

Group Work: Skills and Strategies for Effective Interventions. Second Edition . Sondra Brandler and Camille P. Roman, The Haworth Press, Inc. New York, 1999, Paperback, 348pp, \$ 24.95 ISBN 0-7890-0740-1,

INTERNATIONALLY social problems abound. These include poverty in its various manifestations, the social treatment of ageing, mental and physical disability, HIV/AIDS, problems of refugees and displaced persons, street youths and adults and unemployment. These problems have a disastrous impact on the welfare and social functioning of victims, at the individual, family and community level and the magnitude of these problems is more severe in developing countries where resources both financial and material are scanty.

The publication *Group Work: Skills and Strategies for Effective Interventions*, clearly explains how groups can be employed to bring about the resolution of social problems and how the group work approach can be used to achieve therapeutic and action-oriented ends.

This publication is relevant not only to group workers. It is required reading for social workers, community workers, sociologists, psychologists, residential care staff and managers, industrial relations practitioners and all academics in the social sciences and development studies. Group work is an appropriate approach in developing countries where the impact of social problems is more severe and the resources available to address them inadequate. In social work the overriding aim of the group work approach is to improve the functioning of group members through the establishment of purposeful relationships for enhanced self-awareness and belongingness.

Brandler and Roman describe the power and influence that groups have on members and the desire of human beings to belong to variety groups in their life pursuits. It is the forces within groups and individuals that make group work a potentially effective tool in addressing social problems. The authors explain how a group helps its members and outlines some of the growth-producing factors in groups such as mutual aid and support, catharsis, cohesiveness and the mastery of social skills.

Effective group work, however, requires informed and skilled intervention. As the authors point out, "our purpose is to provide a group environment that enables growth to exist and flourish" (4). Brandler and Roman take the reader through the different phases of group development. They show that the group worker must understand the expectations, problems and needs of individual members throughout the life of the group. Such an understanding helps the group worker to intervene appropriately and effectively at each of the phases. They show that the group worker needs to play a central role at the beginning and middle phases of group development but also work towards developing and capacitating group members to function independently. I have been privileged to read a number of group work books but I find this edition by Brandler and Roman really user-friendly. It is written in a refreshingly direct style and the authors use illustrations and examples covering group work skills areas that are easy to comprehend and to implement. In Chapter 5 the authors address issues to do with group planning. A group does not just come into existence: considerable amounts of prior planning must take place if the group is to be able to meet its objectives. The authors examine the factors that have to be taken into account in planning for a group and the steps to be followed. One criticism is that I would have preferred this chapter to have been placed earlier in the book, before reading about the initial phase of group work.

The aspect of group dynamics is also covered. Factors such as group size and composition, the timing and location of group meetings and programming are well described. These areas are critical in ensuring group effectiveness. The authors also address other special skills that a group worker needs to be equipped with. These include humour, communication and dealing with conflict.

This book is really essential reading for social work educators and practitioners, group and community workers and professionals in the human relations field.

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