

Group Assets



The Newsletter of the
Group Foundation
for Advancing Mental Health

Spring 2015

Hearing The New Voices in AGPA

Connie Concannon, LCSW, CGP, DFAGPA, Editor, *Group Assets*

The sun was shining in San Francisco for AGPA's 2015 Annual Meeting, reflecting the warmth, energy, and vibrancy that were alive in our Conference. We all know how important the sun is in cultivating new growth and keeping the earth fertile and enriched. It felt like spring had sprung for the AGPA community. There were so many new faces and new voices that were present at our Annual Meeting that were both inspiring and encouraging for the growth of the next generation of group therapists.

The 2015 Annual Meeting was one of our highest attended in recent history; more than 1,100 people attended. This was due to the beautiful setting of San Francisco, the rich and full program that was offered, and the record number of scholarships that we awarded this year thanks to the generosity of our donors. This year, the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health awarded 216 scholarships.

This impacted the Conference in many ways. There were a large number of new professionals and students attending the Institute. We added eight new Institutes in the time leading up to the Annual Meeting, adding up to a record 52 Institutes. This is particularly meaningful because we all know the power of the experiential process as an integrated learning environment in teaching group work, and it's great for new professionals and students to have this learning experience. The Annual Meeting theme—Promoting Secure Attachments through Group Therapy—was alive and evident in the Institutes and spilled over to the rest of the Conference.

Starting with the Special Institutes by Stephanie Covington, PhD, LCSW, *Why Gender Matters: Creating Trauma Services for Women and Men*, and David Wallin, PhD, *The Therapist as a New Attachment Figure: How Our History Affects Our Efforts to 'Raise' Secure Patients*, then leading to Elliot Zeisel, PhD, LCSW, CGP, DFAGPA's inspirational Opening Institute Plenary Address, 'Undaunted Courage' and the AGPA Institute, the attendees were well prepared for their Institute experience.

The rich layers of learning from the beginning to the end of the Conference are well expressed by one scholarship recipient, who reflected about her experience: "From the Opening Session to the life-changing Institute, to the wonderful workshops, I have become a believer in group therapy. In the short weeks following the Conference, I have found myself planning future groups and approaching my current groups with a keen eye directed at the process."

As a local Affiliate Society member, I was asked to lead one of the Institutes created specially for new professionals. It was my privilege to meet and work with this wonderful group of people. I was moved by their curiosity, their integrity, their courage, and their willingness to work to promote their personal and professional growth. What was even more

impressive and inspirational was having the experience of being in workshops and The Large Group with some of my Institute members. I heard their voices in the workshops and The Large Group. They were strong and clear, building during the course of the Conference. I had the experience of seeing them contribute to and build on the learning process, actively contributing to the work of the group, not just as students and new professionals but as strong and competent participants in the process.

I was profoundly moved by witnessing this and found that this was life-changing for me as well as it appeared for them. It renewed my commitment and belief in the work we do at AGPA and the Group Foundation, and the pride I feel in the generosity of our community who has it made possible to provide this experience for the next generation.

This sentiment was beautifully expressed by another scholarship recipient: "The only way that I have been able to afford staying involved with the Association during graduate school has been through the generosity of its members. While my interests have not waivered, I can only imagine that I would have had to take several years away from the Conference due to the financial exigencies of getting through school. Instead of drifting away, however, I feel confident that I have found a home. The scholarships not only speak to the value in this organization for continuing education, but it also reflects the strong sense of community and support."

This comment reflects one of the most challenging issues for this generation—the high cost of a graduate education. Because of these costs, it's difficult for many students to get the additional training they need outside of their traditional coursework so they can have the necessary tools for professional growth. Consequently, these needs often go unmet.

This was reflected in another recipient's comment: "I learned a plethora of new knowledge and life skills that will help me throughout my career. The experience that I got at the Conference was something that one could not just receive from school itself, and as an MSW student, I really appreciated this education."

It's important to note that as a tri-organization we are a group that is helping to meet this challenge for the new generation. We are a positive role model for the transformative ways that groups, large and small, influence our culture.

The impact of this experience is felt beyond the six days of the Annual Meeting. The seeds of learning about group are planted in the fertile ground of the Conference and nourished by the relationships that are created there. These seeds are taken back home and planted in the communities where these new voices live, and continue to grow to nourish their

Continued on back

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Group Foundation Honors Scholarship and Award Winners

During the American Group Psychotherapy Association's (AGPA) 72nd Annual Meeting in San Francisco, February 23-28, the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health, the philanthropic arm of the AGPA, sponsored a luncheon honoring scholarship and award winners, as well as the generous contributors who make the program possible. A myriad of tuition, travel, and monetary awards, supporting the training of group therapists and the use of group in communities to effect change, are distributed through the Foundation. Those recognized included:

- Gaea Logan, LPC-S, CGP who received the Social Responsibility Award for her sustained, decades-long

work in social activism, particularly for traumatized communities nationally and internationally.

- William Sharp, PsyD, LMHC, CGP who received the Alonso Award for Excellence in Psychodynamic Group Therapy for his article "Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, But What About Words?"
- The Living Arts Playback Theatre Ensemble of Emeryville, CA which received the Aaron Stein Memorial Award for their creative use of groups in non-therapeutic settings to benefit the community.

More than 200 individuals who received scholarships to attend the meeting were supported through endowed scholarship funds and private donations.

Two Research Grants Awarded

The Group Foundation awarded two research grants in 2015:

- *Effectiveness of a Resilience-Based Group Therapy Program in a School Setting*, Principal investigator Mary Alvord, PhD, Director of Alvord, Baker and Associates, and Co-investigator Brendan Rich, PhD;
- *Efficacy of a Therapeutic Group Parenting Model on*

Adopted Children's Behavior Problems, Stress in the Parent-Child Relationship, and Parents' Empathic/Attachment Behavior with Their Children, Principal investigator Sue Bratton, PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, Professor of Counseling and Director of the Center for Play Therapy at the University of North Texas.

New Voices *Continued from front*

personal and professional development. The gift of this experience is one that multiplies and positively impacts the lives of those who have received it and those they are helping in their work. Our AGPA garden is truly growing into a beautiful space with a lot of new blossoms that spread out into their communities.

In closing, I want to bring the voice of another new

member who reflected on his experience by saying: "I find it difficult to capture with words the profound impact this first AGPA Annual Meeting experience has had (and continues to have) on me. I left feeling emotionally and intellectually drained, the kind of fatigue that one feels after they have stretched their mind in a way that stimulates continued personal and professional growth long after the conclusion of such a powerful experience."

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