

## Editorial

Volume 20 of the journal marks an ending and a beginning. In the Editorial in last issue, 20(1), Pam Trevithick gave a fond farewell to Mark Doel, her Co-Editor for many years. I take over from Mark as the new Co-Editor with some trepidation because Mark has left some really big shoes to fill. Luckily, he has been the ultimate groupworker and, as Shulman (1999) suggests, recognised the transitional aspect of endings. Both Mark and Pam began to facilitate the transition and developed a plan for continuing leadership of the journal several years ago. As such, I feel well supported and adequately prepared to take on the role. As I reflected on the transitional work that Mark quietly did, I thought back to the many groups I have left over the years – some well planned and others abruptly left for reasons outwith my control. I wondered how well prepared the new worker felt when stepping into the shoes I left behind. Hopefully, they felt half as supported and prepared as I have been. Thankfully, Pam will remain as my Co-Editor for several more months until another new Co-Editor is appointed and settles in. Mark and Pam have made a great team and have helped to reinvigorate the journal and will leave it in a very healthy state. Through their efforts we have a steady stream of manuscripts being submitted and this has allowed for the regular publication of the journal.

Much has been written about the importance of good beginnings in groupwork practice, but typically this writing addresses the beginning of a new group. Less is written about a new beginning for an ongoing group. It is important to pay attention to the transitional aspects of beginnings. The journal and the Editorial Board are like an ongoing group, and having a new Co-Editor makes the group different, yet the same. Building on and being true to the history of the 'old' group is an important aspect of the transitional aspects of beginnings in an ongoing group. The journal has a 20 year history and has been led by and had contributions from some real giants in the field. In addition, previous editorial boards have had a commitment to developing new groupworkers and authors. The journal will continue to be true to that history as we move forward. Building on the history of supporting

developing authors and practitioners, the Editorial Board has recently agreed to develop a 'Practitioner's Corner' where practitioners can write about and share their practice with readers of the journal. These articles will be peer reviewed like all articles in the journal, but pieces for the Practitioner's Corner will have different criteria for inclusion in the journal. We hope that this will encourage new authors to begin writing about their practice.

Groupwork as a method of practice is resilient and continues despite the pressure towards the individualisation of problems and individual solutions that Pam discussed in her editorial last issue (Trevithick, 2010). Resiliency is often seen as an individual attribute, but in reality, it is an environmental/transactional concept. For individuals, families, groups or communities to be resilient, they must be nurtured by something in the environment – even having one single supportive voice can be enough for some people to remain resilient. This journal serves as an important voice for groupwork. Through the efforts of the Editorial Board we look for other ways to collectively support the groupwork cause. The yearly symposia have been a place to celebrate groupwork practice and nurture new groupwork authors. Plans are underway to facilitate the development of a groupwork association. In addition, connections are made with other groupworkers and groupwork publications.

Such efforts are very important given the uncertain times we are entering. The connection between what C. Wright Mills (1959) called private troubles and public issues is being muted by much of the rhetoric we hear today. Instead we are told that problems are individual problems – rather than a manifestation of public issues. William Schwartz (1969) and others after him built on Mills' ideas and developed an approach to practice that showed how to work at the nexus of private troubles and public issues. Groupwork, social action, community organising, and other collective approaches are vital to counteract this drive toward rabid individualisation. The journal will continue to give voice to these important forces.

### **In this issue**

This issue of the journal includes one paper which is a conceptual review of the groupwork literature and three articles of new primary

research. Whether one uses the language of ‘evidence-based,’ ‘evidence informed,’ best practice, or some other conceptualisation, it is clear that improving the evidence base for what we do as groupworkers is important. All four articles in this issue serve this purpose. The three empirical articles demonstrate the range of research methods available to groupworkers to evaluate their practice and add to the groupwork evidence base.

The first article *Supporting Ourselves: Groupwork interventions for Compassion Fatigue* by Bourassa and Clements is very topical given the stresses and strains on social workers in the UK in general, but particularly in England. Though the authors are from the United States, their discussion of compassion fatigue will hit home for many workers on this side of the Atlantic. Our work is hard enough without also having to cope with the political and environmental pressures of the various reform and review activities. Worker resiliency can be stretched, but these authors suggest different groupwork approaches to deal with work related compassion fatigue.

The second article, also from the United States, is an example of the type of research called for in the UK by the Evaluating Social Work Education Outcomes (OSWE) project. The OSWE project worked to build capacity in evaluating social work education (Carpenter & Burgess, 2010). Tucker and Norton in their article, *New Heights: Adventure-based Group Work*, report on such pedagogical research regarding adventure based groupwork. Groupwork has a long history of groups that use programme or activity as a method of working – rather than talking only groups. The evaluation suggests that many important educational outcomes were attained. We need more outcome evaluation regarding education in general, but also in groupwork education.

The third article, also a research article, reports on an evaluation of a group for voice hearers in Montreal. This qualitative piece of research by Ngo Nkouth, St. Onge and Lepage identified elements of groupwork practice that members found to be most helpful. It will come as no surprise to seasoned groupworkers what the members of these groups reported. The helpful attributes were what have been called therapeutic factors, curative factors, or dynamics of mutual aid. They included universality, self-disclosure, being with other people who had similar experience, having a sense of belonging, getting hope, destigmatisation, receiving information or training. In many ways, these helpful attributes

can be seen as an antidote to the rabid individualisation discussed earlier. Documenting the benefits of groupwork, like these authors have done, is vitally important given the individualisation of problems and solutions.

The final article by Finley & Payne, *A retrospective records audit of bereaved carers' groups*, is another research article. Here the authors used a retrospective review or audit of groupwork records. Using records that were part of standard agency paperwork, the authors looked at the content of the groups as well as the mood of the groups. The authors were also able to implement an evaluation questionnaire at reunion groups. The method of evaluation could be utilised in many other groupwork settings and provides an interesting and realistic way for practitioners to add to the groupwork evidence base. Importantly, the article should provide evidence to counteract one of the barriers sometimes placed in the way of developing groupwork services. Inexperienced groupworkers and their managers do not need to fear that negative feelings will be too difficult to manage in a support group for bereaved persons.

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## References

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