The Gift of a Scholarship to AGPA Connect

Karen Travis, LCSW, BCD, CGP, FAGPA

It is hard to believe AGPA Connect 2021 is over and the planning for 2022 has begun. On behalf of the Group Foundation, I want to thank the AGPA staff and all of the committees and volunteers who made this year’s virtual AGPA Connect possible. I would imagine there were some glitches or trying moments running our first virtual Conference, but from where I sat, things seemed to run seamlessly. Certainly, we missed being in person, and we eagerly look forward to reviewing and awarding scholarships for an in-person AGPA Connect 2022, to be held February 28 to March 5 in Denver, Colorado.

Donating to a cause that is believed in for its mission and impact on society is a very rewarding experience. I’ve had the privilege of reading the letters of appreciation sent by those who attended the meeting on scholarships that were made possible by donors to the Group Foundation, and I want to share some of the recipients’ words with you. I hope that hearing what scholarship recipients have to say of their experience will create good feelings about your contributions to the Foundation.

In the reading the anonymous letters of thanks, I noted themes, connections, differences, and often-used words. The 2021 scholarship awardees are a group—a group that did not have the chance to meet in person, making history as the first to attend a virtual AGPA Connect, perhaps ending up in Institutes and/or workshops together forming subgroups.

There were eight words/phrases that appeared throughout the letters: incredible; grateful; connected; thank you; feel more confident; appreciation; amazing opportunity; and exhausted.

Themes that emerged throughout the letters were: vulnerability; deepened sense of trust; empathy; the importance of being a participant in a group; sharing information with others; the value of experiential learning; and connection to peers. Doubtless, through these letters, group theory is present and available for us to see as clinicians. We truly know the power of the group, and these scholarship recipients say it decidedly. Following are some quotes to help seal the deal of the importance of giving to the Education and Scholarships Fund of the Foundation, their words say it the best.

“It was a corrective emotional experience I’ll never forget. When leading groups, I always wonder what people feel like it be in conflict with another member, what it feels like to be dropped by the group, and then what’s it’s like to be lifted up by the entire group.”

“In addition to this incredible experience, I also wanted to share my personal experience, as I have shared my professional experience. I would like to see more diversity (meaning more people of color not only presenting, but also in the group setting. Where I believe I am being improved). I was thrilled to see a POC speaking during the plenary and in one of my institutes. At times I felt like there was an elephant in the room, and the elephant was me. However, I did appreciate one of the presenters acknowledging it, in which I almost felt like people were able to breathe.”

“Probably my favorite part of AGPA Connect was the opportunity to connect with other clinicians from all over the world. I loved learning about the many similarities that we all share inside those Zoom rooms. I was inspired and motivated by so many of the people whose paths I crossed, even if it was just briefly. I also enjoyed seeing the differences as we all navigated such an intimate space. There is no perfect space, there is no perfect group. I would be lying if I said that there were no awkward times, negative interactions, or uncomfortable spaces. I would also be lying if I said that everything was perfect and there was no room for improvement or growth within this conference. I think there is always room for growth, and ways to make ourselves better as people, professionals, group therapists, and organizations. However, I do believe AGPA Connect is truly one of a kind opportunity to connect with other clinicians from all over the world.”

“Overall, I came away from the experience on fire about the power of group therapy and its potential for massive change in the lives of people.”

“The experience of 2021 Connect will allow me to better facilitate conversation/processes dealing with race in America.”

“Even though there will be times when I will feel triggered by claims as a therapist, I believe that by examining my own feelings and thoughts in the moment, I will be able to build a trusting and lasting connection with them both individually and as a group.”

“Every single session that I attended added to my growth as a clinician and a professional, and most sessions added to my growth as a human.”

“I also would like to mention how deeply I was moved by the emphasis on diversity.”

“When I came back to the home that I actually never left (both literally and metaphorically), it was not the same home and it was not the same person who was sitting on that same chair in front of the computer. It was much more of the same person who was sitting there all along.”

“Our message to our 2021 Scholarship Recipients: Thank you for letting us know the impact the AGPA has had on you as a group therapist. We look forward to seeing you in Denver!”

“We will be sharing more of the letters on the Group Foundation website and through our communications, so keep an eye out. In the meantime, please know a gift you have given to someone in helping them attend.”

EDITOR’S NOTE

Karen Travis, LCSW, BCD, CGP, FAGPA

The Group Foundation is always elated to support scholarships to attend AGPA Connect. Receiving a scholarship is an honor, whether it be an endowed or tuition scholarship. In this issue of Group Assets, you will read what scholarship recipients have to say about their experience attending the AGPA Connect 2021. Also, in our faces of the Foundation column, you will hear from a donor who is not an AGPA member, nor in the field of mental health. We celebrate Bill Hayden and thank him for his generosity to the Foundation.

I’m always interested in hearing from our donors and AGPA members, so please reach out to me at karentraviskspro@prodigy.net on any issues relating to the Foundation and Group Assets.

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TRIBUTE GIFTS: The following individuals were honored by the contributors listed with a program in their name at AGPA Connect 2021 (donors are listed in italics)

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Janice Morris
Aaron Black
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Leonard Walter
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The Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health, the philanthropic arm of the AGPA, celebrates its 2021 scholarship and award winners. A myriad of tuition 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:

JONATHAN RYAN, CEO and President, Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), received the Humanitarian Award for his dedication to the inalienable right of all people to migrate in order to better their way of life and the visionary leadership he has provided at RAICES to carry out its mission to defend the rights of immigrants and refugees, empower individuals, families and communities and to advocate for liberty and justice.

CRAIG HAN
SUZANNE PHILLIPS
LEONARDO LEIDERMAN
The DANA TAI SOON BURGESS DANCE CO.

LEONARDO LEIDERMAN, PsyD, ABPP CGER
FAGPA, received the Aaron Award for Excellence in Psychodynamic Group Theory for his work on the Psychodynamic Group Therapy with Hispanic Migrants: Intercultural, Relational Constructs in Treating Complex Trauma, Dissociation, and Traumatic Events article.

The following individuals received scholarships to attend AGPA Connect 2021, supported through endowed scholarship funds and private donations.

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