



International Association for Social Work with Groups

SPARC Program

November IASWG SPARC 2015 Report, Recommendations and IASWG Board Actions
Carol S. Cohen, Barbara Muskat & Marcia B. Cohen

Overview: The purpose of the IASWG SPARC Program is to "spark" IASWG members' innovative group work practice, education, training and research projects through endorsement and/or small grants to advance the IASWG [mission](#). The program was developed by the IASWG Board and Commission from 2011-2012, and inaugurated in 2013. Only IASWG members can apply for SPARC endorsement and funding – funds are used to support projects, often in partnership with other organizations. According to its framing protocol, the SPARC Committee members were appointed by IASWG President and were charged with reviewing SPARC protocols and launching the Project. The IASWG Board reviews and votes on the Committee's recommendations, within 30-60 days of the closing date for applications in each cycle. There are two review cycles each year, corresponding with bi-annual Board Meetings in June and November. The SPARC Committee has continued to update, expand and circulate Project documents through multiple strategies and venues. SPARC documents, Project reports, and outreach materials are available at <http://www.iaswg.org/sparc>

History of Endorsement and Funding

2013

June 2013/Cycle One: 4 Projects were Endorsed, 3 with Funding (\$2500.00 expended).

November 2013/Cycle Two: 5 Projects were Endorsed, 2 with Funding (\$700 expended - *One declined due to insufficient funds – not included in total funds expended).

Total 2013: \$3250.00 (9 Endorsed, 5 with Funding)

2014

June 2014/Cycle Three: 2 Projects were Endorsed, 1 with Funding (\$695.00 expended).

November 2014/Cycle Four: 3 Projects were Endorsed, 2 with Funding (\$2160.00 expended – **\$1160.00 not proceeding, funds returned – not included in total funds expended).

Total 2014: \$1695 (5 Endorsed, 3 with Funding)

2015

June 2015/Cycle Five: 2 Projects were Endorsed, 1 with Funding (\$1250.00 expended).

November 2015/Cycle Six: 7 Projects Endorsed, 5 with Funding (Proposed \$3675.00 for expenditure), 1 for Provisional Endorsement (Endorsed at a later date following proposal revisions).

Total 2015: \$4925.00 9 Projects Endorsed, 1 Provisionally Endorsed, 6 with Funding.

Progress of IASWG SPARC Projects

All IASWG SPARC Project Awardees have either completed their final report, or have submitted an interim report. Updates and final reports will continue to be posted at: <http://www.iaswg.org/sparc>

IASWG SPARC Outreach

Workshops at IASWG Symposium: Beginning in Calgary, and continued in North Carolina, we presented what we hope will be an annual event, *The IASWG SPARC Forum on Project Application, Acceptance and Implementation*. The SPARC Committee invited leaders of IASWG SPARC Projects to join as co-presenters to share their experiences related to the application and implementation of their Projects. This year's presenters include Carol, Barb & Marcia, and 9 Awardees, representing a range of SPARC Projects in areas of Practice, Research and Education/Training. The SPARC Awardees presenting were: Zaneta Smith, *In Search of Me Campaign: Community Program for Young Men of Color*; Shirley Simon & Teresa Kilbane, *Social Group Work Dissertations from 1970-2012*; Sari Skolnik, *Factors Contributing to Group Workers' Commitment and Attitudes toward Group Work Practice*; Sue Scher & Meryl Nadel, *The Story of Social Group Work and Residential Summer Camping*; Ellen Sue Mesbur, Alice Schmidt Hanbidge & Martha Kerr, *International Casebook for Teaching Social Work with Groups*. PowerPoints are uploaded to www.iaswg.org/sparc.

Updates, Group News Reports and EBlasts to Membership Lists: We continued our practice frequently updating the web page with new deadlines and posting of SPARC Project Reports and other relevant announcements. We have prepared SPARC items for most Group News Editions, and arrange for an EBlast to be sent to all members before twice annual review cycles. Emily Wilk has been essential to all these activities. Working in collaboration with the IASWG Marketing Committee, SPARC Project has had a presence at the US CSWE Conference and many other venues. IASWG SPARC is promoted as a Member Benefit, and an opportunity to advance the IASWG mission and innovations in group work practice, training, research and education.

In November 2015 IASWG SPARC Committee brought the following for IASWG Board Review and Vote. The IASWG Board approved the following projects:

For Endorsement:

1. ***Teaching social group work asynchronously? Perception of academics, practitioners, key informants, Jay Sweifach, New York, New York, US.*** The purpose of this research is to gain an empirical understanding of the perceptions of stakeholders (academics, practitioners, key informants, and students) regarding the use of online technologies to teach group work. Anecdotal evidence suggests a wide range of variability in perceptions about the use of online methods ranging from those who feel group work can be taught completely asynchronously to those who feel that group work should only be taught using face-to-face instruction; with still others falling somewhere in-between advocating a blended teaching model. Results of this study could be particularly insightful to CSWE in their ongoing process of revising educational policy and accreditation standards, to IASWG in their ongoing efforts to preserve the unique practice of social group work.
2. ***The Past and Future of Social Group Work in Germany: Contributions of Louis Lowy, Lorrie Greenhouse Gardella, Southern Connecticut, US.*** Upon the invitation of the German Chapter of IASWG, Lorrie will be giving two presentations on the contributions of Louis Lowy to social group work in Germany. Each presentation will be drawn from her book, *The Life and Thought of Louis Lowy: Social Work through the Holocaust* (Syracuse University Press, 2011). On November 18, 2015, the annual meeting of the German Chapter of IASWG will be held at the University of Applied Sciences in Aachen, with a program entitled, "With Louis Lowy on the Road to the Social Work of Tomorrow." This presentation on Lowy's contributions to German social group work will be followed by an interactive discussion on social group work in the future. The next day, the German Chapter of IASWG will host a "Day of Study" entitled, "Life in Groups," at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne. Lorrie will present the keynote lecture, "*The Life and Thought of Louis Lowy: Social Work through the Holocaust*," which will be followed by workshops on social group work with various populations (refugees; elders; prisoners) and aspects of practice (supervision; education; and urban gardening).
3. ***Self-care as an Ethical Concern for Trauma Workers*, Susan McDonald, Pennsylvania, US.** This workshop utilizes an integrated approach to train therapists working with traumatized people to prioritize self-care within an ethical framework to ultimately best serve the needs of clients and simultaneously avoid experiencing vicarious trauma. The workshop facilitators will provide insight into the normal reactions experienced in trauma work as well as deepening participants' understanding of the potential emotional slippery slope of doing this work. Group participants will explore coping and self-care techniques. The workshop will utilize expressive arts modalities, Yoga, mindfulness and group facilitation to find ways to contain and regulate internal responses to difficult material. These related concepts will provide the foundation for developing and strengthening their personal well-being. A model of self-care as being central to trauma therapy will be provided. (Note: Proposed for Provisional Endorsement pending additional information on venue and participants). (Provisionally endorsed – later endorsed with revised application.)

For Endorsement and Funding

4. ***Interpersonal Classroom Model: Developing Interpersonal Communication Skills in Social Work with Groups Courses*, Tee Tyler, Austin, Texas, US. (\$725.00).** This study tests a new pedagogical method for teaching group practice classes called the Interpersonal Classroom Model (ICM). The ICM places group leadership skill development as the central focus of classroom instruction. Each week students participate in a weekly group experience, then complete an online

journal entry and Qualtrics evaluation survey (Appendix A) regarding their in-class experience. Instructors can use this data to gain important information from their students allowing them to adjust their instruction efforts to meet the learning needs of their students. Results from the study may lead to a new approach for teaching group classes that is both evidence based and replicable in other social work programs. Funding is requested to provide gift cards to students for completing a follow-up survey (Appendix B) sent to them during their field placements. This survey evaluates student perceptions regarding whether the ICM effectively prepared them to facilitate client groups and contribute to professional groups.

5. ***Ubuntu Youth: Building Compassionate Leaders of Tomorrow, Karen Rice, Millersville, PA, US. (\$750.00).***
Karen Rice and colleagues are developing an after-school community-based program that seeks to build an enduring infrastructure involving youth and their support networks, graduates of the program, artists, and community institutions and leaders. The program will harness the expertise of local and world artists, using their talents to inform the expressive arts, the therapeutic dimension of the program. Then, building on newly developed empathy and compassion and incorporating both a formal curriculum and mentoring, the program will teach leadership skills and actively engage youth in changing their communities.
6. ***An Exploratory Study of Survivor of Suicide Support Groups, Rebecca L Sanford, Louisville, KY, US (\$500.00).***
Though support groups are commonly used in the suicide bereavement experience, little research has been done to examine survivor of suicide loss (SOS) support groups and their impact on the suicide bereavement experience. The study currently involves two phases to better understand SOS groups. The first phase surveyed facilitators of SOS support groups, and the second phase is a longitudinal study of SOS support group attendees. The first phase involved recruitment of group facilitators internationally (current N=130) to participate in a study to explore group functioning and dynamics. Additionally, the first phase included the opportunity for facilitators to identify willingness to participate in the second phase (current N=35), which will follow first time group attendees longitudinally. Facilitators participating in the second phase are asked to distribute sealed envelopes containing a letter of invitation and instructions for participation in the online survey to all group attendees.
7. ***Bridging the Gap: Adapting School Group Programs into a Mutual Aid Framework, Carol Irizarry and Kerry Hoare Field Education Coordinator, Adelaide, SA, Australia (\$800.00).*** Flinders University places around 80 social work students in schools each semester where they facilitate activity-based student groups. Schools promote 'off the shelf' social and emotional wellbeing packages, from nationally endorsed programs - *KidsMatter and MindMatters*. This project aims to develop fieldwork based materials and an implementation plan to help students bridge the gap between the prescribed 'off the shelf' group programs and the social group work mutual aid models they learn at university. It will analyse specific packages for common ground while placing the activities into a social group work framework including transparency of role and purpose and agenda flexibility.
8. ***Fifth House Ensemble Residency Programs with Teen Living Programs, Brian L Kelly, Chicago, IL. US (\$900.00).***
Fifth House Ensemble (5HE), a non-for profit chamber orchestra and music education group, will facilitate two residency programs at Teen Living Programs (TLP) drop-in center during the spring of 2016. TLP provides housing and supportive services to young people experiencing homelessness on the south side of Chicago, including access to onsite music studios at their drop-in center. While young people spend a significant amount of time working on music in the studio, staff members note young people often do so in isolation and that they do not generate complete songs due a variety of factors, including the lack of avenues to present and perform their completed works. The proposed 5HE residency programs seek to address these needs during two 8-week sessions, where 5HE teaching artists will facilitate group-based workshops, working alongside youth to develop original songs based on their life experiences, and subsequently design and produce performance events at the drop-in center.