

## Editorial

Allow me to introduce this issue of *Groupwork*; I am confident that, whether experienced or novice or, indeed, with (as yet) only a passing interest in groupwork, you will find much to engage you in these pages. The articles in issue 15.3 further strengthen the foundations we are building for the knowledge and evidence base for groupwork.

In a fascinating account of groupwork with women survivors from different ethnic backgrounds, Janet Batsleer demonstrates the power of naming some of the myths surrounding women survivors. She considers how the process of community organising helps to shape the notion of 'women's place' into the more powerful 'women's space'. The groupwork she describes helps the women to develop a metaphor of escape, moving away from self-blaming controls ('I've made my bed and so I must lie on it'), what Batsleer refers to as 'brokenness', on a journey to 'freedom and light'. The overcoming of the obstacles on this journey became the focus for groupwork, and it was from speaking about this brokenness that talking about God emerged in the group. The article illustrates the serendipitous way in which powerful group themes can emerge and how the unexpected (a woman railing against her God) can prompt group leaders to take risks. For me, too, it illustrated the many shades and layers of difference; in this group, it emerged that all the members had a God, though they were different ones. The ultimate difference in this group would have been a woman with no God.

As some-one who is less than moved by theories of stages of group development (fine in theory, much less recognisable in practice), I find the model for working with the group life cycle *within* each group session proposed by Martin L. Birnbaum and Andrew Cicchetti much more convincing and, ultimately, more useful. In their review of the beginning, middle and ending phases of each individual session of a group, the authors consider the existing North American literature and pepper their review with interesting illustrations from a study with 18 student volunteers. In particular, groupworkers will find the discussion on sessional endings very welcome. Endings are often the weak link in each session, when they should be the strongest link between this session

and the next. This model will help to counter that tendency.

Complementing Birnbaum and Cicchetti's article on stages within an individual session, Caplan focuses on the contact with potential group members *before* the group begins. Writing primarily with therapeutic groups in mind, Caplan uses a case example to demonstrate how the initial telephone contact with potential group members can help to motivate the person for the first group session. This screening interview, or 'offer of groupwork' as I would prefer to conceptualise it, is a significant part of the groupwork process, even though it does not occur in a group. It also enables the potential member to have a sense of the likely style of groupwork in the group, and to begin to make a judgement about whether and how the group might help, and how they could contribute to the group.

The open letters between Jerome Carson and Patrick Hopkinson return us to a theme which has been represented in many recent issues of this journal - the need to build the groupwork knowledge and evidence base. The format of two open letters provides a lively debate which focus respectively on quantitative and qualitative approaches to research in groupwork. What is particularly noteworthy for groupworkers is the fact that research processes often rely on groupwork (focus groups and nominal groupwork being the best known), and that the process of enquiry in research has such strong parallels with the process of enquiry in groupwork. Taken together, the two letters tend to favour qualitative approaches to researching and evaluating groupwork, though it is probably a judicious use of the two which is likely to give us the most complete picture. It is interesting that the outcome-driven approaches presented by Carson in the first part of the article seem to focus on the *individual* in the group, whereas the more process-oriented approaches described by Hopkinson are more *group*-oriented.

I recently evaluated a group's process as an independent 'outsider' researcher (McDermott, 2005). It was only the third session of a group of twelve people experiencing difficulties with adolescents in their care and I feared the impact of a stranger at this stage in the group, albeit an appearance that the group had sanctioned. In fact, the half-hour slot that was devoted to my researching the group proved to be quite a catalyst for the group to consider itself *as a group*. The very process of experiencing an outsider evaluator, and the nature of the questions asked, helped the group recognise its group identity and, therefore, build on it. I asked

group members to reflect on the circumstances of their joining the group, what they hoped to achieve and how they felt the group was helping, or not. We (the groupworkers, group members and I) will be writing about this experience in more detail, but for now it encourages me to exhort groupworkers and group members to consider the value of building into the group process opportunities for independent evaluation by outsider researchers, preferably those who also have groupwork training and experience.

What is crystal clear is the need to build a substantial body of groupwork research, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and focusing on both outcomes and processes. The Carson and Hopkinson debate is one that invites further discussion, and they point to the importance of understanding that

qualitative approaches produce research that challenges other practitioners to explore their own work and so should be published as widely as possible in order to add to the literature and prompt the evidence based development of groupwork'.

So, for those who wish to participate in this endeavour, the pages of *Groupwork* await ... ! Whether it is an analysis of survey work of the prevalence of groupwork and groupwork education or a single case design reflecting on the experiences and findings of a particular group, even an individual session, we welcome your contribution. Outcome-oriented, process-oriented or both; a speculative article to help us to theorise our groupwork and set it in a wider context; a piece which links group processes with those in teams, organisations and the wider world. All have the potential to contribute to the challenge of enlightening our groupwork knowledge and practice and the journal looks forward to hearing from you.

Professor Mark Doel  
Co-editor

## Reference

McDermott, F. (2005) Researching groupwork: Outsider and insider perspectives. *Groupwork*, 15, 1, 90-108