

NPA Member Spotlight

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Helen Montoya, PhD

How long have you been a member of NPA?

I became a member shortly after my internship in 1993.

Why did you join?

Being a student of Jim Cole- a former NPA president and active member/advocate, I had no questions about joining NPA. Jim made membership an obvious choice for new psychologists and I agree!

What do you like most about being a member?

NPA offers so many opportunities and I really appreciate the Continued Education programs! I have benefited from the remote learning opportunities during the pandemic and beyond. I appreciate NPA's active advocacy for the populations we serve and the protection of the integrity of our profession!

Do you now, or have you ever volunteered for NPA?

I had the opportunity to serve in NPA for a couple of years as a member at large but had to refocus my time and energy when my 10 year old became ill and faced multiple hospitalizations and specialized care out of state.

My path to becoming a psychologist.

As a first-generation college student I happened to find my way with the guidance of a psychology professor during my first year of college. His psychology class inspired

me to take another class and another class until I was completely enamored with psychology. That same professor was a graduate of the UNL Clinical Psychology program and challenged me to apply for graduate schools, especially UNL. He guided me through applications, personal statements and ultimately interviews and was so proud that I chose UNL for my graduate program! I have always leaned toward psychological readings and seemed to be the one others confided in... Turns out I love psychology and love being a psychologist!

In graduate school I focused on community psychology and after my internship I was approached by the Nebraska Medical Director about starting a rural community outreach program with the help of Jim Cole, who would be my supervisor. We created the first rural community outreach program in Nebraska and staffed the program with myself, a psychiatrist and a social worker. Together we traveled throughout the north-eastern part of the state and ultimately earned awards for our innovative program and connection to rural communities. After a couple years I got recruited back to Lincoln to serve as the supervising psychologist for a multi-disciplinary health care facility. This opportunity set me up for private practice when the clinic closed unexpectedly. I have had an amazing private practice and have supervised great clinicians along the way!

While in private practice I have worked with a variety of individuals but just by chance I developed a specialization in mood disorders simply by studying best practices to help the clientele sent my way. I feel like the most blessed person alive- I have loved every step of the way in my career and as I approach retirement I pay tribute to those that guided me along the way!

Who/What inspires you?

I have had amazing mentors and wonderful opportunities and I have learned so much from each of them. The most influential person in my life however, has been my dad. A child of migrant workers, having to leave school in 5th grade to also work in the fields, he has been the greatest example of living an honest, compassionate, grateful, and graceful life. Despite hardship and educational disadvantages, he served his community, was an advocate for the disadvantaged and mentored many. He worked his way to a leadership role in his job and served as a well-respected and adored leader and teacher of many. He instilled humanity and humility in his children and I remain committed to his dedication for the less fortunate. I have volunteered for organizations that serve the disadvantaged ongoing through my career.

What I do when not working- hobbies/interests:

I am an avid walker- for almost 40 years I have taken a 2 to 4 mile walk early morning before work. Walking has kept me grounded and ensures that I enter work with a fresh mind. My adult children and grandchildren are my favorite people- they help me keep work/home life balance. I can always count on them for adventures, good food and game nights. My hobby however is gardening. My husband and I have a large garden and grow vegetables for ourselves and our family for the upcoming year and donate our spares. Walking and gardening are my therapy and have been for as long as I can remember!