

Editorial

This issue is the first to be published since Tim Kelly resigned as Co-editor of the journal. Tim joined Pam Trevithick as Co-editor in 2010, and has nurtured the journal in those 5 years. As good editors should be he has been an excellent ambassador for the journal, supporting and promoting the journal and actively encouraging submissions. He has worked hard to increase the reach and profile of the journal. Many authors will have experienced and appreciated his enabling support that encouraged them to both write and to write better. His commitments to groupwork, along with his story telling abilities were demonstrated in every editorial he wrote. When I joined him as a new Co-editor in 2012 I was very grateful for his patience, as I learnt all that being an editor involved,, as well as his openness to suggestions of new ways of doing things – we were a good team.

Tim will be much missed. The editorial board has lost a valued member – this is something many groups do experience from time to time. Members leaving a group such as the Editorial Board do create a sense of loss, but new members joining can create opportunities for people to take on new roles. Having an editorial group for *Groupwork* allows for the utilization of the different skills, knowledge and experiences that people have. It enables us to share some of the responsibility and to work together on shared tasks and decision making. When chairing a board meeting with people participating in the room, and around the world via Skype, and telephone and when the internet connection is not all it needs to be, it may not feel so – but having an Editorial Board does increase our productivity. Having the editorial group means we can pool ideas, knowledge and skills, people bring diverse perspectives – we learn new things from each other. We hold one another (and are held) to account – we are more accountable in the group. It can be supportive and give encouragement to take risks – we may be braver as a group. We can develop new approaches – we can be more creative as a group. All of which benefits the readers and contributors to *Groupwork*.

Tim's resignation as Co-editor and from the board means in the

coming months we will start the process of seeking people with a passion for groupwork to join our editorial group and as new group members contribute to the development of the journal. We will also be seeking a new Co-editor with the ability and commitment to provide leadership and vision and work in co-operation and collaboration with their Co-editor, the Editorial Board and the publisher, as well as of course with the authors and readers of *Groupwork*. If you are interested in these roles, please contact David Whiting

In this issue

Groupwork has a long history of connections to challenging oppression, empowerment, social change and learning as the four papers in this issue testify. They demonstrate just how important groupwork is and what an effective means it is to provide support and facilitate learning both for users of social work services and the students of social work. All four papers in this issue relate to the use of groupwork in social work; despite the different settings there are some common themes between the papers. All the papers point to the importance of the group facilitator – identified in the papers as a groupworker, facilitator, educator, supervisor – and the experience, skills and knowledge required to ensure that the groups are supportive, the need to provide safe spaces for sharing and to encourage mutual support and learning. In the different settings all four also highlight, within a safe group environment, the value of sharing with others, and how members can offer each other support and challenge. They also identify the benefits of multiple viewpoints on critical thinking and creative problem-solving.

The first paper *Groupwork Interventions for Women & Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse: Do they Work & Do they Last?* by Stephanie Holt, Gloria Kirwan & Jane Ngo explores the impact of a concurrent groupwork programme for mothers and children who have experienced domestic abuse. Their study shows how useful groups can be in helping participants share their personal experiences in a supportive setting. The children found the groups created a safe space in which to talk about their feelings, something they did not have the opportunity to do in other settings. In the same way for the mothers it was liberating to realise others had experienced similar things to themselves, and they

could support each other and give and receive information and advice. Isolation is an integral element of domestic violence and the groups reduced this.

Unusually the authors returned to the women who participated 1 year later, to see what enduring impact the group had had. Mothers all said their participation in the group was a key factor in helping them acquire a sense of personal agency and of becoming aware of their power to shape their own lives.

The next three papers all focus on groupwork in social work education –Alschuler, Silver and McArdle’s paper is about group supervision for students and Jennings, Gandarilla and Tan about the use of Talking Circle to explore diversity and Molina and Jacinto write about using experiential groupwork with students for them to learn groupwork skills.

In *Strengths-Based Group Supervision with Social Work Students* Mari Alschuler, Thelma Silver and Linda McArdle use the theoretical models of the strengths perspective with narrative theory and reflective practice, while incorporating the concepts of the Socratic method into the group supervision of social work students. In so doing they explain they are seeking to use the same model of the cooperative partnership that emphasises strengths and abilities, empowerment, resilience, and diversity that they promote for work with users of social services within the supervisee-supervisor relationship. Their research shows one of the advantages of using groupwork in supervision is that students gain critical insight as a result of the range of viewpoints in the group.

The authors use case studies to illustrate the empowerment, self-efficacy and resilience created in the group supervision sessions that increased students’ ability to grow and learn, highlighting particularly the benefits of group supervision in inter-professional settings. They conclude that strength-based group supervision may develop increasingly professional interactions among students, leading to a mutually supportive team process. This process can assist students in developing the skills, knowledge, and professional use of self that will enable them to become competent and effective professional social workers

Talking Circle as a Tool for Teaching and Learning About Diversity by Lisa Jennings, Maria Gandarilla and Phillip Tan discusses how Talking Circles, a method of group communication that has been used by Native

American tribes, can be adapted and used in a social work education setting to teach and learn about ethnic diversity. The authors explain the rules and egalitarian principles underpinning the circles, which include that *no member is better, more worthy or more privileged, but is unique*.

The participants in the Talking Circle said that through sharing their experiences and challenges everyone got a chance to teach and learn about each other's ethnic heritage and struggles. As the circle developed it enabled the deepening of the sharing of insights and increased the new awareness of the experiences and challenges of others, and their understanding of the value of the differences and similarities they shared with their fellow classmates. In contrast to the groupwork with those who had experienced domestic violence, the differences in the group were one of its strengths and contributed to the learning.

In common with the other papers group members said the process created trust and confidence and participants said they found the process empowering, and that it created mutual empathy that meant they were able to support each other and provide insights as well. In this way they developed their cultural competency and cultural sensitivity.

The final paper focuses on using groupwork to teach about groupwork for social work students. In *The Advantages and Benefits of a Student Mutual-Aid Group in Developing Groupwork Skills* Olga Molina and George Jacinto write of what is sadly a recurring theme in *Groupwork* – the lack of groupwork opportunities for social work students. In response to this, and wanting their students to understand what groupwork has to offer in social work and to have the opportunity to develop groupwork skills and the confidence to facilitate groups in the future, they developed a model for teaching groupwork skills in the classroom using mutual-aid groups. The student groups chose the focus of their mutual aid group and then took on different roles within the group, at different times being a group member or a facilitator. In this way they learnt about a range of theories (introduced in course reading), and concepts including mutual-aid dynamics, group norms, group member roles, role of groupworker, worker skills, structuring techniques, intervention strategies, use of silence, engaging silent members, 'round robin vs. free floating' discussions. This experiential method of teaching helped the students learn about group processes, stages of group development, member roles, group norms, diversity in groups, how to deal with conflict, diverse theoretical models of groupwork, and groupwork

skills for facilitating mutual-aid groups. Some felt the fact they were all students and there was no social worker and service user contact limited their learning. However many students said the mutual-aid groups improved their confidence in facilitating groups, and that they would suggest groups to their clients. The students said they prefer the mutual-aid groups to role play sessions, which were seen as too unreal, as a means of learning about groupwork.

Jennie Fleming
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