

groupassets



EDITOR'S NOTE

I hope you are all enjoying a wonderful summer and are experiencing the rejuvenation we all need to support us in our work.

This edition of Group Assets features an article by Christine Fitzstevens, LCSW-R, CGP, where she shares her experience of organizing an event in the Rochester Area in partnership with the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health. The event featured Elizabeth Ford, MD, a psychiatrist who wrote a book entitled *Sometimes Amazing Things Happen: Heartbreak and Hope on the Bellevue Hospital Psychiatric Prison Ward*. The book chronicles her experiences in working with individuals with mental illness in the criminal justice system at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. This is a population that is underserved and often forgotten when we talk about the use of group psychotherapy in public systems. I applaud Christine for organizing this event and bringing this important issue out of the shadows, giving it the attention that it needs. I was inspired when talking with Christine about this event, and I know you will be inspired when you read her article.

The Faces of Our Foundation for this issue highlights my dear friend and colleague Barbara Squire Ilfeld, MSN, RNCS, FAGPA, CGP-R. Barbara and her husband Fred have been generous supporters of the Group Foundation in many ways. Barbara has served on the Group Foundation Board of Directors for 14 years (and counting!) and both she and Fred have been dedicated to the training and teaching of group psychotherapy nationally and locally. Barbara shares with you what has kept her committed to the Group Foundation as a volunteer leader and donor.

I want to thank Christine and Barbara for their time and thoughtfulness in writing their articles for our newsletter and sharing their perspectives.



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

Sometimes Amazing Things Happen

Christine Fitzstevens, LCSW-R, CGP

Earlier in May, the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health, Westfall Associates, a chemical dependency treatment center, OWN Rochester, a non-profit dedicated to creating worker-owned businesses in Rochester, and the Rochester Area Group Psychotherapy Society, sponsored *Sometimes Amazing Things Happen*, a fundraising event examining the issue of incarceration and mental health and the school to prison pipeline.

Roughly 2.2 million people are incarcerated in the United States, and African Americans are incarcerated at rates five times higher than that of whites. Elizabeth Ford, MD, psychiatrist and author of *Sometimes Amazing Things Happen*, spoke about her book, which chronicles her experience of heartbreak and hope on the Bellevue Hospital Psychiatric prison ward. Dr. Ford is a stunning example of the potential for one human being to impact an entire bureaucratic system. She is the first woman (and mother) to become the Chief of Psychiatry for Correctional Health Services for New York City's Health + Hospitals and is responsible for the mental health care of men and women incarcerated in the New York City jails, including those on Rikers Island.

Dr. Ford is also an Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine and teaches and writes extensively about a broad array of topics related to the interface of mental health, law, and correctional settings, including the mental health impact of incarceration. She has authored and co-authored numerous academic articles and books, including a textbook about significant U.S. legal cases related to psychiatry and the law and the latest edition of the American Psychiatric Association's guidelines regarding psychiatric services in jails and prisons.

To connect the audience to this issue locally, the event planning team invited local speakers: Bria Adams, a poet from the Teaching and Learning Institute at East High School; Craig Waleed, PhD, a professor at Brockport University who spoke on his research and dissertation entitled *Aspects of Emotional Intelligence that Help Former Prisoners Make Decisions to Desist Crime*; and Danielle Ponder, Esq, a lawyer, activist, and artist working on criminal justice reform.

I have been a Board member of the Group Foundation for several years, and frankly, I hate asking for money. It's more fun for me to throw a party and raise funds through ticket sales. This event combined many goals of the Foundation: 1) harnessing inspiration from colleagues in the field who are willing to publicly share their work; 2) modeling group therapy with a demonstration group in the here-and-now; 3) generating compelling dialogue on issues of social justice; and 4) inviting attendees to consider applying for scholarships to AGPA Connect 2020. And let's not forget another important part of the mission: exquisite food, drink, and a jazz trio with impromptu vocals. Now we're talking!

I was struck by the variety of fields represented amongst the 120 in attendance. In addition to mental health professionals of all kinds, attendees were from the probation department, sheriff's department, forensic psychiatry, chemical dependency agencies, non-profits working with incarcerated persons or their families, employees from local jails, hospital nurses, city government employees, and community activist groups. Many urban teachers were in attendance who were inspired by Dr. Ford's words and were struck by the similarities between her experience and their own in the school setting.

Bria Adams passionately recited a poem she had written about social injustice. After the reading, Dr. Ford told Ms. Adams that her words were life changing. Danielle Ponder spoke of her work in the courts, the frustrations and difficulties, and then offered a song she had written, a capella; a loud silence fell over the room. Craig Waleed shared research from his doctorate on the community to prison pipeline, along with his own story of recovery from incarceration in the 1990s. A theme threaded throughout was that it matters *how* we speak with each other.

The demonstration group that followed worked deeply on stage, putting difficult feelings and thoughts into words (and generously navigated working with microphones so all could hear). They spoke of their challenges in working with groups of underserved persons with high levels of trauma. The shared understanding, caring, and honesty between members was palpable. Indeed, sometimes amazing things happen. Leading this group left me with a profound sense of wonder at the power of group.

Rikers Island hosts 8,000 inmates with 40% having mental health issues. In her keynote address, Dr. Ford told of numerous accounts of patient and staff interactions where mental health interventions have potential for high positive impact on patients. She also shared her perspective on some of the macro issues involved in the criminal justice system in this country.

She told a potent story about a seagull from the beaches of the island who was caught in the barbed wire fence outside her office window at one of the Rikers Island jails. The gull's suffering was distressing to Dr. Ford, and she called the facility managers for help in rescuing this bird. Unfortunately, the

Continued on back page

THE FACES OF OUR FOUNDATION

Inspiration for Giving to My AGPA Family

Barbara Ilfeld, MSN, RNCS, FAGPA, CGP-R

For 30 years, along with my husband Fred Ilfeld, MD, I have donated financially to the well-being and thriving of the AGPA through the Group Foundation. In addition, for 14 years I have contributed my time serving on the Group Foundation Board of Directors. The Group Foundation inspires me in so many ways to continue giving as it supports the work of the AGPA: educating group therapists through AGPA Connect; offering online and other educational events; providing scholarships for students and early professionals to AGPA Connect; providing outreach throughout the world in times of natural or man-made disasters; and supplying monies for valuable research projects.

The AGPA has become my professional family to which I feel a strong allegiance and for which I have a deep passion. I am grateful to have the resources of time and money to give back to the organization that has nurtured me for 30 years. I want to see my AGPA family thrive so other professionals can benefit as I certainly have from all that it has to offer.

Whether it is talking to the many scholarship recipients at AGPA Connect or feeling a deep sense of pride when I tell people about the amazing things the AGPA does in our world as a result of funding from the Group Foundation, I am thrilled to be part of a team that helps make it all happen—our Group Foundation Board. I continually learn from and am inspired by our team, an impressive group of professionals who share ideas, expertise, and comradery at face-to-face meetings, phone conference calls, and particularly enjoyable, meaningful and productive retreats, where we stimulate each other with ideas on how to reach out to the greater community to financially support the work of the AGPA.

Two of my most rewarding involvements are our donations to the Foundation's Scholarship Fund and my mentoring of new group therapy professionals. Our new professionals are the future of the AGPA, assuring the longevity and ongoing leadership of our organization. I love doing my part to keep our AGPA family thriving while our new members and leaders grow into our community.



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rescue never took place, and over the course of time, she witnessed the gull's struggle, death, and decay outside her window. What a metaphor for what happens for any living being when help is not available. The work of mental health and group provides the chance for attention and healing rather than suffering in solitude.

Dr. Ford highlighted the need for mental health professionals to seek care and treatment for ourselves including individual and group work, especially when working in settings or with patients with high level trauma in their histories. Her transparency, authenticity, and generosity were contagious.

Here are a few comments/memories from attendees:

I was really moved by the seagull story. —Laurie

When I think about the experience I remember

how human and intimate the day was. Each presenter and speaker shared deep parts of themselves compassionately and compellingly down to earth. So much creative warmth while talking about a system that is dehumanizing and destructive. —Susan

The day was full of information and networking. Lots of great people coming from different backgrounds yet concerned about the same issues within our prison systems. Many "food for thought" and intriguing moments. —Bria

A focus of quiet intensity in the auditorium as Dr. Ford spoke movingly about her work —Bill

An engaged demo group, with Dr. Ford beautifully modeling openness and vulnerability in her sharing as a group member. —Bill

A spectacular reception with convivial conversation, live music, and a fabulous spread. —Bill

I was deeply moved by the honesty and quiet vulnerability present in the room by all of the

presenters. There was no elevating of egos or fluffing of feathers, just truth in the form of sharing stories of heartbreak, injustice, and humanity. I felt honored to witness and be part of it as a participant. Listening to Dr. Ford share her work was like listening to my own experience working in city public schools. It was hauntingly painful, yet relieving knowing I am not crazy for feeling such heartbreak in the witnessing. —Sara

All persons in attendance were invited to consider applying for scholarships to AGPA Connect 2020. A former scholarship recipient spoke of her experience at AGPA and of her support to continue the scholarship program so that new professionals can benefit from group leadership training and experience.

Dr. Ford's book *Sometimes Amazing Things Happen* was available for purchase and signing by the author. Her generosity and

attention to each person wishing her to sign the book were a reflection of the attention she pays her patients and staff.

There is a book club planned for the spring to revisit the issue. It is deeply satisfying to have advanced this conversation to the group therapy community and beyond in Rochester.

In conclusion, I invite you to consider hosting an event in support of the Foundation. This experience was a gift to me and to our community. In writing this article, a film from 1982 came to mind. Linda Hunt played Billy Kwan in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a film about Indonesia in the 1960s. In response to tremendous poverty and injustice, Billy quotes Tolstoy asking, "What then must we do?" Brene' Brown, LMSW, PhD, says we cannot consider racism and privilege without feeling shame. I would add that these issues are very painful and difficult to approach. 🙏

Foundation Awards and Grants

In addition to its extensive Scholarship Program (see page 5 of this issue of the *Group Circle*), the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health presents the following awards:

- The **Social Responsibility Award**, to be presented at AGPA Connect 2020, recognizes an AGPA member or group of members whose exceptional service ultimately benefits the public-at-large, either nationally or internationally. **The deadline for nominations for this award only is October 1, 2019.**
- The Foundation supports **Research** that demonstrates the effectiveness of group psychotherapy. This year in a new endeavor, we are seeking proposals for original critical research reviews, either qualitative or quantitative (particularly meta-analyses), which focus on some selected area of group psychotherapy.
- The **Group Foundation Tribute Program** is a campaign of appreciation, recognizing mentors, colleagues, and others of importance in our lives emphasizing their part in fostering the personal and professional development of group psychotherapists. It is an opportunity to express your personal appreciation to someone through a gift to the Group Foundation for

Advancing Mental Health. If you would like to take this opportunity to make a more significant gift, there are also opportunities to name a program at the upcoming 2020 AGPA Connect. Please contact the Foundation office for information.

- The **Alonso Award for Excellence in Psychodynamic Group Theory** reasserts, in a concrete way, the value of original thinking about psychodynamic group theory. Individuals may qualify in a variety of ways. Suitable entries include doctoral dissertations, videos, published papers, and other creative research.
- The **Aaron Stein Memorial Fund** annually recognizes organizations in the locale of the upcoming AGPA Connect that utilize the creative applications of group theory and technique to benefit the community, particularly in non-psychotherapeutic settings.

Detailed award and grant descriptions, as well as listings of past recipients are posted on AGPA's website at www.agpa.org. The application deadline for these Group Foundation programs, unless otherwise noted, is November 1, 2019. For additional information, contact Diane Feirman, CAE, Public Affairs Senior Director, at 212-477-2677 or dfeirman@agpa.org. 🙏

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