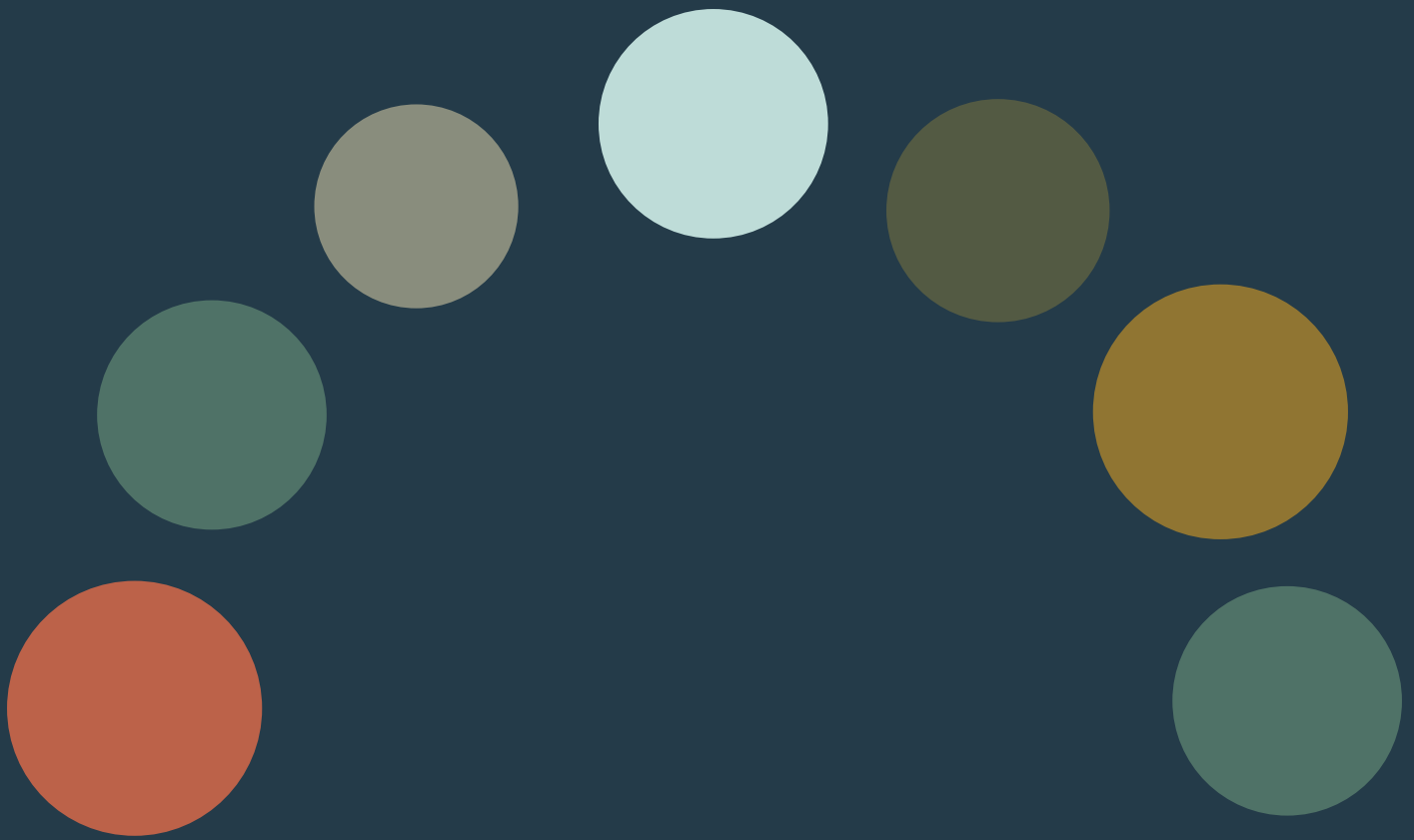


# 2025 ONLINE GROUPWORK SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM



Together, we can make an online difference.

*Relationships*  
AUSTRALIA • NSW



Relationships Australia NSW, Western Sydney University and Interrelate are thrilled to announce the final program for a two-1/2-day Transformative Online Groupwork Symposium on Tuesday, Wednesday, 15-16 April 2025. This Symposium is designed for group workers seeking to enhance their skills and expand their toolbox for innovative online groupwork practice and researchers interested in online groupwork.

Social groupwork captures psychoeducational, social action, mutual aid, cultural development and therapeutic groupwork contexts. This Online Groupwork Symposium explores the benefits and challenges of groupwork practice that is occurring online post Covid.

**Date:** Tuesday 15 and Wednesday 16 April 2025  
**Time:** 11:00am to 3:30pm both days with 30-min Hangout Rooms available before and at the end of each day.  
**Location:** Online via Zoom

The symposium themes are represented in the selected papers and interactive workshops:

- a. Engaging diverse communities
- b. Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork
- c. 'Yarning Down the Line' – Exploring Aboriginal online groupwork

# DAY 1 - TUESDAY 15TH APRIL 2025

10.30AM	Hangout Room				
11.00AM	Acknowledgement of Countries				
11.05AM	Welcome to the Symposium				
11.30AM	Keynote Address 1 - Dr Neil Hall - Groupwork in the new era - Balancing in-person and online groupwork practice				
12.10PM	Keynote Address 2 - Jacqueline-Luise Brescia - Diversity in the online space - Ongoing opportunities for reflection				
2.50PM	Overview of afternoon papers and interactive sessions				
1.00PM	LUNCH				
CONCURRENT SESSIONS A					
	Engaging diverse communities	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	'Yarning Down The Line' - Exploring Aboriginal online groupwork
1.30PM	<p>Paper Presentation 1</p> <p><b>Engaging long term psychologically injured workers in online group programs</b></p> <p>Caitlin Marshall (MakeShift. Wellbeing and Mental Health Lead - Western Sydney University)</p>	<p>Workshop 1</p> <p><b>Bringing theatre online: adaptations for creative and engaging groupwork practice</b></p> <p>Binhua Chen (University of Auckland)</p>	<p>Workshop 2</p> <p><b>BIPOC safe space while supporting change at a Jewish university</b></p> <p>Joyce Roberson-Steele (Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University)</p>	<p>Workshop 3</p> <p><b>Creatively connecting online</b></p> <p>Meredith Lewis Creative Facilitator and Conversation Designer</p>	<p>Workshop 4</p> <p><b>Stepping into insights and learnings</b></p> <p>Anny Druett (Global Values Xchange) and Raylene Hassall (DVNSW)</p>
2.00PM	<p>Paper Presentation 2</p> <p><b>Enhancing accessibility and engagement in delivering online parenting programs for CALD communities</b></p> <p>Jisun (Sunny) Kim (Community Builders Program, RANSW)</p>	<p>Workshop 1 continues</p>	<p>Workshop 2 continues</p>	<p>Workshop 3 continues</p>	<p>Workshop 4 continues</p>
	Engaging diverse communities	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork
2.30PM	<p>Workshop 5</p> <p><b>Respectful man: balancing task, intervention, and experiential process in an online men's group</b></p> <p>Michael Davy (Interrelate)</p>	<p>Workshop 6</p> <p><b>Crafting connection: the role of a group statement in online group work</b></p> <p>Nicola Black (Wattle Place - Relationships Australia NSW)</p>	<p>Workshop 7</p> <p><b>The use of the problem-solving process in an eco-social group: the use of uhe problem-solving process</b></p> <p>Joyce Roberson-Steele (IASWG Eco group)</p>	<p>Workshop 8</p> <p><b>New opportunities for online group work practice</b></p> <p>Carl Malone What Works Australia</p>	<p>Workshop 9</p> <p><b>Harnessing the power of virtual photovoice methods to foster belonging and social advocacy</b></p> <p>Jen Currin-McCulloch, Yixuan Wang and Danielle Peterson (Colorado State University School of Social Work)</p>
3.30PM	Hangout Room				

# DAY 2 - WEDNESDAY 16TH APRIL 2025

10.30AM	Hangout Room				
11.00AM	Keynote Address 3 - Grace Jennings - Online men’s behaviour change groupwork				
12.20AM	Keynote Address 4 - Carl Malone - New opportunities for online groupwork practice				
11.30AM	<b>Panel group discussion – Managing group dynamics, anxiety and communication interaction online groupwork.</b> Panel members – Andrew King (RANSW Practice Specialist), Bianca Stawiarski (Warida Wholistic Wellness & Burany Press), Jen Currin-McCulloch (Colorado State University School of Social Work).				
1.00PM	LUNCH				
CONCURRENT SESSIONS B					
	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Engaging diverse communities	Engaging diverse communities	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	Yarning Down The Line’ - exploring Aboriginal online groupwork
1.30PM	Paper 3 <b>Navigating and embracing the digital shift: opportunities and challenges in online therapeutic group work</b> Rebecca Pepper (Corrective Services NSW)	Paper 5 <b>Taming the mind: working with neurodiverse individuals using online groupwork</b> Nikki Hayhurst and Andrew King (Relationships Australia NSW)	Workshop 10 <b>Design considerations for an online transformative workshop</b> Martin Butcher (Freelance facilitator)	Workshop 11 <b>Mutual aid groups for social group workers</b> Ann Bergart LCSW (Affiliated with Loyola University Chicago)	Workshop 12 <b>Decolonising the online space</b> Bianca Stawiarski (Warida Wholistic Wellness & Burany Press)
2.00PM	Paper 4 <b>Online support services for men's mental health during and post COVID-19</b> Dr Neil Hall (Western Sydney University)	Paper 6 <b>The container of care - facilitating online psychoeducational groups</b> Clarissa Wilson (Relationships Australia NSW)	Workshop 10 continues	Workshop 11 continues	Workshop 12 continues
2.30PM		Paper 7 <b>Harnessing the potential for online groupwork education post COVID</b> Shirley R. Simon (Loyola University Chicago)	Paper 8 <b>Your ex is NOT in this room: navigating the challenges of triggers, trauma and gender biases in online parenting groups after separation</b> Isabel Fox and Kirralee Bourke (Relationships Australia NSW)	Paper 9 <b>Imagining a future therapeutic community that reduces crime</b> James Ferguson (What Works Australia)	Paper 10 <b>Insights from a six-month online groupwork program</b> Anny Druett (Global Values Xchange) and Raylene Hassall (DVNSW)
3.00PM	Symposium close and future directions				
3.30PM	Hangout Room				

# ONLINE GROUPWORK SYMPOSIUM PAPER AND INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS OVERVIEW

## Paper Sessions (30 mins)

STREAM	TOPIC / PRESENTER	OVERVIEW	SCHEDULED SESSION
1P	<p>Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork</p> <p><b>Engaging long term psychologically injured workers in online group programs</b></p> <p>Caitlin Marshall <i>MakeShift</i></p>	<p>From 2019 - 2022, MakeShift, a non-profit trauma recovery, arts and health agency, engaged 45 psychologically injured workers in NSW in an 8 week creative trauma recovery group program. Most of this cohort were male first responders - working mostly in Police and/or Correctional Services. Initially designed as a F2F experience, the onset of the pandemic meant moving this hands-on, arts and activity focused group experience online. What followed was a fascinating process of discovering the unique potential and positive benefits of online group programs, along with challenges too.</p> <p>The program - ReMind: Creativity on Prescription, won 2 Gold Brandon Hall Awards for Innovation and Excellence in Learning, as well as being shortlisted for Best International Social Prescribing program. The research and evaluation concluded significant improvements for participants in their self-identified severity of symptoms, and overall significant increases in social connection, capacity for self care and resilience in management of their mental wellbeing, and increased hope for the future.</p> <p>The group combined the introduction of a series of evidence based creative practices - writing, painting, drawing, music, gardening, cooking, textiles, and movement along with psycho-education and tools for wellbeing development. The group program format applied trauma-informed practice, strengths based, and polyvagal approaches. Alongside this, elements of community development and capacity building were extended beyond the 8-week experience to support participants to link with key activities in their local area, following the process of social prescribing linkage practice modelled by the NHS.</p> <p>This presentation will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumptions we made about this 'hardest to reach' cohort</li> <li>• The surprising benefits, opportunities and outcomes of delivering this program online</li> <li>• The ingredients for this success - blending online format with home delivered resources, live check ins, peer support relationships, links to their immediate community</li> <li>• Technological considerations around accessibility and playing with formats of timing and group programming.</li> <li>• The stories of participants who told us that they would never have engaged in a F2F group, and credit the online group experience at this time in their lives as 'transformative and life saving.</li> </ul> <p>The work from this program has been chronicled in an internationally published book: Creative First Aid: The Science and Joy of Creativity for Mental Health, by Caitlin Marshall and Lizzie Rose, which includes a range of stories from participants of the ReMind program.</p>	<p>Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.00pm</p>
2P	<p>Engaging diverse communities</p> <p><b>Enhancing accessibility and engagement - challenges and opportunities in delivering online parenting programs for CALD communities</b></p> <p>Jisun (Sunny) Kim <i>Relationships Australia NSW</i></p>	<p>This study examines the importance of culturally informed strategies in the design and delivery of online group programs for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) participants. Specifically, it explores two main questions: what factors influence access to online programs for multicultural communities, and what are the challenges and opportunities in delivering effective online programs tailored to these groups? Conducted in an online format, the program provides flexibility and ease of access, addressing autonomy and time constraints for both facilitators and participants. However, the hierarchical structures and indirect communication styles typical in CALD settings, particularly within Korean cultural contexts, influence engagement and open dialogue. Hierarchical dynamics and respectful attitude to authority can lead to anxiety and discomfort for the client and limitation of the active engagement and open discussion. This can influence the program's outcomes and effectiveness. Despite these challenges, online platforms offer significant opportunities for culturally sensitive facilitation. By creating a flexible and safe environment, the program enables participants to discuss issues relevant to their experiences in a supportive space. Tailoring approaches to accommodate indirect communication preferences and hierarchical expectations enhance inclusivity, enabling facilitators to balance participant autonomy with structured guidance. Additionally, utilising smaller breakout groups can encourage greater openness and engagement, leading to more meaningful and beneficial outcomes for participants.</p> <p>Findings suggest that, with appropriate facilitation approaches, online group programs can enhance accessibility for CALD communities, boosting confidence and engagement among participants. Recommendations include implementing culturally appropriate and structured environment to address emerging concerns, which are critical for maximising the program's impact. Furthermore, providing tailored strategies for direct interaction can empower participants to express themselves confidently. Such environments not only benefit the participants but also support facilitators' growth as leaders within the broader community.</p>	<p>Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 2.00pm to 2.30pm</p>



STREAM	TOPIC / PRESENTER	OVERVIEW	SCHEDULED SESSION
3P	<p>Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork</p> <p><b>Navigating and embracing the digital shift: opportunities and challenges in online therapeutic groupwork</b></p> <p>Rebecca Pepper <i>Corrective Services NSW</i></p>	<p>This paper explores the transition to online therapeutic group work, a shift accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rebecca Pepper, a Senior Program Development Officer with Corrective Services NSW, shares her personal journey and experiences, providing insights from facilitating behaviour change programs in a correctional environment to an online setting. The transition presented unique opportunities of accessibility, convenience, and diversity of perspectives within the group, along with challenges, notably retention rate of program participants and lack of meaningful engagement.</p> <p>Initial attempts to find solutions through existing literature were unfruitful, prompting a deeper investigation into effective online facilitation strategies.</p> <p>Key findings highlighted the importance of addressing technological fears, ethical and legal considerations, and communication barriers. Drawing inspiration from Portugal's decriminalisation framework, the team focused on enhancing connection, increasing participant agency, and improving facilitator skills in engagement. Rebecca will share practical insights and strategies for effective online facilitation, addressing both the opportunities and challenges encountered in online therapeutic group work.</p>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.00p
4P	<p>Engaging diverse communities</p> <p><b>Online support services for men's mental health during and post COVID</b></p> <p>Neil Hall <i>Western Sydney University</i></p>	<p>What we learned about online support services for men's mental health during COVID-19 has led to developments in online group work in the years since lockdown, particularly for men in rural and remote regions. This session will look at how we create trusting online environments for men and replicate the 'shoulder-to-shoulder' benefits of in-person group communication in an online environment.</p> <p>What we learned about online support services for men's mental health during COVID-19 has led to developments in online group work in the years since lockdown, particularly for men in rural and remote regions. The session will aim to encourage confidence in practitioners for working online with men and build a set of tools and tips for making men's group work more effective.</p>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 2.00pm to 2.30pm
5P	<p>Engaging diverse communities</p> <p><b>Taming the mind: working with neurodiverse individuals using online groupwork</b></p> <p>Nikki Hayhurst and Andrew King <i>Relationships Australia NSW</i></p>	<p>This paper explores effective strategies for supporting neurodiverse individuals in online groupwork settings, focusing on how to foster communication, understanding, and connection in virtual environments.</p> <p>Neurodiversity encompasses a range of cognitive, sensory, and social differences, and the paper highlights key communication approaches that enhance engagement and promote positive group dynamics for individuals on the autism spectrum, with ADHD, and other neurodivergent conditions.</p> <p>The paper discusses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical support for Zoom related issues the participants.</li> <li>• Adapting communication styles to meet the unique needs of neurodiverse participants.</li> <li>• The importance of clear, direct language in minimising misunderstandings.</li> <li>• Practical tips for active listening that demonstrate empathy and attention.</li> <li>• How to understand and respond to non-verbal cues effectively in an online format.</li> <li>• Building rapport and trust to encourage participation and openness.</li> <li>• The creation of a safe space where all participants feel valued and understood.</li> <li>• Addressing sensory considerations that may affect participants' ability to focus or engage.</li> <li>• Alternative text and use of images.</li> </ul> <p>By integrating these strategies, the paper provides practical insights for group facilitators to create an inclusive, supportive, and productive online environment where neurodiverse individuals can thrive, feel heard, and form meaningful connections.</p>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.00pm
6P	<p>Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork</p> <p><b>The container of care - facilitating online psychoeducational groups</b></p> <p>Clarissa Wilson <i>Relationships Australia NSW</i></p>	<p>The shift from in-person to online groupwork has presented new challenges and learning opportunities, culminating in the development of the "Container of Care" - a framework designed to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of participants and facilitators in online settings.</p> <p>The online format has expanded accessibility, enabling participants to join from the comfort of their homes, accommodating personal commitments, and reducing logistical barriers. However, it has also introduced distinct challenges, such as maintaining focus, managing distractions, and addressing breaches of social norms. These challenges underscored the importance of establishing clear boundaries and explicit expectations.</p> <p>The Container of Care is built upon pre-group agreements between participants and facilitators, discussed during orientation sessions. These agreements outline behaviours such as maintaining a distraction-free environment and adhering to norms that mirror face-to-face interactions. The agreements clarify the psychoeducational purpose of the group, ensuring consistent structure and minimizing disruptions.</p> <p>The Container of Care not only supports group functionality but also models appropriate boundary-setting and respectful communication, skills that participants can implement in their personal lives. This approach ensures a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment, solidifying the success of online psychoeducational groups at Relationships Australia.</p> <p>Key Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enhanced accessibility and inclusivity through online delivery.</li> <li>2. Improved group dynamics via clear pre-group agreements.</li> <li>3. Effective management of challenging participant behaviours.</li> <li>4. Modelling and fostering of boundary-setting and respectful communication.</li> </ol>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 2.00pm to 2.30pm

STREAM	TOPIC / PRESENTER	OVERVIEW	SCHEDULED SESSION
7P	<p>Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork</p> <p><b>Harnessing the potential for online groupwork education post COVID</b></p> <p>Shirley R. Simon <i>Loyola University Chicago</i></p>	<p>Groupwork is ubiquitous in social service delivery, yet it is well-documented that practitioners typically receive inadequate groupwork education and training. Except for a few dedicated groupwork conferences, opportunities for groupwork continuing education have been sparse, infrequent and geographically limited. The emergence of the pandemic prompted widespread use of online communication platforms. This, in turn, offered new opportunities for reaching practitioners and students, and providing essential accessible, diverse, and cost-effective groupwork education.</p> <p>This presentation describes and assesses the implementation of a virtual Continuing Education Series on Groupwork. Born in the early days of COVID, the Series, now in its fourth year, is sponsored by a U.S. Social Work School, offers 6-8 biannual workshops and uses Zoom technology to reach international, rural, and diverse participants.</p> <p>Sessions address online and in-person groupwork, including 1) practice issues (strategies for effective online groupwork, value and ethical dilemmas, diversity considerations in groupwork composition and facilitation, managing challenging issues such as conflict, silence and monopolizing, and effective use of activities; 2) groupwork with various populations (children, elderly, LGBTQIA+, and Latinx); and 3) groupwork in specific practice arenas (substance use, trauma, adventure-based work, and organizational leadership).</p> <p>The success of the Series led to the development of a newly launched Certificate in Groupwork based on participation in Series' sessions, individual consultations with international groupwork experts, and a written reflection paper.</p> <p>Both the Series and the Certificate programs earned endorsement from the International Association for Social Work with Groups (IASWG). This workshop discusses the Series' evolution, strengths and challenges, potential for replication, and opportunities for participation. Session attendees gain a historical understanding of the diminished role of groupwork education, practical strategies for harnessing technology for effective online education, and ideas for creative virtual groupwork innovation. Online groupwork practice is here to stay, and online learning opportunities must follow suit.</p>	<p>Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.00pm</p>
8P	<p>Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork</p> <p><b>Your ex is NOT in this room: navigating the challenges of triggers, trauma and gender biases in online parenting groups after separation</b></p> <p>Isabel Fox and Kirralee Bourke <i>Relationships Australia NSW</i></p>	<p>After separation, many parents seek out support to communicate more effectively and respectfully with their children and their former partner's. For some, this learning is court ordered, for others it can feel like a final ditch attempt to build a bridge with a controlling, non-communicative or violent co-parent.</p> <p>When groups are gender diverse, it is common for attendees to be a complex mix of people single parenting despite wishing their ex-partner and co-parent would participate or people isolated or disconnected from their children despite wishing to have more contact. Typically, these divides fall along gender lines, with women being the one's in full-time caring roles and often wanting but fearing their ex-partner's involvement and men resenting their ex-partner for their lack of access to their children.</p> <p>This paper explores the complexities, benefits and challenges of creating and facilitating parenting groups where there is a gender mix and there can be a combination of both victim/survivors and perpetrators of family violence.</p>	<p>Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.00pm</p>
9P	<p>Engaging diverse communities</p> <p><b>Imagining a future therapeutic community that reduces crime</b></p> <p>James Ferguson <i>What Works Australia</i></p>	<p>We live in interesting times for our species. In Western countries we have never been wealthier, had such amazing technology nor have we lived as long. However, research suggests we have never felt so alone. Crime remains high in marginalised communities especially domestic abuse and sexual assault.</p> <p>What if the same technologies many see as part of the reason for our isolation, misogyny and polarisation can be harnessed to create authentic humane and sustainable communities interested in connection and safety for their members.</p> <p>James Ferguson uses the technology projects he initiated at Corrective Services NSW, with online GroupWork as the starting point, in imagining how communities most at risk of violence and crime might harness technology to reframe their future.</p>	<p>Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.00pm</p>
10P	<p>Yarning down the line - exploring Aboriginal online groupwork</p> <p><b>Insights from a Six-Month Online Groupwork Program</b></p> <p>Anny Druett <i>Global Values Xchange</i></p>	<p>In the wake of COVID-19, online groupwork has become a critical component of professional and academic collaboration. This presentation reflects on a six-month program designed to foster effective online teamwork among a group of 15 participants, meeting virtually for 2'3 hours per month. Through this program, we explored the challenges and opportunities of online groupwork, with a particular focus on strategies to maintain engagement, foster trust, and promote collaboration with local Aboriginal communities in the real world. The session will provide an overview of the program's design and implementation, highlighting key challenges, such as overcoming initial barriers to trust-building, addressing digital fatigue, and ensuring inclusivity. It will also explore successes, including tailored facilitation techniques, the use of asynchronous tools, and the creation of a culturally responsive and safe virtual environment.</p> <p>These insights are particularly valuable in the post-COVID context, where online groupwork continues to evolve as a primary mode of collaboration. Participants will gain practical strategies for addressing common issues in online groupwork, such as balancing individual and group goals, sustaining engagement, and leveraging digital tools for meaningful interaction. We will also share innovative methodologies employed in the program, such as reflective practices, iterative adjustments based on participant feedback, and techniques for replicating in-person dynamics in virtual settings.</p> <p>This presentation will be of interest to academics and practitioners seeking to enhance their understanding of online groupwork. Attendees will leave with actionable insights, practical tools, and a deeper appreciation for the opportunities and challenges of virtual collaboration, as well as the importance of fostering adaptability and reflective practice in online groupwork design for connecting and engaging with local Aboriginal communities. This session will conclude with a discussion of future directions for online groupwork practice, offering attendees a chance to reflect on how they might apply these lessons in their own contexts.</p>	<p>Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.00pm</p>

# Interactive Workshop Sessions (60 mins)

	STREAM	TOPIC / PRESENTER	OVERVIEW	SCHEDULED SESSION
1W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>Bringing theatre online: adaptations for Cceative and engaging groupwork practice</b>  Binhua Chen  <i>University of Auckland</i>	<p>The integration of theatre into social work has a long-standing history, tracing back to the Settlement Movement, where social workers utilized theatre to promote community engagement and socialization. Over time, theatre has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering creativity, participation, and social change. This workshop addresses the pressing challenge of maintaining engagement in online groupwork settings, an issue heightened during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. This interactive session demonstrates how theatre games can be effectively adapted for virtual platforms, inspired by participatory approaches developed by Viola Spolin and Augusto Boal. Participants will explore how tools like virtual stage areas and spotlight features can create dynamic spaces that encourage interaction, collaboration, and co-creation.</p> <p>Through live demonstrations and practical exercises, attendees will gain hands-on experience with these adaptations, exploring how theatrical elements can transform traditional online groupwork into engaging and participatory experiences.</p> <p>By the end of the workshop, participants will have practical tools and actionable insights to enhance their existing practices. Whether applied in social work, education, or other groupwork contexts, these innovative techniques aim to inspire practitioners to rethink online spaces as opportunities for creativity and meaningful engagement.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.30pm
2W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>BIPOC safe space while supporting change at a Jewish university</b>  Joyce Roberson-Steele, and Chantee Parris-Strigle, Annette Clarke-Jones, Sharon Turnage, Chester Johnson  <i>Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University</i>	<p>This study examines the importance of culturally informed strategies in the design and delivery of online group programs for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) participants. Specifically, it explores two main questions: what factors influence access to online programs for multicultural communities, and what are the challenges and opportunities in delivering effective online programs tailored to these groups? Conducted in an online format, the program provides flexibility and ease of access, addressing autonomy and time constraints for both facilitators and participants. However, the hierarchical structures and indirect communication styles typical in CALD settings, particularly within Korean cultural contexts, influence engagement and open dialogue. Hierarchical dynamics and respectful attitude to authority can lead to anxiety and discomfort for the client and limitation of the active engagement and open discussion. This can influence the program's outcomes and effectiveness. Despite these challenges, online platforms offer significant opportunities for culturally sensitive facilitation. By creating a flexible and safe environment, the program enables participants to discuss issues relevant to their experiences in a supportive space. Tailoring approaches to accommodate indirect communication preferences and hierarchical expectations enhance inclusivity, enabling facilitators to balance participant autonomy with structured guidance. Additionally, utilising smaller breakout groups can encourage greater openness and engagement, leading to more meaningful and beneficial outcomes for participants.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 2.00pm to 2.30pm
3W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>Creatively connecting online</b>  Meredith Lewis	<p>Overview: How can we design online sessions that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster human connection rather than digital disconnection?</li> <li>• Are dynamic and inspirational rather than dull, flat, or draining?</li> <li>• See facilitator and participants empowered as co-creators of connective and inspirational groupwork?</li> </ul> <p>This workshop will explore the use of creative facilitation methods to transform online groupwork sessions into experiences that connect and inspire rather than spaces that, by their digital nature, emphasise distance, disconnect, and affective flatness.</p> <p>This session will be highly interactive. It will engage participants through creative facilitation methods that include storytelling, imagery, and serious play, thereby demonstrating some of the methods I use to bring online groupwork alive. At the same time, these creative techniques will be used to open up a discussion addressing the questions above.</p> <p>Online groupwork in the post-Covid context: My facilitation practice focuses on making sense of life post-lockdown / current-polycrisis. Lockdown saw a huge increase in the use of digital platforms for groupwork. Used well, these tools can be powerful instruments across boundaries of distance and circumstance. As a society, we are still coming to terms with how to design and facilitate online groupwork so that it mitigates against the distancing and flattening effects of Zoom and similar platforms. I believe that there is an opportunity to be creative with how we design for digital connection.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.30pm
4W	Yarning down the line exploring Aboriginal online groupwork	<b>Stepping into insights and learnings</b>  Anny Druett & Raylene Hassall  <i>Global Values Xchange &amp; DV NSW</i>	<p>This workshop will share key insights and lessons learned from a six-month online program designed to foster collaboration and growth among a team of 15 meeting virtually for 2*3 hours each month. The mainstream team / group focusing on connecting and engaging with local Aboriginal communities. There will be a focus on the practical benefits, challenges, and practical methodologies that emerged from this experience. The session will offer actionable strategies for enhancing online groupwork for building stronger relationships with local Aboriginal communities in the real world. Participants will explore the program's design, implementation, and outcomes, with particular attention to overcoming common online groupwork challenges, such as engagement, collaboration, and maintaining cultural inclusivity. The session will include interactive discussions, case studies, and tools that supported the program's success. The workshop will address the dual challenges of maintaining connection in virtual spaces and building relationships in the real world. It will explore strategies for fostering trust, sustaining engagement, and achieving collective goals while balancing individual needs. Benefits, such as accessibility and the ability to draw on diverse perspectives across geographies, will also be discussed.</p> <p>Attendees will gain insights into innovative work practices, including tailored facilitation techniques, leveraging with asynchronous self-directed online learning tools, and creating safe spaces for collaboration both virtually and in the real world. The session will highlight how a reflective approach to work practices led to improved outcomes and lessons learned for future programs in the post-Covid context.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.30pm



	STREAM	TOPIC / PRESENTER	OVERVIEW	SCHEDULED SESSION
5W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>Respectful man: balancing task, intervention, and experiential process in an online men's group</b> Michael Davy <i>Interrelate</i>	<p>Respectful Man: Balancing task, intervention, and experiential process in an online men's group - The shift to online groupwork doesn't have to mean the loss of therapeutic intervention and experiential processes. This workshop will explore the use of intervention and process in balance with task and purpose clarity, through the lens of our experience running the online men's group program, Respectful Man.</p> <p>The workshop will cover: What is Respectful Man; Purpose, task and goals: Having an intent with the program and activities; Building authenticity: Connecting and deepening; Intervention focus: catching moments and working with the here and now; connecting to experience and emotion; working collaboratively; working with parts; and embedding cultural elements; Vicarious stress: Impacts on leaders and the use of self and co-support; Vicarious growth: Impacts on leaders and the enhancing of the self and professional. The workshop will include use of a video demonstration that was recorded during a 2-day training, with facilitators in role-play and in-character as participants. This provides a realistic example of what takes place in a first session of Respectful Man. The workshop will also provide space for participant experience and reflection.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.30pm
6W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>The use of the problem-solving process in an eco-social group: the use of the problem-solving process.</b> Joyce Roberson-Steele, PhD <i>IASWG Eco group</i>	<p>This presentation delves into the transformative experiences of social workers across the United States who formed an environmental virtual mutual aid group. The presenters, as active members of this group, will share their insights into employing the problem-solving process which emphasizes collaboration, reflective questioning, and storytelling as a means to address community-level environmental challenges and, indirectly, challenges related to climate grief, community trauma, and professional identity confusion. The presentation will illuminate the benefits of the problem-solving approach, including deeper connections within the group and self-discovery. As a group, the presenters will reflect on common struggles that came up during the process and how the problem-solving process allows for validation and restoration through shared experiences. Challenges encountered, such as the need for a slower pace aligned with the group's process, will also be explored. The presentation will conclude with a reflection on the ripple effect observed with group members as it intensified and deepened the mutual aid aspect of the group, which in turn fostered and increased member's confidence in advocating for and discussing climate change issues in other settings.</p> <p>The Problem-Solving process is a practice that is usually conducted in person. However, our group members, who are in different areas of the country, could only experience the problem-solving process in a virtual setting. For social workers who typically are compelled to rapidly solving problems, this practice allows space for reflection in a way that was at first challenging, but later through practice became beneficial in the pursuit of the group's goals.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.30pm
7W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>New opportunities for online group work practice</b> Carl Malone <i>What Works Australia</i>	<p>Overview: In 2017, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) and Transport for NSW (TfNSW) embarked on a ground-breaking initiative to launch Australia's first online therapeutic group program. Targeting convicted high-range and repeat drink-driving offenders, this behaviour change and education program faced unique challenges with its online adaptation. The absence of precedents for online group work coupled with the need for a new facilitator skill set, necessitated innovative solutions.</p> <p>In 2017, the first program of nine two-hour sessions incorporated hundreds of custom screens, interactive features and multi-media, maintaining the program's independent evaluation of efficacy. The key barriers of participant resistance, technical unfamiliarity, and rural accessibility were addressed and scaled up for the pandemic. Delivery continues today because of the advantages of enhanced confidentiality, greater reach, improved female participant retention and facilitator recruitment.</p> <p>Explore the lessons learnt in this journey and how they were applied to other programs within Corrective Services NSW, providing some of the most isolated and damaged communities access to evidence based therapeutic support for the first time. This session will detail the technological, pedagogical, and therapeutic strategies employed to develop a replicable model for increasing the reach of your therapeutic program beyond postcodes.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.30pm
8W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>Harnessing the power of virtual photovoice - methods to foster belonging and social advocacy</b> Jen Currin-McCulloch, Yixuan Wang and Danielle Peterson <i>Colorado State University School of Social Work in the United States</i>	<p>This session will utilise a parallel process to describe the planning through evaluative stages of a virtual photovoice group. A case example of a photovoice project with young adult cancer survivors that was facilitated during COVID-19 will highlight the power of a virtual photovoice intervention in fostering group members' sense of belonging and social advocacy. First, attendees will gather a comprehensive understanding of photovoice's theoretical roots, exploring its application to marginalized populations. Like other participatory research methods, photovoice aims to uplift the voices and perspectives of the marginalized, oppressed, and unseen of the community and affect change through the sharing of photographic images and brief narratives. Attendees will learn about the breadth of its application and recognize how the method is well-suited to empower group members. For example, being the authority on how it really is-allows photovoice participants to become advocates for their own and their community's well-being. Attendees will be encouraged to see group members as experts in explaining their lived experiences and to give them the prominent role of sharing ideas and resources to help other group members improve their quality of life.</p> <p>After the theoretical overview, attendees will discuss the planning, facilitating, and evaluating phases of a virtual photovoice group intervention. To solidify the learning process, attendees will be invited to participate in an interactive photovoice activity, using photos from their own devices.</p>	Tuesday 15 April 2025 from 2.30pm to 3.30pm

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9W	Engaging diverse communities	<b>Design considerations for an online transformative workshop</b> Martin Butcher <i>Freelance online workshop designer</i>	<p><b>1. Summary of the Focus and Objectives</b></p> <p>This two-part interactive workshop will guide participants through both the theory and practice of designing a successful, transformative session for diverse groups.</p> <p>Experiential Level: Attendees will take part in an online adaptation of a process originally created for in-person groups working in complex topics.</p> <p>Content Level: Participants will explore two key conceptual elements of transformative workshop design:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Design/Action Research/Virtuous Cycle model for facilitating purposeful change.</li> <li>2. Effective workshop planning and design, based on Sam Kaner's "Diamond of Participatory Decision Making."</li> </ol> <p>The primary objective is to give participants a hands-on experience in identifying the critical design considerations needed for effective transformative workshops.</p> <p><b>2. Content of the Session</b></p> <p>The session is divided into two 20-minute segments:</p> <p>Part 1: Participants will explore methods to guide a group in answering essential questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happening now?</li> <li>• What is our vision for the future?</li> <li>• What concrete, actionable step can we take to realize this vision?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why choose that step over others?</li> <li>2. How will we carry it out?</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p>After-action evaluation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What actually happened?</li> <li>2. What insights did we gain?</li> </ol> <p>Participants will actively engage in the diverge/converge model using various techniques to further explore their own experiences, dreams and potential ways forward in transformative workshop design.</p> <p>New Approaches, Methodologies, or Insights: This workshop operates on two levels. On a content level, it introduces participants to a range of theories and practices related to participatory development and transformational change.</p>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.30pm
10W	Opportunities and challenges in online groupwork	<b>Mutual aid groups for social group workers</b> Ann Bergart, PhD, LCSW <i>Affiliated with the Continuing Education program at Loyola University Chicago</i>	<p>The International Association for Social Work with Groups (IASWG) is the only organization that promotes social group work. This presenter has served on its Board of Directors for many years. Her presentation will describe a mutual aid group program which began in 2020 and has become a valued member benefit. Despite the presence of many small groups within the organization, a board, committees and local chapters, it was only when the Covid-19 pandemic began that small groups were formed to focus on supporting members and fostering their professional growth. Believing that social workers need groups for themselves (Bergart &amp; Simon, 2004), this presenter had attempted to establish email networks within IASWG many years earlier. Some were launched, but the program was short lived.</p> <p>The sudden onset of the pandemic made it necessary for teachers to quickly figure out how to teach online. This presenter's anxiety about teaching social group work classes virtually was sky high. At IASWG's 2020 international symposium she put out the word that she wanted to form a mutual aid group where social group work instructors could help one another to effectively teach online. We would learn together and support each other's efforts. Almost 30 people wanted to join, and two international groups were formed. One is still meeting; the other met for over a year.</p> <p>Several other mutual aid groups were soon initiated, first around teaching and then around group practice. More recently, two social action-oriented groups were formed focused on environmental justice, and the other on advocacy for social group work within the social work profession. This program reflects the benefits of online group work. Geographical boundaries are overcome, though accommodating vastly different time zones create challenges. Groups formed around strong common interests and felt need can thrive online and prevent isolation and burnout.</p>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.30pm
11W	Yarning down the line - exploring Aboriginal online groupwork	<b>Decolonising the online space</b> Bianca Stawiarski <i>Warida Wholistic Wellness &amp; Buraya Press</i>	<p>Discover how to decolonise the online therapeutic space in this engaging one-hour immersive workshop. Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, this session invites participants to challenge Western healing paradigms, embrace cultural humility, and reimagine therapeutic practices through a relational and holistic lens.</p> <p>Gain practical insights to create inclusive, culturally safe online environments that honour diverse voices and empower genuine healing connections.</p>	Wednesday 16 April 2025 from 1.30pm to 2.30pm