

# groupassets



## EDITOR'S NOTE



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

It was wonderful seeing all of you in Los Angeles at AGPA Connect 2019 and sharing all the excitement and connection that comes with our time together. In this edition, Simon Bresler, LMSW, and Maddie Freeman, MSW, LCSW, share their experiences as scholarship recipients and the impact that it has had on their group therapy work and their lives. These are just two of the great stories that we hear from the young professionals who are able to attend AGPA Connect because of our donors' support of the Group Foundation's robust Scholarship Program.

This year the Foundation supported 160 students, new professionals, people working in the military, and people working in local agency settings. The training they received by attending AGPA Connect helps them improve the quality of the group services they provide in their communities. They also have the opportunity to make connections for continued networking and learning throughout the year. In addition to these two recipients, you can also view video thanks from a number of others at <https://youtu.be/cOtnqeDSxk4>.

The Foundation, through a generous endowment, also sponsors the Harold S. Bernard Group Psychotherapy Training Award that is given every year by the International Board for Certification of Group Psychotherapists (IBCGP). This year's recipient Judith Coché, PhD, ABPP, CGP, LFAGPA, was recognized for her significant contribution to the training and supervision of group psychotherapists throughout her career, often on a pro bono basis. An interview that Tony Sheppard, PsyD, CGP, FAGPA, IBCGP Chair, conducted with her can be read in the accompanying spring issue of the Group Circle.

The Faces of Our Foundation column features Lorraine Wodiska, PhD, ABPP, CGP, FAGPA, who discusses how support from the Foundation after Hurricane Katrina was one impetus for her making a legacy contribution.

I hope you enjoy reading about the fruits of your support of the Group Foundation.

## Scholarship Recipients Express Thanks



**Simon Bresler, LMSW**

I was finishing up graduate school and looking for a modality that I could sink my synapses into, when I found AGPA. I was in need of something inspiring and realized that the most powerful therapeutic experiences I had been a part of took place in a group, several of which I led the previous year in an East Harlem, New York,

addiction clinic, and the others, while volunteering on a psychiatric unit. Except for a few months where I tried out a languishing young adult group, I had not given myself the opportunity to be a real patient. So, I googled "group therapy" and discovered the annual conference in New York. "An Institute? What's that? I've read enough Yalom; I'm in!"

Ooph, that first one was a doozy. I came face to face with some distasteful parts of myself. Fiercely competitive, seeking validation, and not knowing the contours of vulnerability, I wasn't yet able to just be me. I stumbled, fell, stood up, stumbled some more, and fell again. Ooph. If it weren't for Robin Good's, PhD, CGP, FAGPA, leadership, I probably would've sat in my own puddle. But this experience was different; it was discomfort in the service of growth, and I was being held and helped along the way. Writing these words now, it's obvious that this group was a developmental milestone in my life: It was the first time I saw myself clearly in a social context and met the unconscious winds filling my sail.

As a Group Foundation scholarship recipient and community mental health psychotherapist who runs two weekly groups, I recently attended my third AGPA Connect. It seems that groups don't get easier; they just show us new learning opportunities if we're feeling brave. This year's conference in Los Angeles was no exception.

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**Maddie Freeman, MSW, LCSW**

AGPA Connect in Los Angeles was my third AGPA conference, and I have a feeling it is only the beginning. I recently learned the term "Home Conference," and it resonates with my connection to AGPA Connect. I learned about AGPA as a first-year social work student in 2016. Kurt White, LICSW, LADC, CGP, FAGPA, was my professor, and it was my first class of my graduate school experience. Irvin Yalom's *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* served as the foundation for the course. Kurt had such passion for the power of groups, and he sprinkled in moments and theories from past AGPA conferences. Lectures would end with quotes from Yvonne Agazarian, EdD, DLFAGPA, Susan Gantt, PhD, ABPP, CGP, DFAGPA, and other legends. I was hooked.

This course helped me to recognize that groups had actually been in my life for a long time, and I have my parents to thank for where they raised me. I grew up in an intentional community called New View Co-housing. Twenty-four households face in towards each other on a hill in the suburbs outside of Boston. The members of this community share a love of consensus-based decision-making, environmental and social justice, and connection. By the age of eight or nine, I was already gathering with other neighborhood kids, making up dances, creating odd outdoor games, and planning a camp for the younger kids—imitating the adults' meetings and collaboration styles. These early experiences solidified some of my core beliefs: It is okay to ask for help; community is crucial for well-being; and group dynamics are fascinating.

Towards the end of my first summer of social work school, when Kurt suggested I apply for a scholarship for AGPA Connect 2017, I did not think twice. His inspiring and accessible group therapy course and his offer to write a scholarship recommendation grounded me and supported

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## THE FACES OF OUR FOUNDATION

### Why Am I Giving to AGPA?

Lorraine Wodiska, PhD, ABPP, CGP, FAGPA

It started with a question over a family dinner from my brother-in-law. In your will, are you leaving everything to your children (Of course!), or are you going to do something more meaningful with a part of your wealth? What about funding a scholarship? Or leaving a legacy? Would your children miss that money?



Not being wealthy, this struck me as a question with possibilities I had not imagined. And so, I considered if or where I wanted to contribute to my community. I felt empowered to make a small difference. I thought about my values. Maybe the Group Foundation?

Why the Group Foundation? I believe Marsha Block, CAE, CFRE, CEO, knows the answer to this question. It starts in August 2005. When I volunteered with the Red Cross for the very first time, it was to be a front-line mental health worker in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. The conditions were reported as dire; New Orleans was essentially closed down (except for the National Guard and some access with Red Cross and FEMA), and there would be no services—no water, no electricity, no beds, no goods and services, extreme heat, and still-standing flood waters. Truth be told, I was scared; I had not volunteered with the Red Cross before now; I did not know what to expect; the news was frightening, and my family thought I should not go. I wavered. Out of nowhere, Marsha called me and said she knew I would be going to assist and assured me that AGPA would have my back. How did she know me? How did she know I was going to Louisiana? What could she do? Marsha promised I could choose anyone in AGPA to be on call for me as a consultant 24/7. At that time, I chose Trish Cleary, MS, LCPC, MFT, ADC, CGP, and was in touch with her when needed—any time and every time. Trish always answered the phone. She always spent time with me. What more is there to say? What other organization does this? (By the way, I continue to assist the Red Cross annually offering Disaster Mental Health Services. Bonnie Buchele, PhD, CGP, DLFAGPA, is my current 24/7 consultant, and I owe her my enduring gratitude as well.)

The next time I saw Marsha, I expressed my deepest appreciation for what she had set up for me. As a result, I asked about leaving money to the Group Foundation in my will and the possibility of setting up a Legacy Foundation. I checked with my attorney, and at the next AGPA Connect, we met with AGPA's attorney Bruce Hopkins to start that process. Ever since, AGPA is my top priority in terms of giving. I know where the money goes. I know what the money does. I know who the people are. I know I want to be of assistance.

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We appreciate the provisions these planned gift donors have made for the Group Foundation.

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During one powerful workshop, I found myself in the heart of racial and gender tension. Like a firecracker, the group exploded into a palette of skin color, gender, and emotion. While I could not speak for all white males, nor hold the entire burden of this oppressive history, I was being asked to do just that. With the reduction of my identity to just a few descriptive words, I collapsed under this weight. How does one connect across continents of intergenerational trauma? It felt impossible and arctic. Here we were, a group of therapists skilled in the art of communication and unable to move in stride. The situation only began to thaw when the words of Marshall Rosenberg (Psychologist and Founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication) sailed in on a different wind: It's about letting go of content and focusing on the feelings and needs of others to find our common humanity. From this space, I could find my own reflection in the other, making the first healing steps possible.

Tell me, where else in the world is there a container like this? As I sail for Ithaca with winds I do not completely understand, it's group that has become my compass cutting through the fog. And with each journey out to sea, I am more equipped to help the communities with which I work. Thank you AGPA and WGPS for making this all possible.

With connection and with profound gratitude,  
Simon Bresler, LMSW

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me in jumping in. For the past three years, I have attended AGPA Connect with a scholarship, and in 2018 I was awarded the Barbara and Albert Dazzo Endowed Scholarship. Had it not been for these scholarship opportunities, I would not be re-visiting this Home Conference every year. Now that I am in my first job as a clinical social worker in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and am a salaried employee rather than an unpaid intern, I look forward to giving back to AGPA. I hope inspired, energetic students and young professionals can have the scholarship funds and opportunities that I have had for the past three years. "Thank you" is not strong enough for the generous donations that have allowed me to attend thus far.

This past AGPA Connect conference in Los Angeles sent me home more energized and curious. I work at Cambridge Health Alliance's Elder Service Plan, an all-inclusive medical care program for older adults who have medical complexities, mental health struggles, and are in need of extra support. Although I have not yet started facilitating a group, many themes from the conference were pertinent to my work. For example, in Dr. Gantt's Plenary Address that opened the conference, she allowed the audience to find their subgroups in terms of how anxious we were feeling. I was one of the members who raised my hand to say, "I am anxious," and my anxiety, indeed, lowered when I saw that I was joined by hundreds of others. She remarked, "When we see that we have a subgroup, our neurobiology changes."

I just finished writing a blog for the Cambridge Health Alliance website entitled, "Let's spend time together," emphasizing the importance and health benefits of socialization in older adulthood. My hope is that this blog might inspire someone to join a walking group or Zumba class and find subgroups of their own. When I begin to run groups at work, I look forward to incorporating Dr. Gantt's words and attempt to facilitate honest communication, emotional vulnerability, and thus therapeutic discoveries of subgroups.

I am grateful to my childhood co-housing community for laying a foundation for my love of groups, my former professor Kurt White for the warm welcome into AGPA, and the generous donors who make conference scholarships possible.

Maddie Freeman, MSW, LCSW  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

## Group Foundation Honors Scholarship and Award Winners

During AGPA Connect 2019 in Los Angeles, 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, were distributed through the Foundation. Those recognized included:

1. Richard Beck, LCSW, BCD, CGP, FAGPA, received the Social Responsibility Award for his sustained work nationally and internationally in responding to trauma and providing pro-bono group therapy training (learn more about Richard's work in this interview of him by Foundation Chair Karen Travis, LCSW, BCD, CGP, FAGPA, <https://youtu.be/7U-kdoQ58XM>);
2. The Alonso Award for Excellence in Psychodynamic Group Therapy, given to Bonnie Buchele, PhD, ABPP, CGP, DLFAGPA, for editing Today's Bridge Between Psychoanalysis and the Group World, a special issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*;
3. Teen Line of Los Angeles, received the Aaron Stein Memorial Award for its creative use of groups in non-therapeutic settings to benefit the community; and
4. 160 individuals received scholarships to attend the meeting, supported through endowed scholarship funds and private donations.



## groupassets

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