

NPA Member Spotlight

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Louisa Foster, PsyD

How long have you been a member of NPA?

I think I joined NPA the year I was first licensed in 2000, which sounds like so long ago now!

Why did you join?

Since I was new to both professional psychology and Omaha, I was eager to try to make connections and meet folks. I moved to Nebraska for the Internship Consortium after training in Chicago and truly felt like a fish out of water. I remember tagging along with my internship supervisors, and later my post-doc supervisors, to NPA conferences and was immediately hooked by the warm, welcoming NPA community.

What do you like most about being a member? How has your career benefited from being a member?

I love the efforts that are made to keep us connected as a community, especially both during and after Covid. Since I work in a private practice setting, it can be easy to feel isolated. I feel that both my career and my personal life have benefited from the relationships I've made through NPA. I also love being able to see former supervisors and colleagues at NPA events. Such a treat to have ongoing access to those who've known you your whole career!

Do you now, or have you previously volunteered with NPA?

I almost skipped this question because I volunteered with the Continuing Education Committee for a hot minute a couple of years ago before I realized that I had over committed. I don't think I ever even made it to a meeting! I have such deep respect and gratitude for all those who make the NPA magic happen. To paraphrase a cultural cinematic touchstone "My idealized self is writing checks my actual self can't cash".

Where you are now working and what is your role?

In 2006, I founded The Center for Mindful Living as both a private practice where multiple practitioners office and as a mindfulness center. I work with individuals, primarily with anxiety and depression, using a mindfulness-informed, psychodynamic model. I'm also a drama therapist and Board-Certified Trainer in drama therapy, which is a wonderful adjunctive modality to more conventional treatment models.

I'm particularly proud of the programs we've developed to help people to learn meditation, with a dedicated meditation instructor, daily sits, and a mindfulness study group, all of which are free and open to the public. Occasionally, we offer classes and workshops on various topics such as Mindful Self-Compassion, Introduction to Meditation, as well as more experiential, narrative-based workshops.

In addition to our mindfulness instructor, the rest of our compliment includes an Art Therapist, an Intermodal Expressive Arts Therapist, and a psychiatric APRN.

Tell us about your path to becoming a psychologist.

My path feels more like an intuitive wandering than a goal directed undertaking. I received my undergraduate degree from Washington University in St. Louis in Theatre and French Literature. I actually meant to become an architect but got happily diverted into the arts along the way.

After graduation, I toured regionally as an actor/director and then moved to Chicago to continue my career in theatre. Along the way, I discovered that I was less interested in the performance aspect of the work and more in the rehearsal/discovery process. By some divine providence, I happened on a Psychodrama training program at Rush Presbyterian's St. Luke's in Chicago and began to see how the arts and creativity can inform mental health treatment. I then went on to pursue my both my master's and doctorate in Clinical Psychology. Along the way, I also continued my studies of psychodrama and drama therapy.

I'm often asked how I made the leap from theatre to psychology but, for me, they seem part and parcel of the same study of human motivation and behavior. I'm also very grateful for the circuitous route that I took in my career. I use my theatre training regularly in my work and enjoy being able to approach treatment with more creativity and playfulness.

What is wellness to you? How do you maintain a work/life balance?

Having been raised in a home that modeled an unhealthy relationship to work, status, and wealth, I learned early to identify personal metrics of success based on relationships, creative expression, and learning. I often wonder if I should have been a sociologist as focused as I am on the maladaptive impact of our culture on wellness.

My meditation practice is an important anchor for me, as is a regular creative practice. Every now and then, I still perform at local theatres. I love getting together with friends to play board games, write bad poetry, or learn a new skill. Now that I'm empty nesting, I find it easier to go on retreat and travel, both of which invigorate, inspire, and humble me. The theatre kid in me also really enjoys a good Renaissance Faire every now and then. I think it's the costuming.

What is a fun fact that people probably don't know about you?

My first language is French and I didn't read or write in English until fourth grade. I grew up in Brussels and, at one time, spoke four languages. Unfortunately, I only really retained my French and English. It was a bit of a challenge to practice Flemish back in the day – now it would be easy to connect online with a Flemish speaker who was learning English 4500 miles away. I do have an annoying habit of intruding on Francophones when I hear the language spoken. Mercifully, everyone has been most generous with me and, fortunately, Omaha has a high number of Francophiles to target when I'm out and about.