

GOALS AND PURPOSE OF SOCIAL GROUP WORK

Values underlying the professional use of the Group Work Method

Our *general goals* in social work have their roots in religious and humanistic values. We base our work on the respect for *every* human being and recognize his rights to fullest development of his capacities. While he respects and contributes to the rights of others according to his capacity. Few people will disagree with this principle. The problem is its application and practice. It leads us into the general problems of a democracy namely, how to combine individualism and the concern for a whole community; it raises the question of how to help people in their own community; it raises the question of how to help people in their own terms rather than our own and yet represent values necessary in an interdependent society. The social worker can never escape these problems. Science can tell a social worker “what is” but not necessarily “what should be” and yet we expect the social worker not to be dogmatic (**being certain that your beliefs are right and that others should accept them, without paying attention to evidence or other opinions**) and not to judge individuals according to his own values alone.

Therefore, the first assignment of the group worker is to learn to understand himself as much as he is able. A young social worker, for instance, was very disgusted with the “superficiality” and materialistic values that her group of teenagers presented. They were interested only in money making projects for their own club. There is no question that one would want to help such a group to see the needs of others, yet had this worker really understood herself and the values that these children presented? Had she realized that she had come from an environment that had provided early for many of the pleasures that these youngsters had to seek by common endeavor? Had she realized that her capacity to consider others had grown out of many satisfactions she had received before she was able to give to others? And she really thinking in terms of the others, or was she thinking mainly of herself by being “disgusted with them? It is in such small incidents that we learn something of what we call the “professional attitude”.

Professional discipline is hard to learn and demands a great deal of insight into oneself. It is not the requirement of a cold impersonal attitude and it is not a rejection of the basic values. It is an increased sensitivity towards other people and a constant effort to project oneself into their situations while not losing one’s own identity. In social group work because of the intensified

interaction of several people with each other and because of the unique position of the group worker as agency representative and as helper there can be a great temptation to by-pass this professional self-discipline. We then either have the “leader” who might be authoritarian or paternalistic or enthusiastic but who does not allow the true development of the group members, or we might have the standoffish (not friendly towards other people), cold, purely observant and perhaps dull group worker who thinks “not getting involved” is the badge of a profession.

Human needs served by social group work

The goals of any group are determined by a basic value system of respect for every person and his needs some time social worker was concerned only with the economic needs of human beings, sometimes only with psychological ones. Yet to any one in practice even in the early days of social work, it was clear that economic needs could not be separated from many others: the need to be loved, to feel security, to be an important person is one’s own right, and to have enjoyment.

In the art gallery in Hamburg, Germany, hangs a painting by the famous fifteenth century painter Lucas Cranach. It is a gay picture. It presents a young woman who is surrounded by many little children, some of them being held by her, others scampering happily through the grass and biting into some fresh apples. The painter named the scene Caritas (Charity). The painting shows a deep understanding that giving does not consist only in food but also in a happy, warm, and relaxed relationship. To respect the human being the helper must not feel “removed” from humans but must know that he is only helpful if he himself feels “part of the human race” and understand the many varied human needs. In social case work, this was expressed by the Charity Organization Movement in its demand, “not alms but a friend”

Social group work, rising mainly around the turn of the nineteenth century when there was an emphasis on social reform movements and when labor was awakening, accepted the early fact that people needed more than economic assistance. It also understood from the beginning and they resented “handouts”. We must not forget that labor’s fight was from the beginning not only for increased wages but also for the eight hour day, which was recognition of the individual’s need to be more than just a workhorse. It was also at this time of history that social workers were

fighting child labor, again because of their recognition of the right of individuals to grow up as healthy, well-rounded, educated human beings and not only to be used by others.

With the understanding of human needs beyond bare necessities grew the understanding of the child. It is not an accident that the emphasis on children occurred at the same time as the fight developed for generally improved living and working conditions in the industrial society, at the same time women's rights were demanded, and when there was a generally yearning (**A feeling of intense longing for something**) to put into practice the individual and humanitarian ideas of the French and American revolutions. We find at the same time the beginning of youth movements, the foundation of the campfire girls and scouts, the concern with providing of playgrounds, and the publications of Jane Addams's beautiful book.

We find a number of books describing institutions that were first identified with social group work as the youth-serving agencies: the settlement houses, the YW and YMCAs, and the Jewish centers. We will not go into this here, but the social group work method can only be understood when we see its background not in terms of agency or affiliation but in terms of what needs the agencies served. A professional worker coming from the charity organization societies could do a great deal to help a person talk out and work out his problems or to help tangibly with financial and other services. But in addition to this the client needed to establish himself in his own group and this, too, required skill. We cannot cut up people to match the kinds of services which can supply. Small-Group techniques may be useful in short-term teaching in social work studies.

Early social services were usually quite generic (**Characteristic of or relating to a class or group of things; not specific**) ones. They were focused (mainly) around the social problems faced by the settlement houses out of which many of our social services have grown for instance, the children's Bureau, public health nursing, recreational services, nursery schools and kindergartens, help to delinquent gangs. In social group work particularly, we have focused strongly on those needs that can be fulfilled mostly through group association. Let us look at those.

Large industrial centers are filled with lonely people who cannot find friendship by themselves. A group worker once visiting in a neighborhood to visit some older people to a newly established club program heard a woman say in tears, "I should go down on my knees to thank

God for your visit. I have prayed every night that God should take me out of this miserable lonely life and now there are people who care and there are friends.” Three months later it would have been hard to recognize this desperate woman who she was presiding at a club meeting; the club was preparing for a short camping trip and was working out ways to take every body along, even those who did not move easily.

A capable young woman, married and secure in college community, remembered her excessive shyness and loneliness when she was an adolescent, and she wrote:

I had been told by my parents. That I was not ugly and that I could make friends, but for some reasons I did not dare to join in what other were doing. When there were parties I painfully tried to serve one refreshment and stayed away from the others as far as possible in one of the church group I joined the group worker did not persuade me to enter activities, but simply set down beside me and talked about some of things that I was interested in. He then called on somebody else who “happens to have the same interests” and for the first time I learned that I could talk with others. In his sensitivity way he had understood that I could not join activities immediately, but needed confidence in being able to relate to one person at a time. In this group I gained confidence in myself but I also learned how to help others.

Loneliness is perhaps the most heartbreaking state in which a human being can be. This does not mean that we have to be with others all the time. One can be alone and not be lonely. If a person has gained confidence in himself and feels accepted he can stand being alone, but he needs this reassurance first.

A little twelve-year-old boy, condemned to death because of an incurable disease and incapable of walking around, was able to stand much of this situation because of the great love of his parents and his strong scientific interests. Microscope, slides, and scientific books were close to his bed, and yet he said wistfully, ‘I wish I could find some boys of my age who would be interested and with whom I could talk. Most of the kids who come, come only to see my things. They are only interested in them, not in me.’” Here again, the group of same age meant a great deal, through love and understanding of parents helped.

Being *important*, being valuable to others, feeling one’s own worth is another basic need of all human beings. And this can only be found in interrelation with others. The young child receives a feeling of worth, or should receive it, in his family (and this is the reason why work with the

family is of such utmost importance), but the older we become, the more this must be supplemented and underlined in our relationships with contemporaries. Even the five-year-old news to school can let mother or father leave if he or she is sure that he is liked by the others in the kindergarten and that he is able to stand up among them.

Feeling of self-worth comes with achievement in individual endeavor, in acquired skills, and in interrelationships. Some of you might see the excellent film "The Quiet One," which is the history of a boy who had received little love in his early life and because of delinquent behavior came to a training school where he was helped by the psych Trist, the caseworker, and the group counselor. If u have seen the film u will remember the calm and self confidence that comes to the boy when he is capable of modeling a clay bowl. This is individual achievement. You might remember his rage and this appointment and self-doubt we he thinks that the counselor does not love him because he also love other boys. Here the question of relationship with another human being has arisen. In group work, we are dealing continually with those very realistic feeling of rivalry, self-doubt, and fear, but at the same time we have the gratification of seeing the changes about by a child's mastering direct skills, by the group worker's acceptances and by the groups acceptances. This does not apply to children only. In an experiment in California wit obese adults, it was found that self confidence and the capacity to diet were greatly enhanced by group treatment-partially by the kind of discussions that were conducted in the group but mainly by the help that came from seeing others "in the same boat" making the same kind of effort. This insight has found wide acceptance in self help groups.

We know that people who are not accepted cannot give love and that people who do not feel respected cannot respect others. Marie Jahoda and Dr. Nathan Ackerman made a study of people in psychoanalysis who expressed strong anti-Semitic feelings. He They found that these patients had very low self esteem and suffered from loneliness and frustration they reject themselves and alloy others. Because they heated themselves, they had to "project" this and hate others. We find similar mechanisms in other hatreds, as against blacks, Indians or other races or nationalities. Low self esteem is never the only cause, but it is an important factor. We also see it over and over in work with delinquents; there in concern with the feelings of other people is very closely related to their feeling than nobody cares about them. We see this expressed clearly in an excerpt from discussion among young male offenders;

Harry brought up the intense hostility that he has felt towards his father and at the same time the death wishes that he had. He brought out the fact that when he took off from X he felt that the lack of family concern was such, and particularly, that his father's hostility was such, that he just did not care what happened to him. He stated that at that time he would not even have cared if he had killed Mr.A.....

We cannot "make" parents love their children .But case work service will help reveal why the family relation have been disrupted so badly and perhaps help the parent to gain more understanding of the child. Group work services will be effective in helping the young person establish new and satisfying relationship with others outside the family. We recognize the family as the most important factor in the development of the young person, but we must realize that strength comes also from other associations and that the association must be especially gratifying if the family relationship have broken down. The group in the training school or reformatory might give the first feeling of "understanding," and the beginning of insight into one's own responsibility and feelings might come in those group discussions. Beyond this, the group workers role will be to help the young person to find other satisfying human relationships after leaving the school or the prison. The young person needs not just "occupation" but a slow building up of self confidence and confidence in others and this comes only through experience. For far too long we have left this experience to accident. Consciously planned group work services are an important part of rehabilitation work with delinquent. (Certainly none of these workers if the total living situation is degrading as_ many unfortunately are.)

We do not consider only the youngster who has encountered severe problem. *Growing up* is not an easy process. We cannot protect the growing person from all the pitfalls, but we can enrich him or her and try to supply the nourishment that the growing human being needs so that he or she becomes strong and develops the capacities we consider part of maturity.

It is our jobs as adults.as people with more contacts or information, as representative of agencies which have a social purpose to provide a bountiful table from which members say take intellectual or emotional nourishment.

It is certainly not only through social group work that young people are helped with they growing up process. They receive help through many institution of our society for instance, the family, the school and the church. Social work enters into the life of youngsters who goes through a normal development in those in formal settings where he tries his wings in relation to his friends and in relation to a community. The group worker grave responsibility is to give the

opportunities for growing up_ to provide this bountiful table of which Margaret berry speaks _and also to allow for trying out capacities and making mistakes.

Human capacities Strengthened

By Social Group Work

In addition, there are some basic *capacities* that we can be strengthened considerable through group endeavor. These are human capacities that do not completely grow by themselves but need strengthening and trying out. One is the capacity to *overcome frustration in a healthy and constructive way*.

There is no life without frustration. From the moment when the infant fails to get *immediate* gratification in learning to relate societal demands_ for instance, when drinking from a cup or eating with utensils or sharing toys and people_ to the harsh demands or sickness or of loss of loved ones, life continually offers frustrations. We have put values on how we deal with frustrations. Mental hygiene concepts are clearly value oriented. For some reason, we are embarrassed to use the words “good” or ” bad.” The avoidance probably arose out of the genuine wish to get away from harshly judgmental attitudes. Yet the words we use as substitutes, for instance, being ”mature” or” well-adjusted,” really contain also our value judgments of the way a person deals with life’s problems. Since we are all human, we know we will never achieve the complete ideal. Sometime there has been a tendency in teachers or social workers to expect the ideal. Yet we must know that all we can do is help the human being with his inner strength; we cannot expect a person to never show any weakness.

There has sometimes cropped up a theory of introducing frustration in to group situation so as to make the youngster learn. We know, however, that the natural frustrations that occur are sufficiently manifold. Margaret Mead has described one primitive society where mothers relatives tease four and five year old by showering love on a younger child and pushing the older one away so that the older will learn to overcome his resentment of not being the only one given affection. Many initiation rites in primitive societies inflict a great deal of pain to teach the youngster to be able to accept pain. We consider this necessary. Being part of a family group or a group of contemporaries includes the need of sharing, and one can learn without additional infliction of pain. The simple fact that a beloved group workers has only two hands and,

therefore, cannot walk in hand with ten children at once is something that children experience with some pain and that he learns to overcome. The adolescent with sexual drives and with the great desire for independence continually experiences the inability to completely follow his wishes_this in itself is frustration. In group work we are helping with this process by the allowing for expression of negative feeling; at the same time, we help individual to think through and work through the fact that frustrations are unavoidable. The group worker who tried to eliminate all frustrations would not be helpful, nor would the one who worked too harshly with youngsters.

We may help not only by encouraging acceptance of frustration that cannot be changed but also by helping people to see that there are some frustrations that need not persist, that should be eliminated by a constructive working toward change in the environment. In one of our cities, for instance, the curfew was set unreasonably early for teenagers, and some of the youngsters dealt with it by simply breaking the law. They complained about the curfew to the group worker and they indicated their intention of defying it. In this discussion, the group worker helped them to see that their complaint was probably reasonable but that action should relate to a lawful change of this order. The group worked on a project of collecting evidence for the unreasonableness of the set hour and together with some of the interested parents presented the evidence to the city council. This is an example of learning how to deal with frustration in a constructive way by citizen action and by working together.

Since human beings are interdependent, the capacity to cooperate needs strengthening. We can make, and we had made, the great mistake of equating cooperation with uniformity. In recent years, warnings have been sounded against this tendency and they were justified. Riesman, in his book *The Lonely Crowd*, has made a strong case against our exaggerated ideas of having to do everything in a group and of stamping people in to a given pattern. He is afraid that we do not allow for enough individuality. This danger is great. The social group worker's very specific task is to enhance the capacity of the individual to be different, to be himself, and yet to be able to cooperate.

What we mean here by "cooperation" is the willingness to involve oneself in work with others and to strengthen the group's goal even if one does not agree. One of the "democratic disciplines" (as Edward C. Lindeman named them) is to accept the fact that in a democracy, one

sometime is in the minority. This does not allow one to simply move out or to sabotage the decision of the majority. It does mean responsible cooperation while continuing to work for one's ideas. The English form of parliament has developed this to a very high degree. But cooperation is something that does not come by itself to the human being. It has to be learned.

Groups usually start making decisions by having one group member decide for all, or by a wild shouting match with those shouting loudest winning, or by a primitive form of majority vote. Group members learn only slowly the important possibility of discussion of issues, weighing of facts, accepting divergent opinion without hating those who express opposing views, and finally, deciding on a course of action in which every-body participates without resentment. Again, though we are talking about an idea that is hardly ever completely fulfilled, we are nevertheless striving towards it.

In talking about the capacity to cooperate we have already talked about the capacity *to make decisions*. Decisions certainly are not made only in a group. They are also made inside of the individual. We all know people who cannot make decisions. They either follow the crowd or one other person, or they can never make up their mind. Although perennial hesitation is often very painful to the individual, perennial following of others is more harmful to our society as a whole. Again we see how social workers are working both to help the individual and for the good of society. Our skill will lie in strengthening the individual who seems to be incapable of making a decision by finding out what is blocking him. It is not a simple matter of "just making up one's mind" it is often related to much fear, to low self-esteem, to a wish to be loved, and to fear of losing love if one takes sides. If this is the case, we must give the person, whether a child or an adult, the opportunity to *experience* that he does not lose love if he takes a stand. There are similar dynamics in the cases of those who just follow or those who show a great deal of anarchism. Each time we will have to look for the causes while at the same time creating opportunities for genuine experience-not only "talking through."

The final need and capacity with which we often deal is the realistic need for *achievement*. A thirteen-year-old boy met the social group worker with whom he had worked individually and in a group when he had been five years old. The problem at the time had been that this child had been extremely shy and very unsure of himself. Did he remember the worker who had helped him? He remembered her only vaguely but felt great affection for her. (The human relationship,

therefore, had meaning). He remembered nothing he had talked about and none of his violent play with puppets that had brought out a great deal of his sibling rivalry. But he remembered clearly that he had been able to cut out a wooden animal by using the jigsaw, and he still thought of it with great pleasure.

In no way do we want to say that the working out of feelings at that time was not important. Yet we also see how extremely important it was to this child to have had tangible evidence if the boy had been pushed into it. One of the skills of the group worker lay in helping the boy find proof of his abilities when the boy had had considered himself such an incapable individual.

In a group of young men and women who had severe seizures (**A sudden attack of illness, especially a stroke or an epileptic fit**), the patients strongly favored the meetings in which they could talk freely about their problems. But they considered as a high point of their experience the meeting where for the first time they dared to dance with each other and where some healthy people had been present. Again, it was the realistic offering of an experience of achievement that added to the improvement of their mental health.

There are many other needs and capacities with the social group worker deals. Group worker is dealing with life and, therefore, with the manifold aspects of life. Like all social work, it is concerned with the human being as a whole and as a part of his environment. We have stressed here those needs and capacities that group relations can especially help: the *need for companionship*, for *self-worth*, for *opportunity* and *capacity to be independent or dependent* in accordance with the reality situation; the *capacity to overcome frustration*, to *cooperate*, to *make decisions*, and to *achieve* as an *individual* through *group participation*.