

as I work and have people come to me with this problem and that problem, or even that particular body structure, I am coming to feel that this is a *being*, this is a *self* whose core desire, whether they know it or not, is to create and to live as fully as possible, and to blossom and to be beautiful. What stops this person, this self, this energy complex from doing that? That's really my approach more and more. You know - 'You are beautiful, and what's stopping you being as beautiful as you are?' I feel that's a healing space to come from. I feel when a therapist works from a problem, like, starting with 'What's wrong with this person?' - that is anti-life, that is anti-healing. I feel it's important to really see each person for the beautiful soul that they in fact are. Everyone is beautiful and even though they might not believe or they might not even manifest it. It's got twisted somehow. But the fact that you see them as beautiful and might be able to help them to really be beautiful - that is what is therapeutic.

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Hans Lobstein

## The Neighbourhood Groups Situation

Partly as a result of the MIND conference in May 1975 and subsequent meetings, three training weekends have now been set up to help those who want to start such groups or those who want support from others similarly engaged. The first such weekend last month was oversubscribed, and two more are planned. Many of those who took part in the first weekend have had group experience, some were group organisers or leaders - or facilitators might be a better word. Part of the weekend was spent discussing ways of recruiting and publicity, part to practice actual techniques and methods that are available, and part to give support and encouragement to those who were out on a limb with these groups.

Yes, out on a limb is very much an operative phrase. Some of us are looked at with considerable suspicion by the local authority in whose area we work, even by some who pride themselves on their progressiveness and community spirit, and who otherwise encourage community action and self-help voluntary groups. But even to them it is too much to sanction happily weekend groups where the agenda is not carefully pre-arranged and officially approved. What goes on at these groups, they want to know. How do we know, they say, that things don't get out of hand? Whatever that may mean. John Rowan tells me that groups, any kind of groups, are always viewed with fear and suspicion, from the outside. And ours is no exception.

Coming from adult education rather than group therapy, I like to have a basic outline of a structure at least at the beginning and at the end; to start with an agenda-building session and end with a debriefing session of some kind. At least I want to find out where everybody is right now, what they may expect from this group, what they may be able to contribute to it, what fantasies they may have about each other, what first impressions. I like to have some trust exercises and build up some support for each other before we go too far, so that we can learn to share and open up without

jeopardy. I want to learn about resources of support and safety in the group first, before I can feel happy about taking risks. And so it goes. We may have exercises in the various forms of listening and counselling that are possible, specially with family groups.

So what goes on, then? We discuss our varying experience. For instance, one of us had visited a group of young mothers who meet at the local health clinic. Two of them told him how they had gone through a period of post-natal depression and how much they would have welcomed someone to talk to. They would be very glad, they said, to help any other young mother in a similar predicament. Another woman with mental hospital experience as an agoraphobic is very willing to look after others who may suffer similarly. I am at present particularly interested in school leavers without jobs, or young people trained for a particular job, like teachers, but unable to get started. This is only an idea at the moment, and I would like to hear from others who feel similarly, who would like or who already have started such groups, to see how they can help each other, if they can, possibly to practice interviewing skills and such like. Although it is part of my job with the local authority to help start neighbourhood and self-help groups, it is not in my job specifications to concern myself with school leavers or other unemployed as such. Still, there are plenty of other people in any community, lonely and unhappy, who can help each other.

We discussed publicity. I had compiled a list of nearly 50 outlets, local and national, publications which carry 'coming events' or 'diary' columns and who may well be willing to print notices of such meetings. Since then I have been told of several more, all free of charge.

What else happened? We practiced group leadership skills, and particularly how to keep quiet and let the group develop its own initiative and energy. We practiced listening and counselling skills, role-exchange, psychodrama, and other client-centred experiential exercises, and we practiced on each other to develop skills to cope with fear, stress, threat, conflict, low energy, frustration, happiness and joy . . .

In the present climate of cut-backs in the social and community services such self-help community groups and action groups as can be established or establish themselves, are all the more vital. Social and community workers always talk about preventive work but staff shortages and pressure of remedial work make it all but impossible. Perhaps a little encouragement from these services towards such initiatives and ideas might not come amiss.

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Willow O'Men

## Woman's Right to Choose

*. . . It was woman's reproductive biology that accounted for her original and continued oppression, and not some sudden patriarchal revolution, the*