

Here is the complete, detailed answer with scholars fully integrated:

Models of Social Group Work

Introduction

In Social Group Work, a **model** means a specific approach or framework that guides how a social worker works with a group. Different groups have different needs — some groups need therapy and treatment, some need to learn new skills and become responsible citizens, and some need a space where members can help each other. So different models are used for different purposes and different settings.

The main models of social group work were developed by scholars like **Grace Coyle, Robert Vinter, and William Schwartz**. The most widely accepted classification was given by **Papell and Rothman in 1966**, who identified three major models — the Social Goals Model, the Remedial Model, and the Reciprocal Model.

1. The Social Goals Model

Scholars

This model was developed and promoted by **Grace Coyle, Clara Kaiser, and Gisela Konopka**. Grace Coyle is considered the **founding mother of Social Group Work**. She believed deeply that group work must serve democratic and social purposes. Gisela Konopka further developed the model by emphasising the emotional and social growth of individuals within a socially conscious group.

What is it?

This is the **oldest and most traditional model** of social group work. It originated in the early settlement house movement and youth organisations like the YMCA and YWCA. Its central belief is that groups are a powerful tool for building **responsible, democratic, and socially aware citizens**.

It believes that when people come together in a group, they not only solve their personal problems but also develop the values and skills needed to participate in a democratic society and bring about social change.

Key Ideas

- The group is seen as a tool for **social change and social reform**
- It focuses on developing **democratic values** such as equality, justice, cooperation, and participation

- Every individual is seen as a potentially responsible and capable citizen
- The worker acts as a **guide, educator, and facilitator** — not a therapist
- The group itself is the goal — building a strong, participatory, socially conscious group is the aim
- Problems are seen as **social in nature**, not individual failures

Role of the Worker

The social worker in this model works as a **democratic leader and educator**. The worker helps the group identify social issues, develop consciousness, plan action, and participate in community life. The worker does not dominate or direct — instead, the worker inspires and guides.

Setting

This model is commonly used in **community centres, youth clubs, settlement houses, neighbourhood organisations, and NGOs** working on social development.

Example

A social worker in a rural village forms a group of young men and women to discuss problems like lack of clean drinking water, open defecation, and unemployment. The worker helps them understand their rights as citizens, develop awareness about government schemes, plan a collective action, and approach the local panchayat. Over time, the group members become confident, socially aware, and active participants in their community. This is a clear example of the **Social Goals Model** — the group is being used as a vehicle for social change and democratic participation.

2. The Remedial Model

Scholars

This model was developed at the **University of Michigan** by **Robert Vinter** and **Paul Glasser** in the 1950s and 1960s. Robert Vinter is the most important name behind this model. He gave a systematic, clinical, and scientific framework for group work practice. His book *"Readings in Group Work Practice"* is a key reference. He believed that social group work should be as disciplined and goal-oriented as any other form of professional treatment.

What is it?

The Remedial Model treats the group like a **treatment or rehabilitation setting**. It is used to help individuals who are facing serious personal, emotional, behavioural, or social problems. The word "remedial" itself means **to correct or cure something that is wrong**.

In this model, the group is not the main goal — it is simply the **setting or medium** through which the individual is treated. The real focus is always on the individual member and their specific problem.

Key Ideas

- The primary focus is on **treating and rehabilitating the individual**
- Each member is seen as having a specific **problem, dysfunction, or need** that must be addressed
- The worker carefully **assesses each member** and sets individual treatment goals
- The group is used as a tool — group interaction, peer feedback, and shared experiences are used to bring change in individual members
- The approach is **systematic and scientific** — the worker plans interventions carefully like a clinician
- The worker has expert knowledge and takes a more **directive and active role**

Role of the Worker

In this model, the worker acts as a **therapist, expert, and clinician**. The worker assesses individual members, sets treatment goals, selects appropriate group activities and techniques, and evaluates progress regularly. The worker is very active and central to the group process.

Stages of the Remedial Model (as given by Vinter)

Vinter identified a clear process:

- **Pre-group phase** — Assessment of individual needs and formation of the group
- **Group phase** — Using group interaction and activities for treatment
- **Evaluation phase** — Measuring individual progress against set goals

Setting

This model is used in **hospitals, psychiatric clinics, de-addiction centres, juvenile correctional homes, prisons, child guidance clinics, and rehabilitation centres**.

Example

A social worker runs a group in a **juvenile correctional home** for young boys who have committed petty crimes. Each boy has individual goals — one needs to control anger, another needs to develop social skills, and a third needs to overcome family trauma. The worker uses role play, group discussion, and structured activities to help each boy work on his specific goals. Progress is regularly evaluated. Here the group is being used as a treatment setting to rehabilitate each individual — this is the **Remedial Model**.

3. The Reciprocal Model (Mediating Model)

Scholars

This model was developed by **William Schwartz** and introduced in his landmark 1961 paper *"The Social Worker in the Group."* Schwartz was a professor at Columbia University and his ideas revolutionised the way social workers think about groups. His model was later expanded and developed further by **Alex Gitterman** and **Lawrence Shulman**, who wrote extensively on mutual aid and the helping process in groups.

What is it?

The Reciprocal Model is based on the idea that there is a **natural and necessary relationship between the individual and society** — each needs the other to survive and grow. But sometimes this relationship breaks down due to stress, isolation, discrimination, or life crises.

The social worker's job is to **act as a mediator or bridge** — restoring and strengthening the connection between the individual and the group, and between the group and the wider society. This is why it is also called the **Mediating Model**.

Key Ideas

- The relationship between individual and society is **interdependent** — neither can function well without the other
- The group is seen as a **mutual aid system** — a space where members genuinely help each other
- The worker does **not set goals** for the members — goals come from the members themselves
- There is **no "sick" member or identified patient** — all members are seen as capable and having strengths
- The worker's role is to remove obstacles and create conditions for mutual aid to happen naturally
- **Mutual aid** is the most powerful healing force in the group — not the worker's expertise

What is Mutual Aid?

Schwartz's most important concept is **mutual aid**. He believed that people in a group naturally want to help each other — they share information, offer emotional support, challenge each other, and learn from each other's experiences. This mutual helping is more powerful than any technique the worker can apply. The worker's job is simply to **create the conditions** for this mutual aid to flourish.

Role of the Worker

The worker in this model acts as a **mediator and enabler**. Schwartz described the worker's tasks as:

- **Searching for common ground** between members' needs and group goals
- **Detecting and challenging obstacles** that block communication and mutual aid
- **Contributing data and information** when needed

- **Lending vision** — helping members see possibilities they cannot yet see themselves

The worker is present and active but **never dominates** the group process.

Setting

This model is used in **community groups, school groups, hospital support groups, old age homes, groups for people facing common life situations** like illness, grief, migration, or disability.

Example

A social worker in an **old age home** forms a group of elderly residents who feel lonely, disconnected, and cut off from family and society. In the first session, many members feel hesitant to speak. The worker gently encourages sharing and helps members find common experiences — loneliness, feeling unheard, missing family. Gradually, members begin opening up to each other, sharing stories, giving advice, and offering emotional comfort. One member who has lived there for years begins mentoring newly arrived members. The worker facilitates but does not direct. The group becomes a **mutual aid system** where members restore their sense of belonging and dignity. This is the **Reciprocal Model**.

Comparison at a Glance

Point	Social Goals Model	Remedial Model	Reciprocal Model
Main Scholars	Grace Coyle, Clara Kaiser, Gisela Konopka	Robert Vinter, Paul Glasser	William Schwartz, Alex Gitterman
Main Focus	Society and citizenship	Individual treatment	Mutual relationship and aid
Role of Worker	Guide and Educator	Therapist and Expert	Mediator and Enabler
View of Member	Responsible citizen	Person with a problem	Capable individual with strengths
Goal	Social change and democracy	Cure and rehabilitation	Mutual aid and restored connection
Group is...	A tool for social action	A treatment setting	A mutual aid system
Setting	Community centres, youth clubs	Hospitals, jails, clinics	Support groups, old age homes

Conclusion

Each model of social group work has its own philosophy, purpose, and setting. The **Social Goals Model** developed by Grace Coyle focuses on building responsible citizens and bringing social change through the group. The **Remedial Model** developed by Robert Vinter uses the group as a clinical setting to treat and rehabilitate individuals with specific problems. The **Reciprocal Model** developed by William Schwartz sees the group as a mutual aid system and the worker as a mediator who restores the connection between individuals and society.

A skilled social worker understands all three models deeply and selects the most appropriate one — or combines elements of all three — based on the needs of the group, the setting, and the goals of intervention. Together, these models give social group work a strong theoretical and practical foundation.

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