

## LETTERS OF APPRECIATION RECEIVED FROM RECIPIENTS OF SCHOLARSHIPS TO ATTEND AGPA CONNECT 2023

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My experience at AGPA Connect 2023 was truly incredible. Thank you so much to the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health's Barry Bukatman Memorial Scholarship for making my attendance possible! As a doctorate student in a Psy.D. program, my exposure to group therapy is very limited. The four days at AGPA Connect 2023 not only offered informative content and experiential learning, but also provided a great opportunity for me to connect with group leaders from various backgrounds and with different styles. Now I feel a lot more confident to lead my own groups at our program clinic and my externship next academic year.

The special institute presentation on the first day, titled "Emotional Availability in Group: Expanding the Capacity for Intimacy in Group Members and Leaders" by Jeffrey Hudson was one of my favorites. I appreciated the educational components, which offered a wealth of knowledge and techniques applicable to both group therapy and individual therapy. The small group discussion and the fish ball demonstration were also fantastic. I really love the presenter, Jeffrey Hudson's authenticity and his warm and supportive presence. I anticipate return to the notes from that presentation frequently in the future.

The two-day institute left me with complicated feelings. Yet, it was unquestionably a worthwhile experience for me and stimulated my thoughts and reflections on both how to facilitate groups and my own personal growth. The thing I appreciated the most is the power of the group. It was a great demonstration of the resourcefulness of the group and how groups function on their own. I felt so grateful for the presence of each group member and learned so much from them.

On the last day, I attended 1a-Longing to Belong: Exploring Barriers to Connection and Closeness led by Allan and Joan-Dianne. I was most amazed by the reflection and discussion-based exercises. By exploring and sharing our unconscious assumptions and projections in small groups, I saw so many similarities among the group members, which help to break down the barriers between us and make us feel more connected. I was also impressed by Allan and Joan-Dianne's styles. They were so caring, empathetic, and composed. They are great models for me as a group leader.

Once again, I want to express my gratitude to the kind donors who provided the opportunity for me to attend AGPA Connect 2023. I am truly overjoyed and grateful to have been a part of AGPA Connect 2023. I look forward to future AGPA events!

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I am writing this letter to express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to attend APGA connect 2023! It was truly one of my life's most profound and transformative experiences, and I owe it all to you.

Before attending the conference, I was curious to learn more about group work as I am still in school and loved my group class, but I got so much more than I ever could have imagined. On the first day of the institute, I walked out with a real experience of how deep group work can get, which got me so excited to be part of this

community. The senior members of the AGPA welcomed me so warmly that I felt like I was part of a family that I wanted to be a part of.

I confidently told people after I finished the conference that this was a conference of some of the best people in the world! The next two days, I was in the institute with Dr. Steve Van Wagoner, and I am so happy I was there. He was a phenomenal facilitator and led the group through some real topics exploring race and diversity, which sat at the forefront of the group from the start. It was a phenomenal experience for me and one that I will never forget.

The next day, I met Greg Crosby, participated in his CBT group therapy training, and learned so much about integration in our work. Best of all, I got to meet Greg - a legend of a man. Finally, I attended the group about entering private practice on Friday - I am so young in the field, but I wanted help creating my career vision for the future, and it turned out to be a wonderful and fun day.

After completing the training, my main goal was to start a group by a specific date. As soon as I returned to my workplace at the agency, I immediately began working towards this goal. I met with the clinical director to discuss starting a process group at our clinic. Although she didn't allow me to lead the group as a student, I was able to introduce the idea to her.

I don't intend to stop; this conference gave me much power to succeed in my group work. I am confident that so many people I met there are with me in spirit as I go on my journey of becoming a certified group psychotherapist. This letter does not fully encapsulate my true feelings, but I hope it gives you an idea of how much I gained thanks to you.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and I hope to be back next year!

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I want to thank you for opportunity to be this year on AGPA conference and for stipend - it is heartwarming support for me as a person and as a professional♥

During this week, many processes have happened in me - thanks to this opportunity. Every workshop and every meeting at this conference was important and influenced as a professional and as a person. And it is difficult for me to underestimate your contribution to this.

Thank you for your work and understanding on my way on conference.

It was not easy for me because of my experience now - so I understand that it could be not easy for you too because of my state of mind and letters.

Thank you for this huge opportunity to be on AGPA conference and to face outstanding information, workshops and colleagues. I hope to next year we will meet each other with good situation behind our backs and in our life.

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Thank you so much for providing the Anne Alonso scholarship which allowed me to attend AGPA Connect 2023 as a psychiatry resident with an interest in group therapy. Having attended a psychiatry education conference immediately prior, I found the experiential nature of AGPA Connect very effective for learning and personal growth. Even from the more didactically oriented special institute led by Jeff Hudson, I could tell that this would be a conference unlike most others. I have rarely attended a large group event with such thought-provoking and personal small group discussions. The demonstration groups were also skillfully led and served as a

great model of group therapy for a relatively new group leader like me. The two-day institute was the highlight of the conference. By experiencing the “client” role in group therapy for the first time, I expected to learn techniques to be a better group therapist. However, I did not anticipate the depth of sharing, connection, and personal growth that would occur. These experiential sessions not only taught me about leading group, but also about my own patterns of emotional availability in settings in and outside of group therapy. Finally, the three-day conference featured excellent and engaging workshops which exposed me to new disciplines that I hope to incorporate into my own practice. Most impactful were the psychodrama workshops, one of which was particularly encouraging in that it was led by a psychiatrist. Observing and participating in psychodrama sessions where participants shared deeply and stirred strong emotional reactions left a lasting impact – I took copious notes and couldn’t help but imagine bringing elements of psychodrama into my own group and individual therapy. Finally, connecting with like-minded individuals has already benefited my future career. As someone who aspires to facilitate group therapy in an inpatient psychiatric setting, it was very encouraging to meet people like Gary Burlingame, who kindly offered to share his expertise in evidence-based group interventions in state hospital settings.

As I return to my daily residency routine, I’ve already noticed the impact of AGPA Connect on myself and my group members. Having seen and experienced for the first time what a model therapy group looks and feels like, my co-therapist and I have been more able to intervene to direct our group members to discuss emotions and experiences in the here-and-now. Yet we are also more empathetic when our clients have difficulty sharing, as we have now been in their shoes. I look forward to increasingly incorporating practices I’ve gleaned from the two-day institute and three-day conference workshops to facilitate connection and healing for my group members. This conference has shown me experientially that group therapy is a powerful tool for change which is compatible with the practice of psychiatrists in various settings. I greatly appreciate the opportunity afforded to me to have attended AGPA Connect 2023, and I look forward to reconnecting at future AGPA conferences!

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I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to take a moment to thank you for putting on such a wonderful conference. Your efforts did not go unnoticed, and my wife and I had an amazing time. It was a truly memorable experience that we will always cherish. Meeting friends from my EGPS training group and meeting new folks was great.

Your dedication and hard work to facilitate the connections between attendees were impressive. We appreciated your thoughtful approach and the extra touches that made the conference even more special. Your attention to detail did not go unnoticed, and we felt welcomed and appreciated every step of the way.

Thank you for creating such an incredible opportunity to learn, grow and connect with like-minded individuals. It was a pleasure to meet you and everyone else involved in making the conference a success.

I look forward to staying in touch and hopefully seeing you again at the conference next year. Once again, thank you for everything you did to make this event a remarkable experience.

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I am a member of the Georgian Group Psychotherapy Association. International organizations actively support my professional development, namely, the American Group Psychotherapy Association. For this reason, I consider myself very lucky to have the opportunity to develop my professional skills at significantly favorable prices and conditions.

I appreciate the value of such international organizations; I think it is a manifestation of great kindness on their part to support us and share their achievements in professional growth and development. I mainly work with wounded soldiers using both individual and group psychotherapy. This service operates on the basis of the Ministry of Defense. As it is still young, operating since 2014, the processes of improving and refining are still ongoing. Therefore, in order to function properly, a lot of knowledge and experience is still needed to reach international standards.

By participating in the group processes of the 2023 AGPA Connect, I realized and became aware of many things about myself; as a result, I had insights concerning the events that were taking place in my country. It was brought to my consciousness that the same mechanisms apply to both the inner individual psyche and the society, namely, in case of lack of dialog psyche and as well as society splits into several parts. Inspired by ideas and purpose, I returned to the challenges and turbulence of my society, where I consider group psychotherapy to be one of the most important solutions to conflicts and chaos, for society to grow more, become mature, and take responsibility for the well-being of its own country.

Also, the need and demand for group psychotherapy have increased dramatically among wounded servicemen. This is confirmed by their desire and the lack of therapeutic groups. However, as a group therapist working with wounded warriors, I still feel that therapeutic meetings and processes, in general, are less structured and the goal is a bit vague due to the lack of systematicity and regulations of the meetings, and therefore, the results are not determined either.

One of my favorite AGPA members, Dr. Anne McEaney helped me a lot to grow and develop professionally, whose priceless supervision not only strengthened my sense of professionalism but also developed the ability to see and feel the current dynamics of the group processes. So, I value these supervisions very deeply.

I would also like to express my greatest gratitude and respect to the AGPA Scholarship Fund and its representatives, with the help of which I was able to attend the AGPA Connect 2023 annual meeting in New York at a significantly discounted rate. Active participation in different groups helped me to see group processes in different ways. Especially, the psychodrama group, where the traumatic experience of one person played out very vividly. The trauma resonated not only with me but with the most of the group. I'd like to praise the techniques used and the leader's skills that made the processes amazingly dynamic and alive for the participants as well. People from my community, especially the wounded military, who participated in war quite some time ago, still have resistance to integrating traumatic memories, so I think they would benefit from these psychodrama techniques. Therefore, as a group leader, I would like to know more and improve my practical skills in psychodrama.

Once again, thanks to the representatives of the Red Well Theater Foundation for their support and for giving me so many precious opportunities. As a result, I not only gained experience but also met global colleagues and had the chance to interact with them.

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Thank you so much for the generous scholarship that allowed me to attend AGPA Connect 2023. I want to first mention the SIGs that I attended because they reflect the personal as well as professional opportunities at AGPA Connect. Firstly, I attended the Women's SIG luncheon. This time I came as a (future) chair, along with Carmen Burlingame and Rachelle Rene. It was a pleasure to meet other women clinicians once again. I look forward to participating in the administrative aspects of the Women's SIG. Additionally, I attended the Private Practice SIG, as I am newly licensed and just opened my own practice. What a great group! It amazes me that we are all so busy and yet people continue to dedicate their time to helping us grow in the areas we need.

This year I attended the Early Career Process Group Experience with Dr. Kaye and Dr. Logan. CGP. Drs. Kaye and Logan did a stellar job as facilitators. I was so surprised to see how our group created cohesion over the two days. We all continue to text each other occasionally! The didactic portion of the institute clarified the group process in a very helpful manner. I am so glad I attended their institute. Likewise, the full-day Mentalization Training group was also helpful. I have been studying Mentalization for a few years now, but the experiential exercises helped me with personal insight. It also gave me very creative ideas with how to support my clients to mentalize. Again, I find the personal and the professional growth a consistent experience at AGPA Connect.

I am deeply grateful for the generous scholarship. Without it I would not be able to afford to attend the conference. Thank you for all the work that not only goes into the logistics for holding this conference, but for actively supporting human dignity and rights. The opportunity to learn from dedicated leaders in the field of group therapy has been a major contributing factor to my growth as a clinician. I still feel the same energy and warmth from fellow members and look forward to continuing to grow as a group therapist.

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I would like to express my gratitude for the scholarship granted to me for attending the 2023 AGPA Connect. I was greatly looking forward to attending, and I could not have afforded it without your support. My experiences at AGPA Connect have been immensely impactful for me personally and professionally. My drive to lead groups has only magnified since the conference.

My experiences at AGPA Connect left me with three distinct takeaways. 1.) Encouraging emotional intimacy in groups is one of the most important offerings we can provide to the group and its members. Witnessing and then experiencing this has radically changed my view of self and inspired me to explore new ways of relating to others personally and professionally. 2.) Addressing disparities in group members' experience across different aspects of identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) is crucial to establishing intimacy and building trust in an equitable way; to avoid these topics (or handle them poorly) results in othering, pain, and the extension of oppression into group. I believe that I still have a lot to learn in this area, and I aspire to fully embrace the challenges of doing so as I grow more confident in my contributions to groups as a member and as a leader. 3.) As much as I care about my work at the community health center where I am currently employed, I have come to an understanding that I will need more control and agency over my career. I know that I can offer high quality therapy (especially groups) to people in my community, and I want to be able to sustain myself and my family.

At AGPA Connect, I gained incredible guidance and access to valuable resources which have enabled me to begin planning for my future. For me, AGPA Connect was a renaissance. I am only beginning to incorporate the many insights gained there. I am left with questions about how a community such as AGPA can face and hold some of the larger societal issues that showed up at the conference. I am afraid that some difficult and painful interactions that I witnessed at AGPA Connect could have harmed people. Though, I also believe that the difficulties that I saw represented an actual path forward for us as a society; we can face the pain and suffering together, asserting ourselves with care and respect for each other. I am excited for the future, and I hope that I can help expand access to quality psychotherapy groups in my community. I would very much like to come back to AGPA Connect in 2024.

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Thank you for selecting me as a full-tuition scholarship recipient for AGPA Connect 2023. I was ecstatic to receive the news that I would be able to attend my first-ever AGPA conference in New York City! I am a new professional employed as a mental health therapist at a dual-diagnosis addiction wellness center in Baton Rouge,

Louisiana, and recently credentialed as a provisionally licensed professional counselor and a nationally certified counselor. Group therapy has always been my favorite modality and where I feel the most fulfillment in my career. It was not until discovering AGPA, with the endorsement of Karen S. Travis, that I learned I could join a professional family who shares this same adoration.

Before travelling solo to New York, I was both anxious and excited as I tried to conceptualize what the experience would be like. I was told numerous times that I would be met by cheerful faces with a great eagerness to welcome me into the space. Once arrived, plenty of members shared that they have been coming to the Connect conference for many years and always look forward to interacting with long-standing peers. I was fortunate to make many new friends from a variety of professions, several of whom I have personally stayed connected with almost a month later. I was also fortunate enough to have been selected for a reduced-rated stay at the Sheraton hotel, where I met my wonderful roommate and now dear friend, Laura. We will certainly be lifelong friends, and I have AGPA's Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health to thank for that.

Thank you for your generosity in choosing me for the scholarship. Attending the full conference afforded me the opportunity to learn from a great deal of experts in the special institute, experiential group, plenaries, and workshops. I now understand exactly why the majority of attendees return each year, and I have already marked my calendar for Connect 2024 and started a countdown until I get to reunite with my colleagues and learn more invaluable information about the group process next year. I look forward to also staying connected with our Louisiana affiliate, the Louisiana Group Psychotherapy Society, until it's time for us to join together again. I am forever grateful.

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I wanted to thank you very much for all your support in my getting to the AGPA Connect this year. It was a fantastic opportunity and one that I am extremely grateful to have been able to attend. Would you please pass on my heartfelt thanks to those responsible for granting me a scholarship, I would not have been able to travel so far without AGPA's support

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I am very grateful for receiving a Group Foundation scholarship, which enabled me to attend the AGPA Connect 2023 Two-Day Institute. Going into AGPA Connect, I was quite new to process groups. My first exposure to didactic and experiential learning about process groups was in an interpersonal group psychotherapy class last semester (Fall 2022). In that class I experienced firsthand both the evocative power of group—I found myself thrown into intense, deep-seated emotions and dynamics with fellow group members—and the healing potential of group—I was able to understand and approach those archaic patterns in new, healthier ways. These experiences sparked an interest in group therapy, and my professor directed me to AGPA Connect to learn more! The Group Foundation scholarship lowered the financial barrier to me attending the Two-Day Institute, and I was able to sign on for an Institute group and head to the conference.

My group—which focused on enhancing vitality through enactments—augmented my previous group learning in several ways. First, I got to experience leaders with a different style, to see the choices they made and the impacts of those choices on our group. This opened my eyes to some of the questions I will face as a group leader, such as: How much do I want to intervene early in the group and establish myself as an active presence, versus allowing the group to define their own early identity? Second, through interacting with others in the group, many of whom had attended 10 or more Connect conferences, I learned more about how group members can support themselves and each other when difficult emotions come up. And third, by observing my own

experiences, I became more aware of challenges I am likely to face in future group therapy settings, such as automatically taking in unexpressed feelings of other group members.

I am not currently leading a process group, but I will begin leading a group through my graduate program's clinic this summer. The things I learned at AGPA Connect 2023 will help me to see more possibilities for myself as a leader, better understand how group members can support each other, and maintain awareness of my own valances as a participant in a group. I plan to attend again next year and to stay connected with the welcoming community I found in the AGPA.

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I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to attend AGPA 2023 conference in NYC this past March. Both the Special Institute and workshops provided me with insights and ideas, that I am able to incorporate in my work as a group psychotherapist.

The Special Institute allowed me to practice connecting with others in group setting, examine my own barriers to relate to others in a mindful, empathetic, and open way, as well as learn how to deepen my inner development as a person and a therapist. The facilitator was very skillful in allowing our group to process our experience, but also to provide some guidance how to handle group interactions. Some of the interventions I learnt (or knew about, but observed and got a chance to rehearse) and have been successfully utilizing in my practice include:

1. When group members interact between each other, It is best when they do not ask each other lots of questions, but rather provide deepening comments, relating to each other and staying with each other experience.
2. Encouraging group members to reflect how a group member's reaction affected them emotionally
3. Ability to endure/process group member's expressions of hostility towards leader, rather than internalizing it.
4. As a group leader, navigating silence, feedback and appropriate self-disclosure.

I chose to attend psychodrama related workshops on Thursday and Friday. I deepened my psychodrama knowledge and experience, and became more confident in utilizing psychodramatic experiences in my practice. It was very helpful to observe various directing styles and also to see how to combine psychodramatic interventions with other modalities, such as CBT.

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Thanks so much for your email and to the AGPA group foundation for granting me a scholarship. As I am not located in the US and have minimal institutional support, the scholarship allowed me to attend and present at the conference. During the conference I was able to attend the institute portion of the conference where I was able to experientially learn with, and from, a seasoned group leader about leading groups, navigating impasses and cultivating a safe group atmosphere while also challenging group members to bring their genuine-selves. This experience was both personally and professionally meaningful and no doubt will enrich my own work with groups in the future.

The highlight of the conference for me was presenting on a panel about group work with trans and gender diverse group members. We received feedback from attendees about how much they felt offerings like this were imperative to the DEI mission of AGPA. The panel was an opportunity for me to engage in deep conversation and ongoing work with multiple colleagues located around the US who are doing this work.

Coming back to NYC after the pandemic and being in-person with AGPA colleagues I had been in touch with primarily online was moving and meaningful ~ thank you for a fantastic conference!

I am so grateful to the AGPA Connect Scholarship Fund for providing me with a full tuition scholarship to have a 6-day experience at AGPA. This was my 6th time attending AGPA Connect, and probably will be my last time eligible for a scholarship. I find myself quoting workshop leaders to my individual clients and my groups. It felt so good to be back together in person, and I cannot wait for next year in DC!

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This was my second AGPA, but first in person. It was a really incredible experience. It was great to have the process group in person. From the 2 day process group I was able to more fully identify, experience, and practice stepping outside of a largely unconscious family interpersonal dynamic. What was unreal was to see how strongly my righting reflex underpinned even my most classically psychoanalytical/exploratory group interventions that at surface examination would appear to have very minimal “advice giving” nature. I better appreciate the how, when and why of my interventions. I’m still exploring what’s left in the wake of that realization in my own group therapy, but I can already see greater flexibility, resilience, and effective process in the two groups I colead. Crucially, with naming this I find that I am far more comfortable centering the group members in the process of healing and intervening more judiciously/intentionally.

Another surprise was in modeling an emotional identification and release pattern I learned in a workshop on ISTDP. I was initially very skeptical, and really concerned that it would further center me in the group, as well as risk undermining autonomy. I experimented anyhow, and it allowed the member to healthily cathect anger in a way previously not seen in two years in group therapy. While the pattern initially did center me, the post process and consequent here and now activation of the group has enlivened the group to do it’s work together. My worries did not come true.

Large group was a really valuable experience, albeit how scary it can be as a new member to said large group. I now consider myself large group curious.

Outside of those breakthroughs, it was really great to make new friendships with others passionate about group therapy. I hope I can continue to build on this over many years to come and I am excited for Connect 24. Thank you donors for help making all of this possible.

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I write to thank you for the scholarship to attend AGPA Connect 2023. The Institute I attended, for 0-4 years of experience, helped me realize and understand how I share common experiences and perceptions with the other new therapists, residents and interns and how my experiences are unique and reveal my self to me. I deeply appreciate the modeling of effective group leadership the experienced leader offered. The Conference provided numerous networking opportunities that will benefit my Affiliate Society, of which I am an officer, as we tap the experience and expertise of these other Affiliates. The workshops expanded my understanding of the breadth of group psychotherapy approaches. And the efforts of AGPA in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion inform my own and my Affiliate Society. Seeing the wider world of Group Psychotherapy world that AGPA Connect reveals has energized my growth and understanding. Thank you again!

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I feel so fortunate to have been awarded a donated Early Career Professional scholarship to attend this year's AGPA Connect. Visiting New York was a delight, and making new connections with other queer and trans group therapists was a real gift. My two-day institute was a powerful training and healing experience, and overall the conference has confirmed my wish to be a group therapist, train other group therapists, and expand my group work with the LGBTQIA2+ community. I was also delighted to see a diversity of theoretical orientations represented, including group approaches that mesh well with social justice perspectives. Fortunately, I felt the majority of the people I interacted with were very welcoming and inclusive of me as a non-binary and visibly transfeminine person. I am glad that the scholarship committee has remained committed to bringing folks in from the margins, and I celebrate the progress AGPA is making towards becoming a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. I look forward to contributing to this movement and allying with members of other historically marginalized groups to make AGPA a professional organization and community where we can all belong.

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I cannot recommend the AGPA Connect Conference in New York enough and am deeply grateful for the opportunity to attend thanks to my scholarship. As someone new to private practice, the conference helped me conceptualize how to incorporate group work in this setting and to update my existing knowledge and practices. The breadth of workshops and presentations available was so impressive, and I was disappointed I could not attend more of them!

The training I received at the conference has already been instrumental in my current group work. Serendipitously, I attended a session on running shame resilience groups when I myself would begin facilitating such a group the following week after the conference. Though I already had an existing curriculum, I have been able to supplement it with concepts and exercises presented at the workshop, and my clients have responded very positively.

My two biggest takeaways from the conference are the practical techniques and concepts that I've already been applying to my group work and a re-energizing take on anti-racist work that I can apply both on a clinical and personal level. My most impactful experience at the conference was hearing Dr. Ronald Hopson's opening plenary address on America's racial divide and how to "embrace the other" with passion, empathy, and courage.

Finally, I am grateful for the opportunity of connecting with other group therapists and sharing our ideas and experiences. Solo private practice has been isolating, and being at a conference like this really lit me up and filled that need for professional connection and enthusiasm around group work. Overall, the AGPA Connect conference was an invaluable experience and one that I would highly recommend to anyone running therapy groups.

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I wish to thank you for providing me with a tuition scholarship to attend AGPA Connect 2023. As a resident in psychiatry, I have found that group therapy has not been emphasized in my training program, and I have struggled to find opportunities to develop skills and experience in this area. The scholarship you provided to me has been of enormous benefit in this regard, allowing me to connect with like-minded therapists and experts in the field in order to benefit from leading experiential and didactic learning in an intensive environment. As a senior resident, I am now leading three long-term therapy groups, and following my participation in AGPA Connect 2023 it was obvious to me that I had gained insights and technical knowledge that I could deploy right away in these groups - with positive responses from members. I am going forward with a greater sense of connection to a community of

therapists, of confidence in the group modality, and of faith in my abilities as a group leader. Again, thank you for your generosity in helping me move forward in my journey as a developing group therapist.

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I am honored to have been awarded a full tuition scholarship to attend AGPA Connect 2023 in New York City. I am writing to convey my sincerest gratitude for this generous act.

I am a Provisionally Licensed Professional Counselor practicing in Baton Rouge, LA. While I mostly work with individuals, group therapy is something I have loved doing since I first led groups at a local behavioral health agency. Facilitating groups is something I plan on returning to in the near future, and my confidence in doing so was augmented by attending AGPA Connect. Being awarded an AGPA membership, as well as a scholarship to AGPA Connect, were very unexpected, and equally welcome and special gifts.

The most impactful conference event for me was the Two-Day Special Institute led by Maryetta Andrews-Sachs and Farooq Mohyuddin. It was a beautiful experiential experience that helped me feel more seen by and connected with the AGPA community at large. Maryetta and Farooq were the ultimate group facilitators. They consistently held space for me and the rest of the group, and in this way, modeled exactly what exceptional group facilitators do and embody.

Leading up to the conference, I felt nervous, especially since I only knew a handful of others who would be in attendance. That being said, the warmth of various AGPA members blew me away. For example, Karen Travis, who gifted me with an AGPA membership, organized Zoom meetings for both before and after the conference so that a number of new members and conference attendees, myself included, could feel more prepared and connected. This poetically speaks to the very name of the conference - *AGPA Connect*. The AGPA community has only ever been kind, inclusive, welcoming, and accepting, and this is something that can be a rarity these days.

I truly cannot thank the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health enough for awarding me with an AGPA Connect 2023 scholarship. I am lucky to have found this organization and to now be a member. The conference was a tremendous gift, both personally and professionally. I can undoubtedly say that my professional competence - and connection - has already been, and will only continue to be, bolstered because of my attendance.

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I am excited and grateful to share my experiences attending my third AGPA conference (FIRST IN PERSON!). When I transitioned to the role as Group Coordinator at Kansas State University Counseling Services, my colleague suggested I attend the annual AGPA. As it turns out, this connection would be instrumental in advancing my career and competence in group therapy. Connecting with this community has been a wonderful experience, as everyone has welcomed new members. Additionally, attending AGPA Connect has enhanced this experience by sharing information, experiential learning, and connecting to peers who deeply value group work.

During the conference, many of the presenters were gracious in sharing their presentations and resource guides. I have been able to take those resources, collaborate with colleagues, and deepen our agency's understanding of group functioning, development, and here-and-now group process. Having the experience of participating experientially in workshops has helped me better understand group dynamics and deepen my understanding of myself and interpersonal dynamics, which has contributed to my growth as a group leader.

At the conference, I attended various sessions such as; Using Our Emotions as Leaders to Understand and Guide Our Group, The Power and Effectiveness of Psychodrama: Using Action Techniques in Process Group Psychotherapy, and Bringing Shared Fun and Adventure to Therapy Groups Through Using Team Building Activities. The techniques taught in each of these workshops deepened my ability to utilize myself as a container for the group, gave me additional skills to contain the emotions in the group, and assisted me in my ability to accelerate group cohesion, trust, and safety.

The information provided in the Advocacy for Your College The counseling Program Workshop I attended at AGPA helped me identify possible solutions to our center's various barriers when expanding our group program. As a result of that workshop, I feel more prepared to implement a plan addressing some common obstacles and feel confident connecting with others on campus who may assist in these efforts.

Lastly, my experience at the AGPA Connect conference had a tremendous impact on my ability to be a Group Leader. Because of my experiences with AGPA, I will be able to enhance my skills to create safe and therapeutic environments in the group room. I now feel more prepared to manage nuanced dialogs regarding various identity markers, and I have a more extensive tool kit for here-and-now process interventions. This learning and growth could not have happened without the scholarship I received from AGPA. Due to COVID-19, departments across our college campus must navigate more financial strains, attempting to do more with less. Counseling Services were not immune to this problem, and receiving this scholarship considerably helped offset the financial constraints presented by COVID. It also helped further the values of continued education and growth as a group therapist.