

# Group Assets

The Newsletter of the  
Group Foundation  
for Advancing Mental Health

Winter 2015

## Telling Our Story

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

Over the last 30-plus years, the Group Foundation has grown and matured, and along the way so has our story. We have so much more to tell about the work that we have done and all the young professionals who we have been able to reach out to by funding hundreds of scholarships for the Annual Meeting. They now have their own stories to tell about their experiences, many of which we have shared with you over the years. Reading their stories is always moving and inspirational.

As group psychotherapists know, the telling of one's story—putting our voices out in the world—is a connecting and powerful experience. Our story shows our uniqueness, our passion, and our purpose and provides the map that marks our life journey. In her book *The Story of Your Life* (1996), Mandy Aftel said it this way: "Telling someone about your experience breathes new life into it, moving it out of the inchoate swirl of unconsciousness into reality. It takes on a form, and allows to us examine it from all sides."

While we see the value of the "telling the story" in individual lives, through the process of strategic planning, AGPA has learned that it's equally important for organizations to have a story to tell about their journey and purpose. In the business world, the process of creating this story is called "branding."

Leading up to and as part of our 30th Anniversary, the Foundation Board, knowing we needed help in developing and defining our organizational story, hired consultants who were experts in branding for nonprofit organizations to lead us in this process. The first thing they communicated was the importance of spending time and energy in researching, defining, and building our brand, including actively considering what activities we want to fund that are in line with our mission. The brand is a foundational piece in the marketing communication, which is essential for our fund raising. The consultants have played a vital part in pushing and structuring this process and have led workshops with the Board, gathered data, and conducted individual interviews with those involved with the life of the Foundation.

The push was to clearly define *why we do what we do, what we do, and how we get it done* through this process. This is organized in a simple way that communicates the essence of our brand and provides a reference for everyone involved with work of the Foundation to use when talking about our vital work.

The narrative about our primary mission, goals, and activities can easily be expanded upon or adapted to either the person or group we talk to about the Foundation, as well

as by who is doing the talking. The personal stories about how being part of this professional community has impacted *your life* will provide the emotional connection that is a vital part of our story.

As Elliott Zeisel, PhD, CGP, DFAGPA, expressed in an interview with me for *Group Assets*, "Almost everyone you meet has been impacted by mental health issues at some time in their lives, directly or indirectly." This statement reflects our foundational belief that "mental health is essential for community well-being." Reflection of this organizing belief resulted in the Foundation Changing its name to the "Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health" with the tagline "Together We Can Change Lives."

This is the broadest and most inclusively held value that is reflected in our efforts to build and strengthen community networks. We do this by our outreach work and our efforts to build a partnership that promotes the work done by AGPA members and CGPs to strengthen communities. Our work in Disaster Response is a great example of how we mobilize as an organization to bring aid to those communities suffering trauma. There are so many moving stories from our work following 9/11, and all the way to China, where we worked with mental health providers in the aftermath of a terrible earthquake. We have used what we learned from these experiences to create and deliver our Trauma Modules in preparedness to help train mental health workers, and members have continued to go to China to continue to teach and train mental health professionals. These are just a few examples of our efforts to build partnerships and strengthen communities both nationally and internationally.

The next identified organizational tenet—stated as "Strengthening the community of practitioners is vital for effective mental health delivery"—is the most active part of our work and is the heart of our organization because it is fueled by our educational programs. We have been able to support this goal by "Professional Development, scholarships and research to advance group therapy through funding professional and public education and ground-breaking research." Our Scholarship Program is exemplary in supporting this goal. We have made it possible for hundreds of new professionals to attend the AGPA Annual Meeting, and by doing so, we have been able to underwrite a large part of the programming and public events at the conference. This has allowed the conference to grow and to adapt to the changing face of group psychotherapy while supporting the integrity of the rich learning environment that the Annual Meeting is

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WHY We Do What We Do	WHAT We Do	HOW We Get It Done
Mental health is essential for community well-being	Build and Strengthen Community Networks	Strategic outreach to create partnerships and relationships to promote work done by AGPA members and CGPs to strengthen communities
Strengthening the community of practitioners is vital for effective mental health delivery	Education	Professional Development, Scholarships and Research to advance group therapy through funding professional and public education and ground-breaking research
The power of the group is transformational	Advancement of the Group Therapy Field	Movement building to raise the understanding of group work and the power of group therapy within the wider community of professionals and the general public

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Our sincerest appreciation is expressed to these endowment donors in support of our program.

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## Telling Our Story

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know for. It, too, is the heart of our story.

The next identified mission of the Foundation is communicating our shared belief that "The power of the group is transformational." We do this by dedicating our work to the continued "Advancement of the Group Psychotherapy Field." The work is described as "Movement building to raise the understanding of group work and the power of group therapy within the wider community of professionals and the general public." The Foundation is active in funding significant projects to realize this goal. Just look at the new award-winning website to see this in action. It's both engaging and informative, while communicating the transformational qualities of group work. There are many other ways the Foundation has supported this

message, and here are just some of them:

- The *Group Works!* brochure;
- Curriculum development in revising the Core Course, and creating new training modules; and
- Research development

As I write this, I am again amazed at how much we have accomplished and how our story has grown. We have developed some wonderful new chapters that will reach out beyond our membership to the greater world. I hope that in sharing our structure to define our mission it will encourage you to share with others what we are about and why you are committed to this professional community. Your experiences about what you have gained professionally and personally is the next chapter, one that only you can write and will have the most meaning in the narrative as you share the work we do with the support of others.

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