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## Group Work Camp

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# Editorial

## Group Work Camp

Welcome to this special issue of *Groupwork*, which features papers on the International Association for Social Work with Groups (IASWG) sponsored Group Work Camp. Before beginning my thoughts on the historical relevance of summer camps and their importance to modern groupwork practice, I must note that this editorial is decidedly American. The camp history I present is closely related to the development of the recreation movement in the U.S. during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This history highlights the relationship between summer camps and groupwork and the important role groupwork played, and continues to play, in summer camps. In many ways this analysis is apropos as the IASWG Group Work Camp originated in the U.S. and is deeply indebted to this history.

Social workers and social group workers have a long and rich tradition of using recreational activities in their practice. During the late 19th century, settlement workers facilitated recreational, art, and music-based activities for community members (Kelly & Doherty, 2016). These activities engaged community members in civic dialogue and participation and played a vital role in the social, emotional, and civic development of children, adolescents, and young adults (Glowacki, 2004). At the Chicago-based settlement, Hull House, this practice extended to the development of arts studios, theatres, performance spaces, and summer camps (Hull House Association, 1907; 1910; 1921).

Summer camps began shortly after the establishment of Hull House under the guidance of co-founder Jane Addams. Similar to her rationale and support for recreational, art, and music-based programming, Addams believed summer camps and their use of groupwork offered urban youth healthy alternatives to easily accessible forms of vice and delinquency that would often land them in juvenile courts (Addams,

1909). Addams promoted summer camp as a bucolic and vital respite to the oppressive and stifling congestion and heat of summers in the city. Initial camps for 50 to 100 youth at a time were held in Wisconsin and Michigan, U.S. While successful, these camps presented several logistical challenges associated with lacking a permanent site, including issues with delivery of quality goods, programming, and shelter. In order to fully realize her vision, Addams sought a permanent home for the Hull House summer camps.

Enter local philanthropist, social reformer, and suffragist Louise DeKoven Bowen. The daughter and wife of successful bankers, Bowen was a dedicated civic leader, holding several prominent positions at the regional, state, and national level. In 1893, she began a very lengthy and productive relationship with Hull House Association, serving as an officer, trustee, and treasurer. Shortly after the death of her husband in 1911, Bowen committed to Addams that if they could find a suitable property for a permanent summer camp, she would purchase and donate it to Hull House in memory of her late husband. Per Bowen's report, their real estate agent provided them with a list of over 300 sites, of which Bowen (1946) recalls she and Addams saw at least half.

Bowen (1946) describes arriving at the site that would become Joseph T. Bowen Country Club, Hull House Summer Camp, in Waukegan, IL, U.S.

One winter's day he (realtor) drove us in an open sleigh from the station in Waukegan, three miles north of the highway, then turned in across a rolling piece of ground and stopped at the edge of a beautiful ravine. This we knew was a perfect children's playground. The property, a plot of 72 acres, had once belonged to an old doctor. He had been very fond of his grounds and had planted a beautiful tree on the cultivated part. Transverse ravines which cut through the place, had at their bottom a stream. Part of the property was left in uncleared woods. It was an ideal place, so I bought it and gave it to Hull-House Association. (p. 2)

Bowen Country Club (B.C.C.) opened in the summer of 1912 and remained operational as a summer camp for urban youth and their families until 1963, at which point Hull House Association sold the camp and moved to another location in southeastern Wisconsin, U.S. Throughout 51 summer seasons, B.C.C. provided thousands of urban youth and their families access to affordable country vacations away from the city and provided campers with access to group-based

recreational programming, including cooking classes, crafts, team sports, swimming, and other water-based activities. While Addams, Bowen, and the camp staff promoted fun, they understood the importance of providing young campers with responsibility through recreational programming and upkeep of the camp, as well as providing parents with needed time for rest and relaxation.

Flyers and other promotional materials for B.C.C. highlight the sense of democratic engagement and civic participation that permeated the camp (Hull House Association, n.d.). They also showcase the racial and ethnic diversity of campers and their families, which is important to note given the timeframe and history of oppression and racism in the Chicago land area. The spirit of the camp, the campers, and their feelings toward B.C.C. are well captured in the Joseph Bowen Country Club song:

Joseph Bowen Country Club  
Our summer camp so dear  
We love you  
Joseph Bowen Country Club  
Our summer camp so dear  
We love you  
Hiking in the morning, dancing every night  
Swimming in the afternoon, so everything is all right  
Oh Joseph Bowen Country Club,  
Our summer camp so dear  
We love you (Bowen Country Club, 1962)

While few B.C.C. documents explicitly note the role of groups in camp programming, it is quite clear that groupwork played a vital role in the day-to-day operations of the camp. In fact, the recreation movement played an important role in the development of groupwork in the U.S., and camping and camps were an important part of that development. This practice lived on at B.C.C. as evidenced by photo after photo of young people working, playing and living in groups (Hull House Association, n.d.). While this brief review is limited to one case in one locale, it is certainly not unique. Affordable and accessible summer camps played a vital role for youth and their families throughout the U.S. during the 20th century, and groupwork played an important part

in making the experience memorable.

My experiences with summer camp, including day camps with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and camping trips with the Boy Scouts of America, were formative in my development. Breaking away from the neighborhood and the day-to-day existence of home life to be in nature and play with peers, often in a group setting, was fun and provided me with opportunities to work in groups and develop interpersonal skills. While a teenager, I had the opportunity to go on a 12-day hiking trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, U.S. Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, IL, U.S., it was powerful to be in the mountains with a group of peers – camping and trekking together as one unit. Our successes and trials were our own and we learned to work as a group to complete the trek.

Fast-forward to 2013 and I found myself at IASWG Group Work Camp at George Williams College, Williams Bay, Wisconsin, U.S. I was invited to facilitate an advanced training workshop on the creative use of audio documentary. I had just defended my dissertation and was in the liminal space between doctoral candidate and fledging academic. Not quite sure what to expect, I arrived to find the experience of camp just I had left it 24 years earlier – full of natural beauty, group-based recreational activities, and opportunities for connection and engagement with my peers. Throughout the weekend campers played games, attended workshops, shared meals and dialogue, and enjoyed campfires by the lake. We created groups, as well as a larger community, and had fun while doing so.

I hope you enjoy the personal reflections on Group Work Camp in this issue. In addition, I hope you find the papers developed from workshops at Camp, as well as the history of Group Work Camp, thought provoking and useful. Given the longstanding relationship among the recreation movement, groupwork, and summer camps, it is vital to keep this lineage and practice alive. As I am sure you will agree after reading this special issue of *Groupwork*, Group Work Camp offers a way forward in doing so.

Brian L. Kelly  
Guest Co-Editor

## In this issue

The papers in this Special Issue are written by those who have taken part in IASWG sponsored Group Work Camps – as participants, facilitators and organisers. Some are writing about their first and only experience of being at a camp – others reflecting on numerous experiences over many years. The papers reflect on the camps that have been running bi-annually in the U.S. since 2009, and others on the first European camp in Lithuania in 2015.

The first paper *How Group Work Camp Began* is written by Ann Bergart, who is one of the creators of the IASWG camps. In it, she sets out the theoretical underpinnings of the experiential program of Group Work Camp that enables practitioners to understand the *essence* of social work with groups – via their own experience as members of groups at the camp. Bergart links her own professional development as a groupworker with the development of the idea of the experiential camp. The paper goes on to recount the planning of the first camp, its subsequent development and how it has been sustained over a number of years, and finishes with her thoughts about where Group Work Camp might go from here.

We then move straight to one of the practitioner's reflective pieces with Cynthia Martiny's piece *Group Work Camp: A once in the blue moon unique experience*. Martiny takes us through the process of camp by recounting the activities and feelings at each stage – beginnings, middles and ends, explaining how she found the experience one which restored her emotional resources and both validated exciting group work practice and gave her new strategies for future use.

The next paper is a multi-authored piece from several of the facilitators of the first European Group Work Camp held in Lithuania. *Reflections on the IASWG European Group Camp in Birštonas, Lithuania* was edited by Jorūnė Vyšniauskytė-Rimkienė and Mark Doel. The paper discusses how the idea of Group Work Camp came to be a reality and how the 67 participants from 7 countries met together to share their interesting and innovative techniques for social groupwork within the same experiential learning format of the U.S. camps. It gives us a real flavor of the camp, what was learnt, and insights into the experience.

*Experiential practice learning - providing a theoretical foundation* by Greg Tully describes the importance of the mutual aid approach to

groupwork and the workshop that Tully offers at camp to provide a theoretical foundation to support the experiential learning taking place at camp. It illustrates the vital connection between practice and theory in groupwork.

Next Mary Frances H. 'Mitzi' Beno writes of her experience of Group Work Camp in *Rekindling the Campfire*. She arrives at the first IASWG Group Work Camp as a participant and quickly finds herself moving to facilitating a singing group to running a workshop about leading singing groups. She then describes her journeys through increased involvement in subsequent camps and preparing workshops for both a university course and the IASWG symposium based on her camp experience.

Following this is Shirley Simon's informative paper that describes her workshop at camp that sets out to encourage participants to continue their professional involvement beyond the camp experience. In *Beyond Group Work Camp: A bridge to symposia and conference participation via professional presentations* Simon explains how her workshop was developed to support participants in exploring their options for taking and sharing their groupwork experience further. The paper offers readers an approach to preparing for professional presentations at symposia and conferences.

*My Whirlwind Journey to Understanding and Loving Group Work* written by Anna Ginzberg gives an engaging account of her experience of Group Work Camp. Her enthusiasm for groupwork and for the camp comes over clearly throughout.

Next, we turn to two papers by facilitators. In *How Leading a Workshop Can Be a Real Eye-Opener*, John Genke's shares his heartfelt reflection of a very meaningful experience at camp. He captures the transition from feeling apprehensive and insecure to feeling liberated and empowered by the experience of being a facilitator. *Visual Methods of Working with a Team* is by facilitators at the Lithuanian camp - Lina Bartusevičienė and Terese Nijole Liobikiene. In it, they describe two visual methods they shared with experiential workshop participants at camp. They describe the methods, how they delivered the methods the workshop, and reflect on the challenges of facilitating in such settings, including managing different expectations, roles, and levels of experience.

Herman Curiel's *Group Work Camp memories: Group power* sets out the experience of Group Work Camp from the point of view of the

writer who has a long career using social groupwork. Curiel goes on to apply Tuckman's classic stages of groupwork as a framework to reflect on his experiences of taking part in a number of Group Work Camps.

We give the final word to Kristen Perron, who offers us a reflection of an emerging professional social worker on her development of understanding groupwork through experiences at camp as a child and as an attendee at the IASWG's first Group Work Camp in 2009. In *Camps Aren't Just for Kids: The power of group work as an adult at IASWG Group Work Camp*, she explains how she has found the experience of Group Work Camp a lesson in the power of groups. She describes taking responsibility for ice-breaker activities at a subsequent a Group Work Camp. The final paper of this special issue of *Groupwork* is another description of the community building and transformative power of Group Work Camp.

Jennie Fleming  
Editor

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