

### **The future of *Groupwork* and groupwork**

This journal is a valuable resource. It is the only UK-based journal which focuses specifically on the method and context of professional practice which we know as groupwork. As we mentioned earlier, it offers something in common for people who, in all other respects, are separated by borders of all kinds - national, professional, specialism, setting, etc. Those who have practised groupwork or researched, taught and written about it, know that it has a special potential to transform the rhetoric of anti-oppressive practice and empowerment into reality.

We will continue to publish three Issues in each volume. We will make it a priority to ensure that these Issues appear on time. Our group of peer reviewers is eager and committed and has made a collective commitment to provide feedback within two to three weeks. Contributors to the journal can, therefore, be assured that you will receive two timely peer reviews (anonymous - and your identity will be anonymous to the peer reviewers). We have had very positive comments from a number of contributors about the diligence of the peer review and the helpfulness to those (a majority) who are requested to make some changes.

We start from a position of wanting to publish your article and we

give what help we can in respect of those articles which initially fall short of standards for publication. Of course, our first consideration must be the quality of articles in the journal, and there can never be a guarantee of publication, but we will in all circumstances give constructive feedback and suggestions. Above all, writers should always remember that this journal is about *groupwork*. It may seem obvious, but one of the most common reasons why articles are not published is because they focus too little on groupwork, as an intervention with its own theoretical framework and knowledge base. The guidelines for contributors (at the end of each issue) should help, and we hope that by the time this issue is published you will be able to access information on the journal's website, such as the peer reviewer's assessment format, etc.

In particular, we hope that practitioners will find time and confidence to publish in these pages. *Groupwork* has a better track record than most in attracting people who are involved in direct practice, namely running groups, as well as those who are teaching and researching. Sharing practice experience is central to the purpose of this journal. However, we know that there is more to do. Again, we - and the journal's peer reviewers - are keen to provide support and encouragement.

Journals often focus on the authors and contributors, yet the whole purpose of a journal is the *reader*. Please contact us with your thoughts and comments and do consider responding to articles you have read in the journal. You might want to copy us into any correspondence you have with an author. We would seek your permission before publishing correspondence, but we would like to encourage this kind of dialogue. If you enjoy reading *Groupwork*, please spread the word whenever you can to encourage others to read the journal.

Finally, as co-editors we discussed whether it was right to submit our own articles for publication in this journal (subject, like all submissions, to the anonymous rigour of peer review). After discussion with the Editorial Board, we decided that it was appropriate to write an example of the kind of article we would like to encourage. In this Issue, Mark has written about a particular area of groupwork practice (difficult behaviour in groups) which arose from workshops with groupworkers in Children's Services, though the issues have a broad significance to all kinds of groupwork. We hope this quite

detailed and focused approach might encourage others to write about specific topics in groupwork practice (for example, working with subgroups; working with difference in groups; getting the best from session endings; using a particular activity or technique in the group) which would build a library of practice guidance for groupworkers.

It is common for the state of groupwork to be discussed rather like a tide that ebbs and flows, with something of a retreat over the last decade or so and always the hope that the tide is currently turning. For example, some commentators look at the specific inclusion of groupwork in the National Occupational Standards for the new social work degree in England and Wales as an indication that groupwork is gaining greater prominence. There is no doubt that the profile of groupwork does seem to ebb and flow, yet we groupworkers know that group processes are essential to almost every aspect of human endeavour. Groups are an inescapable part of our lives, personal and professional, and knowledge of group processes a key to harnessing collective energies and creativity. Whether 'social groupwork' is in or out of fashion, *groupwork* will never cease to fascinate and energise, and learning about groups and groupwork in the pages of this journal will continue to contribute to our growing knowledge and enthusiasm. We look forward to playing our part in this process.

**Mark Doel and Pamela Trevithick**