Sam Ung, a ten-year veteran elementary teacher from Del Mar, was one of dozens of CTA members who attended the IFT Teacher Innovation Expo in Garden Grove. Her reflections on the Expo are published here with her permission.

“Even though I have been a teacher for almost 10 years, I hadn’t really understood what the CTA was and what it stood for. During this conference I found out exactly what I had been missing. They were a group of like-minded teachers who were finding innovative ways to lift up the teaching profession and help other fellow teachers.

“The Pre-Conference Teacher Innovation Expo was so different from what I was expecting. Instead of fast-paced workshops and hoping I would find something useful, I was treated to innovative ideas from current IFT grant winners. Every presenter inspired with his or her creative ideas and passion for teaching.

The alternative high school teacher, who was given a last minute solar class and turned it into a school-to-job model where his students had a job once they completed his class, floored me on how he was able to take a last minute assignment and make it so successful.

Or the teacher who bought a zoo in Chula Vista to help his students make real world observations and used it as a cornerstone for writing, math, and science in his elementary class. Each grant presenter had so much passion and hope for the teaching professions.

Meeting these teacher innovators really made me rethink my own teaching and how I could find that passion once again. What could I change in my teaching to become a better teacher? What roadblocks were stopping me from trying something new? I now know that I had the support of the CTA members to step out of my comfort zone and I can’t wait to get started.

San Joaquin County Office of Education grant recipients Denise Vaughn (below left) and Sandra Elliott presented information about their unique outdoor education program for their 7th-12th grade special education students.

Tara Kajtaniak (above right) of the East Bay Teacher Think Tank invites comments from students who participated in IFT grant projects. Ocean View High School Senior Alex Lopez (left) and La Mirada High School’s Kevin Park spoke about the positive impact the work of their teachers had upon them.

Dana Tomlinson (far left) encouraged home visits to connect with her southern San Diego County 6th-grade families. (Near left) Blaine Boyer’s grant provides opportunities for his continuation high school students in Temecula to get on-the-job training for the solar economy.

Oceanside colleagues Serina West (above left) and Liliana Gonzalez listened as students described the impact of these grants on their lives. (Below), CTA President Eric Heins chats up some middle school “mathemagicians” from Moreno Valley.
Got an Idea? Feeling Inspired? Need Resources?  
2016-17 Grant Application Deadline is April 30th

The CTA Institute for Teaching (IFT) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. IFT supports strength-based teacher driven change in school communities across California. Please contact IFT at 619-683-3990 or at contact@teacherdrivenchange.org

Rancho Cucamonga Middle School’s Pine Car Derby Club held its first meet in early February. The all-gender club, advised by seventh grade teacher Bobby Baltierra and partly funded by grant funds from the CTA Institute for Teaching, teaches physics, crafts and sportsmanship.

In the first six years of the program, IFT received a total of 415 grant applications. The 167 funded grants represent an acceptance rate of more than 40%. As part of the application process, local Association Presidents are asked to sign off indicating their willingness to have the local Association serve as a fiscal agent on behalf of the grant recipient. This increases accountability and insures that the individual member incurs no tax liability.

Since 2010, the CTA Institute for Teaching has been utilizing a portion of CTA members’ $20 voluntary dues contributions to fund strength-based teacher driven projects at schools all over California. To date, IFT has funded 167 grant projects totaling more than $1.7 million. All CTA members are eligible to apply for an Educator grant (up to $5,000) or an Impact grant (up to $20,000).

This is a competitive grant program and grants are evaluated by the IFT Grant Selection Committee, made up of five educators from around the state and an IFT staff consultant. These educators represent various grade levels and are experienced in the strength-based approach.

Applications are due no later than April 30th. The Grant Selection Committee meets in May. Grant recommendations come to the IFT Board of Directors in June for formal approval. Grant checks are mailed in late July/early August for use in the upcoming school year. A link to the grant application and supporting information is available under the Grant tab on the IFT website: teacherdrivenchange.org.

Babies and Beads: 2015-16 Grant Empowers Students to Succeed

San Diego EA member Stacy Williams is a case manager at TRACE (Transition Resources for Adult Community Education). The program serves students who live in San Diego, have a disability and have not completed their high school diploma.

She and her colleague Robert Rochin, a case worker for SDUSD, saw a need for the young adults in their program who had children to get off social services, learn work readiness skills and earn money for baby necessities.

Thus was born Babies and Beads, a non-profit organization that provides job training, mentoring, parenting education classes, career planning and program services to students who are parenting or are at risk, ages 18 to 22 years old.

The goal is to teach these students to be self-sufficient by training them to make and sell jewelry. Profits generated from jewelry sales will assist students in buying baby necessities, while they learn job skills and complete their education.

Stacy applied for an IFT grant for this school year to help grow her program and received $10,000. She is grateful to her fellow CTA members for this support which she says helps her students learn customer service, entrepreneurial skills, cash handling and other work readiness skills.