Editor’s note

In our third issue, I’d like to give you a taste of our annual general meeting which took place in Bristol during the three-day long gathering last autumn. These are AGMs to be proud of! Fiona Parr mentions them in her article about the history of our association (which follows on from its early story as told by Peter Afford and Barbara McGavin in the two opening issues of the newsletter). I’m struck by how the meetings still keep the same shape, warmth and sense of purpose – the sharing of experience both professionally and personally, as a group and in Focusing pairs, the statutory walk (this year across the Clifton suspension bridge), a dash of dance and Laughter Yoga.

This issue gives a glimpse into the workshops at the AGM. Sandy Gee’s ‘Focusing Dialogue on Community’, an unusual combination of Focusing and Homeopathy by Gordon Adam, and ‘A Space for Poetry’ hosted by Susan Jordan. Jerry Conway’s article describes his interest in Community Wellness Focusing, and ‘Swallows and Amazons in Buckinghamshire’, by trainee Rebecca Harris, shows how three Focusing mentors support practitioners-to-be on their Focusing journeys. Although this last workshop lies outside the AGM itself, it highlights the theme of collaboration and peer support which is so alive at our gatherings and keeps us growing as teachers, as Focusers and as people.

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By Fiona Parr and Jerry Conway

This is a busy time. The BFA has recently taken the new legal form of a Community Interest Company – thanks especially to Jerry’s hard work. This makes it much easier for us to run large events, like the Focusing School. There are also big changes afoot at The Focusing Institute, and Rob Foxcroft from the BFA has been invited onto a small interim Board of Directors. Gene Gendlin, who is now 87, and his wife Mary Hendricks-Gendlin, have retired from the board – and The Focusing Institute is re-forming itself. We wish Rob and the interim board every success in this delicate stage of transition.

Planning is continuing apace for the UK Focusing School, which is taking place on 22 – 26 October 2014. We are now open for bookings and we hope to meet up with you there. It promises to be just as exciting and stimulating as last time. (See opposite and next page for details).

Looking even further ahead, the BFA will be hosting the 2016 Focusing International Conference, and we’re already planning for that major event. We have booked a lovely venue at Robinson College, Cambridge. So please put that in your diary also.

With all good wishes for 2014.
Fiona and Jerry

Fiona Parr and Jerry Conway have been sitting on the sofa together for 2 years (as co-chairs of BFA). They both offer individual sessions and Focusing training; and meet regularly to keep BFA on track.

Focusing School 2014 – We are open!

By Manju

The first Focusing School back in 2011 was a great success and a landmark for the Focusing community in the UK and beyond. We gathered some of the best teachers and topics together, offering a rich feast of Focusing delights. Ever since then we have been trying to pull it off again and after many months of planning and waiting, I am pleased to say that the 2014 UK Focusing School is now open for bookings on: www.focusingschool.co.uk

The next school will be held at:

Belsey Bridge Conference Centre
in Norfolk
October 22nd to 26th 2014.
We have seven main morning topics on offer:

- **Creative Thinking at the Edge** with Peter Afford
- **Meditative Listening** with Rob Foxcroft
- **A Forum for Focusing-oriented Therapists** with Greg Madison
- **From Spark to Beacon – The Dance of Creating** with Barbara McGavin
- **Introduction to Focusing** with Paula Newman and Fiona Parr
- **Fresh Perspectives in Wholebody Focusing** with Astrid Schillings
- **Being Seriously Playful** with René Veugelers

As well as this, we have afternoon choices, the popular Focusing Corner and some special evening events to mix things up. To book and find out more go to [www.focusingschool.co.uk](http://www.focusingschool.co.uk)

Manjudeva teaches Focusing to groups and individuals and is based in the South West. He also runs regular retreats and residential workshops. He loves exploring the interface of Focusing with spiritual practice, dreams, and healing trauma. For more information, see his website [www.livingfocusing.co.uk](http://www.livingfocusing.co.uk)

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Personal reflections on the (relatively) early days of the British Focusing Teachers’ Association.

*By Fiona Parr*

*How did the (once) British Focusing Teachers’ Association (BFTA) get to where we are now – the British Focusing Association?*

I see myself as ‘second generation’ within BFTA. I was trained by Barbara McGavin, and contemporaries in that cohort included Jenny Brickett and Chris Wilson. Kay Hoffmann and Jerry Conway were also with me on those trainings with Barbara, as well as Claire Carter, the whizz behind our first website. Many of the ways that we do things were already established by the time that I joined the annual meetings; the Focusing sessions at the beginning of the day, the Saturday afternoon walk and the social time on Saturday evening. These important social and Focusing times were built in, enabling strong links to be forged between us which helped at times of conflict and disagreement.

For the first two or three years of meeting with BFTA members at the annual gathering and AGM from 2002 onwards, I felt that I was a small person, a ‘newbie’, surrounded...
by giants. These giants, Peter Afford, Rob Foxcroft and Barbara McGavin were like Titans, who sometimes clashed fearsomely. It was their honesty and integrity, and their faithfulness to their own felt sense, that enabled them to express their differences. As well as feeling overawed, I was also exhilarated. I felt that here was an organisation that I could trust and lean into. I felt that I belonged here. I read over and over the two early key documents; the ‘Operational Philosophy’ and the ‘Code of Ethics’. This was an organisation that I wanted to be part of. It felt like home, particularly the consensus decision-making and trusting each person’s uniqueness and felt sense.

Foolishly perhaps, in 2004, I volunteered to be chair of BFTA. I feel now that I did not do justice to the post. Not like Kay and Chris, and Jerry have done since. I was at a difficult stage of trying to get Focusing out into the world. We didn’t have a website then, and I didn’t have a local population to work with. Being chair of BFTA then was a very different experience from being a so-called ‘sofa person’ now, with Jerry. We have had a system of co-chairs for five or six years, and I find that sharing the responsibility is so much lighter and easier that trying to do it on my own.

Also, back then, we did not have a system of peer consultative support (peer CS). I had my Focusing partners, but there was nothing in place to support me specifically in my work. Now, I feel very fortunate to be part of three CS triads. An early collaboration was between Barbara McGavin, Kay Hoffmann and myself, studying Robert Middleton’s empathy-based marketing tools. Greg Madison led a weekend on Focusing-type supervision, at Barbara’s invitation, and this proved a turning point for me. Partners and triads began to be initiated after this. It was strongly supported by Peter Afford’s introduction of peer CS groups as a significant part of our annual gathering.

Where I did get really good support, in my early days of being part of BFTA, was from my dear friend and colleague Eileen Fendick. We managed to do about 10 Introduction to Focusing afternoons locally, over a period of a couple of years. This gave me valuable experience of introducing Focusing in a shared and collaborative context. We learned together, shared and supported each other. Perhaps this is why I am now keen to develop a buddy system for new members, because Eileen was such a great support for me when I was getting started.

All this time, the membership was growing, as Peter’s, Rob’s and Barbara’s trainees completed their training and got their certificates. Graduates from the University of East Anglia also joined us, as well as The Focusing Institute (TFI) Focusing Professionals. At some point it felt necessary to have a website, which Claire Carter created for us. And finally a couple of years ago, our new website took flight, with fully-fledged wings ‘supporting your Focusing journey’, through the hard work and dedication of Manju and Barbara McGavin.
BFTA Gathering Session: Focusing Dialogue on Community

by Sandy Gee

At the BFA annual gathering this year I held a one-and-a-quarter hour Focusing Dialogue session on Community, which most members attended. Focusing Dialogue is my own Focusing-oriented interpretation of David Bohm’s Dialogue practice as taught to me by a colleague, Gill Wyatt. I’ll outline how I explained it in the session as a way of introducing it here, and give a brief account of the session itself.

I introduced Dialogue as:

... a specific practice developed by the physicist David Bohm who, in studying quantum physics, recognised that the true nature of reality is utterly different to how we conceptualise it. We are not ‘billiard ball’ units acting in discrete ways on each other, we are deeply entangled and inter-affecting. The atoms in our very bodies are entangled with and inter-

Fiona has been Focusing since 1991 and a BFTA member since 2001. She offers individual Focusing sessions and Focusing-centred therapy, teaches the Focusing Skills course (in person and on Skype), and runs Teacher/Practitioner training programmes. For more information see our website, www.fionaparr-focusing.co.uk, or contact Fiona directly on fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk.
is utterly inter-related and there is in the universe a naturally occurring principle of emergent complex intelligence. Seeing this reality and how different it is to how we ordinarily conceive of reality, he developed Dialogue as a group practice to realign our thinking and awareness to be in resonance with the true interconnected reality.

I find his work to be hugely compatible and overlapping with Gendlin’s philosophy and that we as Focusing practitioners have an inherent advantage in attempting the practice of Dialogue – we already know how to work with and be with our felt-sense. And our felt-sense is a direct experience of ourselves as complex inter-related intricate process. Gendlin has shown us, and we can directly experience, that intrinsic within our felt-sense is the whole of our outer situations and much beyond.

To help us sense the wider picture of interconnected communities I showed this diagram ‘Visualising our Connections’ representing our ‘interlocking communities of belonging’.

Starting with the small circle marked ‘you’ representing you as a person here in this circle in this room at this session today. The inner circles of ‘you’ represent inner ‘parts’ of us.

In addition each of us carries inside us many other ‘communities of belonging’ (the dotted circles) - our family, our friendship groups, interest groups, spiritual communities etc and they are also somehow present (one member noted the wider Focusing community as one we all belong to). And that is all within the wider-still circle of our human community, which is within Gaia - our planetary community of all beings and elements and then beyond that the whole cosmos. In a deep and real way all these interconnecting levels are present within and between us and I asked that we hold open an awareness of this wider context as we give space to dialogue together on our community.

Differences between Focusing and Wholistic Dialogue

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<td>• Dedicated companion solely to support</td>
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*know how to work with and be with our felt-sense. And our felt-sense is a direct experience of ourselves as complex inter-related intricate process. Gendlin has shown us, and we can directly experience, that intrinsic within our felt-sense is the whole of our outer situations and much beyond.*
I showed my ‘Difference between Focusing and Dialogue’ chart and particularly emphasised the top right box. The process of Dialogue is inter-relational: we need to listen on three levels – inside to our felt-sense, outside to the group, and also beyond that to the much wider context (including Bohm’s conception of inter-affecting emergent intelligence – allowing all of that to also be somehow present with us here).

Finally I went through the ‘Guidelines for Participation’ that I’ve drawn up. They are:

1 Know you are needed JUST AS YOU ARE

2 Adopt a Focusing attitude towards the WHOLE GROUP
   - Be open, curious, receptively attentive
   - Welcome whatever comes
   - Trust that a wiser, wholistic intelligence can emerge
   - Suspend:
     - already known, opinions, judgements
     - urges to ‘fix’
   - If judgements persist – acknowledge them
   - Keep freshly sensing ‘what’s most alive?’

3 Take Risks!
   - Be willing to feel uncomfortable/vulnerable
   - If you are usually confident and speak easily: risk speaking less and listening more
   - If you are usually quiet: risk speaking what’s there for you

4 Include yourself
If you are feeling stuck, bored or frustrated:
   - Ask inside:
     - How might I be contributing to this stuckness?
   - Might there be anything I’m withholding?
   - Voice it!
   - (it’s likely to be just what is needed or missing in the group)

Then I sat back and allowed some space and silence.

After an amount of time that felt just right someone started to speak. It was a new member who spoke heartfully for some time about how moved he was to hear and have it emphasised that he was NEEDED exactly as he is. It gave him the space to breathe, feel at home and include himself and it felt good. Other new members also found the invitation prompted them to speak and show/include themselves where they might have kept quiet. They voiced inner questions about the nature and inclusiveness of the BFA community and whether there was space to belong here (especially if not actually teaching). This theme was responded to from the heart by a number of established members, one saying that this was a place he came to be with people to whom Focusing matters and who make it an important part of their lives. And another saying that teaching didn’t really matter to her compared to ‘this’ – this living, breathing, being, doing felt-sensing process together.

The theme of inclusiveness and the difficulty of acceptance of what we don’t like and what hurts us was taken up by several. One member spoke about discomfort with having judged, excluded and ‘cut off’ people in her outer life. She felt a wrongness about it in resonance with the wrongness of cutting out part of herself or of shutting out anyone in the room. She spoke heartfully about wanting an inner and outer place where all are valued and welcomed. Another spoke about trying to accept someone who is
troubling and hurting her and how rightful respecting boundaries can be held.

The atmosphere that was jointly created almost from the start was one of deep, resonant listening and was visibly present in the silences between people speaking. One person named it as ‘an extraordinary energy in the room’ and a lot of appreciation was expressed for this rather special time we had spent together.

Sandy is a long-term practitioner of Focusing. She’s currently developing a series of workshops on Living an Authentic Life and intends to expand her work facilitating Focusing Dialogues. Feel free to contact her if you’d like more information at wildbalance@gmail.com

Community Wellness Focusing

By Jerry Conway

My particular interest lies in Community Wellness Focusing, working in communities including those in areas of hardship and conflict. Community Wellness Focusing supports what is already working in communities to maintain resilience, and offers communities a set of skills they can use to promote wellness. As part of that work I’m currently involved in a project teaching Focusing in Gaza, using an approach that was previously developed in Afghanistan. Community Wellness Focusing includes the use of objects and drawing as metaphors for our inner experience – something I bring also into my teaching in the UK. I’m keen to explore how Focusing can help social care workers and social workers in their work. I believe that if people in the helping professions can be in touch with their own feelings in a Focusing way, that they will bring a different presence to those they work with.

My interest in Focusing goes back to 1999 and I have a sense of wonder at how much has come for me through this practice of compassionately listening to myself and others. I’m currently exploring how we can increase our understanding of compassionate listening and why we sometimes find that something gets in the way of our being the kind of listener we would like to be.

Jerry Conway teaches Focusing to groups and individuals and is based in the West Midlands area. His particular interest is in Community Wellness Focusing, building selfhelp networks in communities in the UK and overseas, particularly in areas which experience conflict or have limited access to mental health services. For more information, see our website or contact Jerry directly on: www.jerryconway.co.uk
A Focusing proving of Wolf’s Milk (Lac Lupinum)

By Gordon Adam

In homeopathy, information about the symptomatology of new remedies is usually initially obtained by conducting a proving of the remedy, wherein a group of people (usually homeopathy students) take several doses of the remedy and each person records in a diary any new symptoms that arise for as long as that is happening (which can be days or weeks). This process could be termed a Classical proving.

In the last 20 years or so, other proving forms have emerged, including:

   **Trituration proving**
   Trituration is a systematic process of grinding an insoluble source substance with lactose powder in a mortar and pestle in a number of stages to prepare it as a remedy. A trituration proving is a sort of alchemical group process wherein the dynamic effects of the substance being potentised are obtained by observing (through audio or video recording) the conversation and sensations arising within the provers during the process.

   **Dream proving**
   A group of people all take the remedy (or sleep with it under their pillow) and record any dreams arising over the next few nights.

   **Meditation proving**
   In this case information about the remedy is gleaned through the proving group taking the remedy and then meditating on it as a group.

   **Focusing proving**
   In a one-hour workshop at the 2013 annual BFA gathering, a group of five of us conducted the first ever (as far as I know) Focusing proving of a remedy. We did this using a group Focusing process, drawing upon Rob Foxcroft’s ‘Meditative Listening’ protocol. After an initial tuning in, participants had the option to ingest or hold the remedy or not to receive it at all. Three of us took the remedy, one held it, and one person witnessed.

   No one apart from me knew what the remedy was (provings are generally done ‘blind’). We then sat with our experience for the next 40 minutes, at times in silence, and at times sharing whatever was arising and being companioned by someone else in the group.

   The whole thing was recorded (thank you Locana!) enabling me to review the proving.
for this article and to identify certain emergent themes – these are as follows:

**Energy moving upwards and outwards**
“Energy moving up; wanting to come out; as if it wants to extend out further.” “A density that’s pushing out to the periphery; getting right to the edge of my skin; maybe it could break out past the skin and be released beyond?” “Is the wrongness inside about the wrongness out there? Maybe this isn’t all mine and it shouldn’t stop at the barrier of my skin, and yet I hold it all in.”

**Heaviness, density, drowsiness, sleepiness, drugged, underwater**
“Feeling really foggy ... there’s a woozy, ‘ugh’ quality to it ... the atmosphere in the room feels very thick. It’s almost like a drug or an enchantment ... I feel slowed down ... it’s not easy to move. It’s all grey and sludgy and slightly toxic in some way.” “It felt as if my head was underwater.” “It felt like we were in a tank (of water).” “There was a sense of sleeping and being heavy.” “Quite a lot of density and thickness in my body.”

**Mouth, yawning**
Nearly everyone in the group was yawning a lot during and after the proving.

“Impulse to open my mouth wide; when I do that, it feels huge.” “Clear open space around my throat and mouth.”

**Head and shoulders**
“A headache at the top and back of my head.” “As if energy is building up in my head.” “Shifting and moving energy in my head.” “A whoosh of purple coming up into my neck and head.” “Stuff around my head; energy around outside of my forehead.” “My shoulders are where the tension is.” “Something that isn’t ok in this shoulder.”

**Heart**
“Energy and pressure in my heart.” “Fear, excitement, energy around my heart.” “The wooded area is more in my heart/chest – there the colour is white, like white bluebells.”

**Nature/Outdoors**
“I had a sense of a wood – like a bluebell wood.” ”This little elf was sleeping on the woodland floor.” “This is foreign territory for me ... is this something I should explore?” “Brushing past a reddish, trailing creeper; it has a slightly African feel.” “I had a sudden shift of landscape ... looking down onto a beach.” “A sense of a clear blue sky.”

**Clearness**
“A clear open space around my throat and mouth.” “My head has cleared.” “A very clear, delicate purple flower.” “A clear blue sky.”

Some remedy provings clearly correspond with the nature of the proving substance, and with others the connection is less obvious. In this case, possible correspondences could be: the nature/outdoors theme, which would be a wolf’s natural habitat; energy wanting to come out could correspond with a ‘wild’ energy wanting to be expressed; the prevalence of yawning in the group could correspond with the wolf howling; the underwater theme could correspond with the wolf’s (mythological/zoological) connection with the dolphin; the ‘toxic’ theme could be connected to large-scale historical poisoning of wolves (often with strychnine).

One very interesting correspondence in our proving with the original proving of the same remedy comes in this comment from the original proving, comparing dog (Lac Caninum) and wolf (Lac Lupinum):

the dog’s interpretation of her experience is that there is something wrong with herself; the wolf’s interpretation of her experience is that there is something wrong with the world.
For more information about the original proving of Wolf’s Milk see https://www.facebook.com/schkent/posts/477006735711026

As well as being a Focusing practitioner involved in running Focusing Groups and Retreats, Gordon has worked as a homeopath and homeopathic teacher for the last 25 years. He has a particular interest in sea remedies and set up ‘The Sea Remedies Project’ in 2004 to study less commonly prescribed sea remedies, and more recently taught a course on sea remedies, ‘Healing from the Depths’, in Bristol. He has been involved with many homeopathic provings, including a number of meditation provings of sea creatures, and trituration provings of Sea Otter and Grass Snake. See the Directory of Members section of the BFA website www.focusing.org.uk for further information and events or contact Gordon on: gordonadam@blueyonder.co.uk or Tel. 0117 9080494.

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Swallows and Amazons in Buckinghamshire

Emerging practitioners’ weekend September 2013

By Rebecca Harris

The scene: a wet and cold Friday night, a knight in shining armour (Manjudeva in a Nissan Micra), comes to rescue me from Winslow’s petrol station and transport me to Redfield, weekend home for 13 trainee practitioners. The journey I had taken to the petrol station had been an adventure – but the adventure was only beginning. I had been unsure about attending the event and had booked at the last minute. As we gathered in the newly renovated hall (with its space-age robotic wood burner) for our first official meeting, I sensed in and felt growing resentment and a part of me judging and criticising both myself and the others in the group. I noticed a clench in my gut and a familiar voice in my head saying “What are you doing here? Who are these people?” This was the first time that I had met Kay Hoffmann and Fiona Parr who along with Manjudeva were facilitating the workshop and only a few of the other trainees were familiar faces. As we introduced ourselves and our Focusing journeys, I suddenly realised that I had been petrified of comparing myself to other trainees and finding myself falling very short. As the circle moved round, however, it became clear to me that many of us felt unsure about our developing practice and we had gathered from far and wide to sense the next steps on our Focusing path. I felt a warm opening relief spread through my body. I looked again at the faces of my colleagues and was now able to see our connection rather than our difference.

For me the highlight of the weekend was working with experienced Focusers and being given permission to explore different ways of companionsing without feeling scared
of ‘messing it up’. I also particularly enjoyed role-playing ‘a difficult client’ – and a lovely pear cake! Other people’s highlights included the Five Rhythms dancing on Saturday night and an exploration of massage and Focusing, inviting a felt sense of the body to lead the way into movement and touch. For some it was the synchronicity of the external and internal landscape and the opportunity to Focus in nature. A highlight for most was the sight of some of the group successfully racing to save swallows trapped in the barn’s window panes.

Manjudeva, Kay and Fiona held the space beautifully and facilitated informative sessions, Fiona throwing us into the Deep End, Kay exploring Beginnings and Manjudeva Resonance. This was the second year of the emerging practitioners’ workshop at Redfield and those who had attended last year celebrated the changes to the building and the development of the programme. While I hope that I will have completed my training by September 2014, I anticipate that other practitioner ‘amazons’ will be able to experience the opportunity to come together at this event, making the brave new world of practice a little less scary and much more exciting!

Rebecca was called to Focusing five years ago, after seeing an advert for a workshop she felt deeply drawn to attend. The workshop was cancelled but for some reason she found she was compelled to pursue the interest. Five years later she is so grateful for this sense of ‘knowing’ inside. Rebecca is currently training as a Focusing Practitioner and lives and works in London where she introduces others to Focusing in person or via Skype. She can be reached by email on: rebeccaelizabethharris@hotmail.com; or mobile, 07534455262.

A Space for Poetry

By Susan Jordan

At the BFTA/BFA gathering a small group of us decided to take some time for poetry, both sensing into our feelings about it and exploring the process of writing a poem. I took a poetry module as part of my creative writing MA. I’m now doing a poetry course and loving it, and it felt good to be able to offer this little workshop for some of my Focusing colleagues. It seems to me that writing has a lot in common with Focusing – sensing for the right word or image, checking whether it fits, sensing for what needs to come next – and I enjoy trying to bring the two together.
The workshop itself was very much a joint creation. As I began by sharing my relationship with poetry, it became apparent that this was what we all needed to do: to listen to the joys, difficulties and uncertainties that always seem to accompany the writing process. Once all of these had been heard we could begin to find the poems that needed to be written, sensing for what wanted to come and continuing to sense how it needed to develop. The idea wasn’t necessarily to produce a finished piece of work but rather to see what came and, if necessary, to recognise the places in us that might have feelings about it.

In fact all three of us were able to write fairly fluently and from the short time that we had together came two more or less finished poems and a first draft. Sharing the poems we had written was a way of completing the process and acknowledging our feelings about what had emerged. Whether we were experienced writers or relative beginners, there was a sense of satisfaction and also a sense that as a group we had supported each other in the uniquely difficult and uniquely rewarding task of making a poem.

Here is the poem I wrote, which I have revised since the workshop and may revise again. I’ve called it Blessing for the moment but am still not sure if that will be the final title.

That afternoon the hills were in a huff.
Grass was exhausted, far less than green.
Sky sulked behind a tattered veil of wool,
flat scraps of leaves clumped in a dowdy mess.

The day was thrown away, already lost,
dropping useless as a fallen twig.
I turned my back and left it to its ruin,
my feet insulted by the encroach of mud.

Across the field sheep leapt in meek surprise;
one stared, gentle in the lowering light,
and, on the way home, I saw. In front of hills,
their green itself once more, caressed by sky,

four rose hips dangled from a pergola,
deep red, each one a sacrament.

Susan Jordan is a Focusing teacher and Focusing-oriented psychotherapist living and working in South Devon. She first came across Focusing in the early 1990s while she was training in Core Process Psychotherapy, a Buddhist-based approach. She has been writing for most of her life and from time to time offers workshops on Focusing and writing. You can contact her via www.susanjordan.net.
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