Empower, Integrate, Sustain

By being awarded the support from the SERVE Grant here at Seattle Pacific, I was able to attend The Western Region American Music Therapist Association Annual Conference. I was able to connect in a powerful way with future peers, to get inspired about my future career by listening to professional presentations, and to discover a community so rich and self-supportive that I felt immediately at home.

My first new friend from another school introduced himself to me by asking my opinion on which djembe (drum) he should get while at conference. Next year, my friend and colleague, like myself, will be off to different 6-month internships which will help us develop the skills and knowledge we will need in our future career field as Board Certified Music Therapists. I connected with many more friends who I will be proud to call my future colleagues. We were able to see professionals discuss important topics such as State certification for Music Therapists as well as State Insurance funding for our future clients. In many of the other presentation sessions we were able to attend, those who specialize in certain areas or techniques in therapy or certain client populations gave us in-depth looks into their experience. I personally learned much from a session in which two therapists co-lead a group in a prison using spoken word and rap in order to help men identify healthy leisure activities, get out feelings of abandonment and lack of support, and focus on the necessary skills they will need to transition back into civilian life. The genuine approach and safe environment they created were tactics I observed and look forward to using, as well as their tips for creating good raps with clients for constructive purposes. Another presenter who really struck me was a professional Music Therapist who originally was trained and accredited in Great Britain, but came to the United States to participate in research for Rett’s Syndrome. Julie Berghofer, RMT, uses music therapy in order to improve the lives of girls and women with the heavily restrictive gene mutation that develops Rett’s Syndrome. Her videos of her and her clients gave me an overwhelming sense of her selflessness and determination with a range of clients who do not ever show improvement, but truly need music therapy to keep what strength they have.

The professionals that I met were friendly, accomplished, and inspiring. The conference was truly a time when Professional Music Therapists were able to directly speak to us, to remind us that in a decade we would be the ones imparting our knowledge and working on the growth and communication of our community together. In a way, I was able to see what I would be doing and how I could affect the growth of this profession as well as contribute to the world in my own small way as a Music Therapist.

The community that I was able to see and feel was something else; I have never experienced being in a group of Music Therapy legends, professionals, students, supporters, and professors. It was, in the truest meaning of the word, awesome. The level of acceptance for exactly who I want to be, the encouragement of my dreams and goals, and the overall respect of each other’s strengths and talents was truly the best feeling I’ve ever had while at a group function. I knew I was in the right place, and these were my people. Jana Stanfield, a Christian Inspirational Artist, opened our conference; she told stories, sang, and played her guitar. My favorite line from her music was “I am not lost, I am exploring; life is an adventure worth enjoying, and though I may not know where I am going, I am not lost, I am exploring”. In it I feel a true sense of this unknown and new route as a Music Therapy student. It seems sometimes I do not know if I am truly doing what I’m meant to, or that what I want for myself is unattainable and a mere dream, but attending this gathering of like-minded people, kindred spirits, gave me the courage to believe in what I’m doing. I am a Music Therapy student; I sing, I pray, I learn, I grow.