

Editorial

In a recent lecture on working within an organisational context the topic of change emerged as an important theme. Students discussed the amount and pace of change that seems to be occurring in the health and social care fields at the moment. They expressed many concerns about being able to cope with the quickly shifting landscape they were soon to enter as professional workers. The amount of uncertainty about the future was unsettling for them. I stopped to reflect on my own time as a student back in the USA. A new presidential administration had just entered office and it seemed to me as if the social contract was being torn apart, ripped up and thrown away. To mix metaphors, many people felt as if the rug was being pulled out from under their feet, especially many young people, the poor and vulnerable. A new era of 'personal responsibility' and individualisation had been ushered in. Social Darwinism held sway once again. Here we are 30 years later and another sense of uncertainty and impending doom is being discussed by university students in courses ranging from across the health and social care professions. Future professionals from social work, community learning and development, education, counselling, psychology, occupational therapy, nursing and others are worried. As an educator I share their concerns and worries about the future. At times like this it would be easy to despair, but it is also important to offer a sense of hope to the professionals of tomorrow.

Perhaps it is my advancing years, sense of déjà vu, and/or my identity as a groupworker, but I maintain a sense of hope. Groupwork is essentially about change – whether we work at, or across, the micro, meso or macro-systems in our environment. As a groupworker I embrace conflict, challenge and change as a healthy, normal and energy producing dynamic in the life of a group. Tensions and differences, if used appropriately, can give rise to new and creative solutions to group problems. In addition, as a groupworker I have the knowledge and skills to engage with others when facing organisational structures that hinder, rather than help, service users. As a groupworker I also have the knowledge and skills to engage with others when faced with

oppression or unjust social structures. The power of collective action sustained me as a young professional and continues to do so today. The strength of mutual aid and working together has sustained or improved the lives of countless service users, vulnerable people, and communities. With an increasing focus on individualisation and social Darwinism by politicians, the voice of groupwork across all helping professions needs to become stronger and more vocal.

In this issue

The theme of change is echoed in the four articles in this issue of *Groupwork*. The context of change within these four articles is truly diverse. The contexts include education, mental health, social work education and group treatment. The practice described or studied occurred in Zimbabwe, the southern United States, and both the French and English speaking areas of Canada. The focus of change ranged from individual behaviour change to organisational change. Despite the differences in international location, organisational setting or target of intervention, all these articles are essentially about change.

For example, Muskat and Mesbur's article 'Adaptations for teaching social work with groups in the age of technology' describes an institutionally driven change in teaching groupwork in a Canadian social work programme. They make recommendations for others who are implementing online teaching in a course requiring the teaching of groupwork skills.

Also from Canada, Roy, Gourde and Couto provide an excellent review of the literature regarding engagement of men in group treatment programmes. Through exploring the literature using an ecological framework to organise and make sense of it, they argue that engagement with men is essential for change. Their theoretical approach is a very useful way to structure a systematic review

Casstevens and Cohen explore the use of focus groups as a research method in a psychiatric clubhouse programme. The focus groups were used to facilitate the development of new health and well-being programmes within the clubhouse.

The use of focus groups was essentially about change, namely how to bring about programme change by including and involving service

users. It also highlights the messy world of research in the 'real' world, which is rich and exciting but also challenging. Their qualitative study helpfully explores how groupworkers can usefully 'break the rules' in focus group methodology.

Finally, we move to the southern hemisphere in the article by Newman Wadesango from South Africa. His study, based in Zimbabwe, explored decision making and leadership styles within schools. Within the context of organisational change in schools, Wadesango suggests that groupwork skills and using groups as a means of organisational change are critical to the success of change implementation.

As I trust you will see upon reading all of these articles, the knowledge and skills of groupwork are required in order to navigate, survive and thrive in times of change. The articles give me hope which I can share with my students along with the groupwork skill and knowledge they will need as they enter the uncertain world of health and social care.

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