

Editorial

Celebrating student groupwork

In this issue the Editorial Board is proud to publish papers by student groupworkers. They include the winner and 4 runners up of the 2016 Groupwork Student Essay Competition.. As editor of Groupwork it should be no surprise that I strongly believe groupwork has much to offer all aspects of life and work. Many years of working with groups of young people as a youth worker, with community members as a community worker and with groups of older people and carers as a social worker, all re-enforced my understanding that groupwork is a powerful method and an indispensable item in the toolkit of community, youth and health and social care workers of all disciplines.

Historically groupwork has been recognized as a core practice methodology. In the 1970's groupwork had a secure place on many professional curricula and was seen as a key method of working. Since then however we have been aware of a decline in the teaching of groupwork. The lack of groupwork education for social workers and other health and social care professionals has been lamented for decades now. This phenomenon has been noticed both in the US (Goodman et al, 2014) and the UK (Ward, 2009), and indeed on the pages of this journal more than once (Trevithick, 2005; Ward, 2013). According to Goodman et al (2014) specialist groupwork courses on Masters social work programs have reduced from 76% offering groupwork in 1963 to just 5%.

However, in contemporary health and social care work group settings still feature, whether for example, team work (including of course multi-professional and inter-professional practice) or group care – and work continues to happen in groups (self-help groups, youth groups, user groups etc). In many cases it is not based on an understanding and appreciation of groupwork theory, even an

understanding of very basic groupwork processes such as group dynamics may be lacking. Nor does it draw on the egalitarian and collective values that are at the core of groupwork (Mullender, Ward and Fleming, 2013).

However groupwork in professional courses has not actually completely disappeared – as issue 25(2) of *Groupwork* showed – this issue featured papers by those who both teach and utilise groupwork as a method in their educational settings. There are courses where student professionals get the opportunity to learn about groupwork theory, group process and in most cases to experience and reflect on actual groupwork practice. There are some people entering the world of social work and other professionals who do have a strong grounding in groupwork – its potential and its challenges.

To celebrate this continuing and hopefully growing commitment to the place groupwork can have in professional practice, two years ago the Editorial Board agreed to hold a student essay prize and invited entries. In this second year we were thrilled to receive more entries than the year before – from Ireland, England and the US, and from a range of health and social care courses. The winners and runners up have each year been announced at the IASWG¹'s summer symposium. Hopefully next year there will be even more from a more diverse group of students.

Groupwork values the work with groups that is undertaken in the diverse contexts in which student practitioners operate. We wish to showcase this work to promote and encourage the generation of knowledge and the application of groupwork.

In this issue

The winner of 2016's Student essay competition was Evan Burke, who was a Master of Social Work student at University College Cork, Ireland when he wrote his essay: *'From lessons to sessions: How does second language teaching experience translate to psychoeducational group facilitation?'* In it he explores whether his previous teaching experience is transferable to the facilitation of a group in a social work setting, and concludes that since his teaching style was more one of facilitating learning than teaching information, there were in fact many aspects

that were transferable.

Samantha Bryan & Elizabeth Marshall are both students on the BSc Occupational Therapy course at Sheffield Hallam University UK. Their essay focuses on a placement within an NGO/Not for Profit organisation providing respite and day-care to older adults with mental health conditions and learning disabilities within a rural community. They describe the activities they undertook with the group and use various social theories to gain insight into what is taking place. They used both reflection and tools to assess the impact of the group experience on those taking part and finally consider how the groupwork experience has helped them develop the skills required by Occupational Therapists.

Lorraine Kessler was a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Southern Maine when she wrote her essay - *Respect Detectors: A Support and Educational Group Engaging LGBTQ Activists to Prevent Violence in Their Community*. Respect Detectors is a formal community education program designed to help participants understand the particular needs of LGBTQ-identified people experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault. After reviewing relevant literature and theory Lorraine goes on to describe the group and reflect on various aspects of the group. Using feedback from participants she concludes that the group was a powerful experience for those who took part – most particularly in terms of sharing experiences, empowerment and creating a motivation to confront a serious issue in their community.

Colette Gallagher's essay '*Social Work and Professional Development: A Critical Reflection about Groupwork*' was written when she was It focuses on a small group of girls she worked with when on placement at a special school for young people (between 11- 16 years) who have behavioural and emotional issues. She uses theory to give background and context to the groupwork before giving a descriptive account of the group activities. Gallagher then uses Schon's concept of reflective learning to reflect on the experience and her role in the group, group dynamics, conflict and empowerment.

The final essay is by Rosa Wright '*To what extent are people with intellectual disabilities (ID) active partners in focus group research?*' Wright was a BSc (Hons) Integrated Practice (Learning Disability Nursing and Social Work) student at Salford University, UK. Although this essay is a

literature review, rather than an account of actual groupwork practice, and as such did not meet the criteria of the essay competition, the judges still considered it an interesting piece worthy of publication. She reviews a series of research projects through the lens of Zarb's criteria for a critical evaluation of disability research. She explores who controlled the research and its process, how far disabled people were involved in the research process, opportunities to criticise and influence future directions, and what happened to the products of research and concludes that control and power rests primarily in the hands of researchers, many of whom are also clinicians, and opportunities for criticism are limited. There is much still to be done!

Jennie Fleming
Editor *Groupwork*
Find us on twitter @GroupworkJ

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to William Pelech for assisting in the judging of the essays.

Note

International Association for Social Work with Groups

References

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- Trevithick, P. (2006) Editorial: The place of groupwork in the new social work degree. *Groupwork*, 16, 1, 3-6
- Ward, D. (2013) Editorial: The changing face of groupwork with offenders 1991-2013 *Groupwork*, 23, 3, 3-15

Lyn Romeo, the Chief Social Worker for Adults at the Department of Health in the UK, offers her support for the *Groupwork* Student Essay Prize:

I was really pleased to have happened upon a tweet from @GroupworkJ announcing that they are soon to publish a special edition made up from the work of students who submitted to their essay competition. The brief was that students from across the health and social care sector and from across the world, who have utilised groupwork as a practice method on placement, could submit a piece of work that outlined the method of intervention, setting it within a theoretical context.

I recently blogged about groupwork as an essential method of intervention in social work practice (<https://lynromeo.blog.gov.uk/2016/04/28/group-work-is-an-essential-intervention-in-social-work-practice/>) and as you will see strongly value this method of intervention and am calling for it to be promoted much more explicitly in our own social work education and practice.

*Therefore to see *Groupwork Journal* offering students the opportunity to think about and reflect on groupwork from their practice placements was really encouraging. What is also really helpful about journals promoting student engagement in this manner is that not only does it develop practice knowledge and academic writing skills it also increases the potential to advance research-mindedness. I am very much looking forward to reading the students work and hope that you will too because as a profession it is important that we as a 'group' continue to learn together as a collective.*

Lyn Romeo

Groupwork Student Essay Prize, 2017

Whiting and Birch are happy to announce the third *Groupwork* Essay Prize of \$100.00.

Student groupworkers are invited to submit an essay or paper on any aspect of their practice of groupwork. Any student on a first degree or masters program, or those who have graduated in 2016, may submit an essay or paper (maximum 5,000 words) for the prize.

We invite essays from students who have worked or done placements with groups in a variety of contexts: in the Statutory, State or Federal systems; Non-Governmental or Not-for-Profit Sectors; or in the independent or private sector. The essay should give an overview of the context in which the group is set, identify what they actually did, including models of intervention if appropriate, and discuss the outcomes achieved. Authors need to include a short reflection on their learning and to undertake a critical discussion on such issues as challenges faced, implications for group members, facilitators or leaders or members, ethical issues etc. Papers should identify connections with the discipline of social groupwork and with the other authors that have influenced their development as groupworkers using evidence from their practice. *Please note papers must include description of and reflection on direct groupwork practice – purely theoretical or literature reviews are not eligible.*

The essay may have been submitted as an assessed assignment, but it should not have been published elsewhere.

The Editors of *Groupwork* journal will review the shortlisted essays for publication.

Groupwork journal values work with groups that is undertaken in the diverse contexts in which student practitioners operate. We wish to showcase this work to promote the generation of knowledge and the application of groupwork. Support and mentoring in the writing process may be offered to writers displaying talent and passion for groupwork to bring the entry up to the standard required for publication in *Groupwork*.

The deadline for entries is May 15th, 2017. The winner and runners up will be announced at the Annual Symposium of IASWG in June 2017 <http://www.iaswg.org/> and placed on the *Groupwork* websites.

Identifying Information: Please include a front sheet stating that the essay is being submitted for the 'Groupwork Essay Prize'; include the author's name, address, e-mail, phone number and a statement confirming that the essay is your own work. You should also include the dates during which you were a student, the name of the program studied, the name of the higher education institution attended, and email contact details and a signature from a tutor to verify that you are/have been a student on the program.

Submissions and enquiries: Essays should be sent as an email attachment to the *Groupwork* Administrator, Jane McLaughlin, jm4whitingbirch@aol.co.uk. For more information about *Groupwork*, please visit <http://www.whitingbirch.net/cgi-bin/scribe?showinfo=ip001> and <https://groupworkjournal.wordpress.com/>