

## **2018 Chamberlain Scholarship Recipient: Oana Alexan**

I am grateful to be the 2018 Chamberlain Scholarship recipient of AFP Monterey Bay.

Born and raised in Romania, a developing country in post-communist transition, I learned that giving allows us to experience a deep connection with others even in the face of adversity. The possibility of lifting our family's circumstances and my future opportunities inspired my parents to begin a life in the United States. I have since cultivated and pursued my purpose: to make my community better, healthier, and more inclusive. I am honored to be a fundraising professional, because giving in impact-oriented, energizing, and rewarding ways fills the gap in all of us and positions us on the pathway to a loving, kinder, and compassionate world.

I was thrilled for the opportunity to attend the International Fundraising Conference in vibrant New Orleans, especially as the AFP's reaffirmation of its commitment to investing in the areas of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) was at the core of the programming. The Opening Session included a poignant video with an urgent call to action: "It's time to change our profession and our sector." In parallel, at the Closing Session, Bryan Stevenson urged the same IDEA-driven change at national level to address the structural imbalance along racial lines.

I am the Development Director at Pajaro Valley Shelter Services (PVSS), empowering families to move beyond homelessness and into self-sufficiency and permanent housing. At PVSS, we are committed to IDEA in that we intentionally integrate these values in all aspects of our work, from small tasks to high-level case management. We are embarking on a strategic planning process to ensure the sustainability of our empowerment services and address our potential for service expansion in response to an ever-increasing demand for housing and support. We want to co-create our future, empowering our community and increasing its investment and participation in our organization.

Our community here in the Pajaro Valley is incredibly diverse, as are our clients. In Watsonville alone, 80% of the population is Hispanic. Our support base has historically not reflected this diversity. I went to the International Conference committed to bringing back tools that would empower us to build broad community support at PVSS as the foundation to long-term social change.

I created a coherent learning experience by focusing on grassroots fundraising and cross-cultural giving. I especially appreciated the session led by James Anderson and Alice Ferris from GoalBusters Consulting: "The House of Philanthropy: Creating a Framework for Cross-Cultural Giving." The questions they posed are at the core of developing a cross-cultural giving framework for any organization: (1) "What values are connected with philanthropy?" (2) "What words are used for giving?" (3) "What is the currency of giving?" and (4) "What are the key relationships in this community?"

One of the many positive developments stemming from the Conference's focus on IDEA was the organic creation of mini-forums for open and honest discussion between peers outside of official sessions. I had illuminating conversations with others about shared experiences of resilience in the face of breaches of these values.

In her session on designing powerful partnerships, Susan Holt from Vision Philanthropy Group began her presentation with a statement by Margaret Meade. I'd like to end in gratitude and with that inspirational thought: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Without the Chamberlain Scholarship, I could not have partaken in the experience of the International Fundraising Conference. As a growth-minded, lifelong learner, I appreciated that the Conference set an outstanding culture of learning and partnership. The more you learn, the less you know. I love the fundraising profession, because fundraising expertise embodies the willingness to accept feedback, take nothing for granted, embrace change, and welcome all opportunities for learning. At the Conference, I had an authentic opportunity to develop my expertise alongside other change agents. I have you to thank.