

Group Records-the Basis for Evaluation

If workers are to do a sound job of evaluating their work with groups, they must keep group records. The major value of the narrative process record from the standpoint of the worker is that such records help the worker to do a more effective job with his groups. Every other purpose is in a sense a sub purpose of this major one: to improve the quality of experience provided for the group. By writing a complete process record of everything he does while working with the group, the worker is helped to think, to analyze and to evaluate. The record is thus a tool in the process of understanding the group and learning how to help it. When the worker puts in writing what happened in each group meeting, what he did, what problems he faced, and what questions arose in his mind, he is thinking into the group situation.

Process records are written by the group worker primarily for himself and for his own use continuously throughout his relationship with the group. These records help the worker to become more aware of the members of the group as individuals. He can see emerging and changing interests of individuals; he can see evolving needs and how these needs are being met. He can see the development of skills and social attitudes; he becomes sensitive to special problems which may interfere with the individual's full use of the group. Process records show the worker the variety of interpersonal relationships which take shape within the group. The emergence of group consciousness can be seen as can subgroupings. The acceptance of the individual by the group is reflected by his change in status which can be discovered from reading accumulated records. The development of the worker's relationship and role can be ascertained from careful recording of what he does while helping the group. Attention becomes focused upon the status of the group in the agency and in the community as intergroup relations are recorded. Changes in the goals of the group become more evident, and member interests outside the group are seen from a review of the record. As the worker writes his records after each meeting, he develops a picture of the group that can be passed on to his superior. Together, worker and supervisor can focus their attention on the group situation as experienced by the worker. The record is thus a stimulus to interaction between the supervisor and the worker. Records enable group work supervisors to keep in touch with many groups for purposes of coordinating the total program of the agency. Records are useful as a basis for evaluating the group experience-of-the-members and for helping the worker in individual and group supervisory conferences. When new workers are assigned to groups, past records become useful at the point of orientation and help new workers to understand the kind of experience the group has enjoyed prior to the coming of the new worker. Records are valuable to other departments of the agency if it is large; and they are important in the planning of referrals of individuals to community resource agencies. The underlying function of recording is to improve the quality of service to the individual. Hence, recording enables agency administration to judge the quality of its service, the need for its service, and the needs of its constituency or potential constituency. Records are useful to administration in determining whether its services meet the needs of the community, whether the quality of service is in line with processes and objectives of the agency, and whether there is a need to change policies and practices. Furthermore well-kept records are useful in interpreting group work as a method in social work. Agency boards and community groups can be helped to

appreciate the need for added facilities, equipment, and staff. When a review & the records of several groups reveals common problems, it is possible to utilize such factual information as a basis for the selection of staff members and for staff training. Staff assignments to groups can be made with greater intelligence when there is a record of the development of the group.

Meaning of the Record in the Group Work Process

What are we attempting to record when we process? This is the most important question to answer and understand. Partial answers may be found in this list of items:

First, when we set out to record the group work process, we write about individuals and their responses to one another in a given group situation. In other words, we write about the behavior of the individuals in the group.

Second, we write about the type and extent of participation individuals are working, playing, thinking, or otherwise acting together in the group. We concentrate upon what individuals do as they associate with one another.

Third, we note and record the origin and the development of ideas, in noting their acceptance or rejection by the individuals involved. We look for the interplay of minds and the stimulation of individuals by other individuals, we put down exactly what the group worker does as he carries out his helping role with the group. In addition, we record what the worker thinks and feels about the group situation and what he hopes to accomplish as he works with it.

Fifth, we put down movement, growth, and change as we see it in individuals and in the group as a whole.

Sixth, we write about the relationship between the group and the agency - and include community relationships when these are significant in understanding the group.

Recording the group work process thus implies that we shall concentrate upon individuals working together in group situations, relationships among individuals as reflected by their participation, interaction within the group and between groups, ourselves as workers present to exercise a helping role. This may be restated as: who? - the members of the group; what? - the things they do together, how the way in which they do things together; Why? - the reasons why we think certain things occur or fail to occur.

In the beginning, workers who are learning how to record the group work process discover that their job consists of alert observation and sensitivity to what is happening in the group; selection of what to include; organization of material selected; the actual write-up; analysis of the material written; interpretation and utilization of the material in next steps with the group.

The Content of the Narrative Record

The writing of the narrative record is but one part of the worker's job in group work. For some workers, especially for those new in the field, it seems to be a difficult part, and they frequently ask, "What do you want me to include in my records? Do you have an outline that I may follow?" An outline or list of what to include in the record is but a reflection of the work philosophy of the person or persons drawing up the outline. When workers have good insight as to the basic principles of social group work, the items included in content lists tend to emphasize or illustrate these principles. Because groups are different, any list or outline of what to include in the record must be something to select from and to be guided by only in a general way. It is doubtful that any group meeting could possibly include all the items that might be listed in a comprehensive outline. At the outset, workers should be encouraged to include everything that they see as important in understanding the group. As the worker develops security and skill with a given group, changes will come about in the recording. The worker will see more than he saw at first. He will recognize the importance of his own role within the group and will comment upon it more fully. He may discover perplexing and conflicting situations which need further study, and so he will include more interpretation and evaluation in the records. Various items which might appear in the records of a group which has been meeting for some time include the following:

1. The record should include basic identifying information about the group, its name, the date, time, and place of its meeting; the names of individuals present and absent should be listed and new members properly noted. The physical setting within the agency or away from the agency should be mentioned at the beginning of the record as well as any important observations on weather or other conditions which might affect the attendance.

2. The record should include mention of individuals by name; what they do, what they say, and how they get along in the group should be recorded along with the sequence of their participation. Specific contributions of individuals should be mentioned as they interact with other members of the group. The emotional quality of participation, as reflected by behavior toward other individuals or the worker, is important and should be included.

3. As the worker works along with the group he will become aware of the group as a whole. But by putting down what the group does in its activity program, by noting positive and negative response to experiences, and by recording what the members say about their group in relation to the agency, the worker becomes conscious of the group as it moves through various phases of its development.

4. The relationship and role of the group worker should be included. When the worker provides materials, makes arrangements, introduces new members, offers suggestions, leads discussion, participates in activities, interprets the agency, or in any other way enters into the affairs of the group it should be recorded.

5. At the close of each meeting's record the worker should include a section of evaluative comments regarding what happened during the meeting. This section can consist of questions, explanations as to why things occurred or failed to occur, and tentative plans for the future. Such comments or meeting-by-meeting evaluations are exceedingly important and frequently are longer than the actual meeting record.

6. The worker should include both planned and informal meetings with individuals before, after, and between group meetings. If the worker work with committees that are a part of the group, these meetings should also be described. Individual conferences between the worker and officers of the group, and meetings that the worker established for the purpose of locating programs resources should be included. The goal should be to make the record as complete as possible.

The Principles of Recording

The best discussion of the principles of recording is found in Lindsay's book. She lists and describes five basic principles. These are the principle of flexibility, and by this she means that the record must be adapted to be agency's purpose because group work practice and agency purpose are inseparably interwoven; the principle of selection, which implies that the worker does not include everything in his record but selects significant material in the light of individual and group development; the principle of readability, which is based on the thought that form and style are important and that clarity of expression is essential for all written material; the principle of confidentiality, which says in substance that the record is a professional document and that as such its contents are guarded by a sense of professional ethics; the principle of worker acceptance, which underlines the fact that the worker must accept his responsibility to write records be conviction that records have value in rendering high quality professional services.

These principles become self-evident when we consider the various ways la which sworkers use their records to improve upon that work with their groups.