

The Social Group Worker's Role

In the helping process of group work, the interactions and relationships of the members to each other have much meaning. They are never static. They change in time, and in relation to specific situations. The changing interactions and relationships as well as all the developments and changes taking place in group are called group process. The social group worker's role in group work process can be best understood as a role of 'midwife', who provides help in delivery. He is a methodological helper, a catalyst. He makes his knowledge and experience available to participants during a group work process. It means the youth groups, treatment groups, adult groups where there is a need to improve relationships, groups that need help with understanding their own problems, and groups that need help in working toward the improvement of community services, they all need a professional group worker.

In working with groups a social worker is expected to be knowledgeable and skillful in a variety of roles. The particular role that is selected should (ideally) be determined by what will be most effective, given the circumstances. We are presenting here some, but certainly not all, of the roles assumed by social group workers in group process.

Enabler:

In this role, the group worker is present with the group as a "helper," or "enabler," there to do things with the group rather than for or to the group. His influence is indirect rather than direct. He helps individuals or groups to articulate their needs, to clarify and identify their problems, to explore resolution strategies, to select and apply a strategy, and to develop their capacities to deal with their own

problems more effectively. As an enabler, the worker helps members revitalize and mobilize their own strengths and resources to cope with difficult problems.

Broker:

In the broker role, the worker identifies community resources, government schemes and programmes that may help group member to carry out their plans. Often the group members lack information about various resources and services available. As a broker, the worker helps members become aware of resources, eligibility criteria, and other conditions for using a particular service.

Advocate:

It is an active, directive role in which the worker advocates for a group. When a citizen's group is in need of help and existing institutions are least interested in providing services, then the advocate's role may be appropriate. In such a role, the group worker provides leadership for collecting information, for arguing the correctness of the client's need and request, and for challenging the institution's decision not to provide services.

Activist:

When the group is formed with the social goal, the group worker works as an activist. An activist seeks change; often the objective involves a shift in power and resources to a disadvantaged group. In the role of an activist the group workers are concerned about social injustice, inequity, and deprivation. The goal is to change the social environment to better meet the needs of individuals.

Mediator:

The social group worker is often a link between the group members, between groups, group community and group-agency. As a mediator, the worker helps resolve disputes, conflicts, or opposing points of view within the group or

between a member and some other person or organisation. The mediator role involves intervention in finding compromises, reconcile differences, or reach mutually satisfactory agreements. He works through the members of the group and occupies a position of liaison between the group and the agency. The social group workers use their value orientations and unique skills in identifying miscommunication and clarifying position. For example, in a group for adolescents in a residential centre, the worker might help two members resolve a conflict about their participation in a recreational activity. In another group, the worker might help a member resolve a conflict with a child-care worker.

Negotiator:

A negotiator brings together those who are in conflict over one or more issues and seeks to achieve bargaining and compromise to arrive at mutually acceptable agreements, somewhat like mediation, negotiation involves finding a middle ground that all sides can live with. However, unlike a mediator, which is a neutral role, a negotiator usually is allied with one of the sides involved. The group workers play this role especially while negotiating about time, venue, resources, etc. with group members, agency or community.

Educator:

One of the most important roles assumed by workers in helping members achieve their goals is that of the educator. The educator role involves giving information to group members and teaching them new skills. To be an effective educator, the worker must first be knowledgeable. Additionally, she or he must be a good communicator so that information is clearly conveyed and readily understood by the receiver.

Initiator:

An initiator calls attention to a problem or even to a potential problem. It is important to realize that some problems can be recognized in advance. The group worker with his experience and knowledge can foresee the potential problem areas and draw the group members' attention to address the issues. In this role he/her initiate discussion or action on the problem area. Usually the initiator role must be followed by other functions; merely calling attention to problems usually does not resolve them.

Empowerer:

A key goal of social group work is empowerment. In the role of empowerer the group worker helps the individuals and groups to increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and influence through improving their circumstances.

Coordinator:

Coordinators bring components together in some kind of organized manner. On behalf of the agency often the group worker assumes the role of coordinator for helping the group members to avail the services from different agencies. The group worker also at times coordinates between the group members, especially in the initial stage of group formation.

Group Facilitator:

A group facilitator is one who serves as a leader for group activity. The group may be a therapy group, an educational group, a self help group, a sensitivity group, a family therapy group, or a group with some other focus. Facilitating discussion and helping group members to arrive at decision are important role that group workers play. As a facilitator he/she provides the methodological help.

He/She does not discuss the method but he uses it for facilitating the group process. He/She does not allow himself/herself to become involved with the group and their problem. When required to express his/her own opinion, he/she at all times makes it clear when he/her is functioning as a group worker and when he/her is expressing his/ her own opinion as a member of the group.

Communicator and Interpreter:

The group worker is a specialist in the “how” of communication between people. The group worker has to act as a communicator or interpreter, where interpersonal relationships have to be dealt with. The role of communicators is different from facilitating the communication in the group. In this role he/she actually helps the group or members to understand what is being communicated. At times she has to interpret or reword the phrases to explain to the members. For example where a group is starting from scratch, a group may be puzzled about, and even suspicious of its purpose and the role the worker, at this stage the group worker has to perform as a communicator and interpreter.

Similarly, when the group members are not able to see the actual gains of being in the group or when their expectations from the group are very high, she actually makes things clear and simple.

