

British Focusing Association



NEWSLETTER

Supporting Your Focusing Journey

Issue 1: June 2013

www.focusing.org.uk

Editor's note

Welcome to the first issue of our newsletter! Our aim is to share the lively sense of community which many of us appreciate and enjoy in British Focusing Teachers Association (BFTA). We hope this newsletter becomes a forum for ideas, a place to meet other members, and learn more about Focusing in the UK. Feel free to contact us with feedback and suggestions.

If you would like to receive future editions of this newsletter we will create them in mailchimp. You can sign up to receive future editions by clicking [here](#)

Or paste <http://eepurl.com/zsEwH> in your browser

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2

A message from the Sofa

By Jerry Conway and Fiona Parr

2

How BFTA began

By Peter Afford

4

'How come the experience of Focusing with different people is so different, when I'm the same person?'

By Susan Jordan

5

Members' Corner

In this issue we meet Jenny Brickett ... And Peter Afford

7

Focusing initiatives

By Claire Carter

8

Want to receive more Focusing newsletters?

How to sign up

News from the Sofa

By Jerry Conway and Fiona Parr

As the sofa people (co-chairs) for BFTA we would like to welcome you to our first newsletter. The newsletter is designed to help people interested in Focusing keep in touch with what is going on and create a community of like-minded people. We hope it will provide you with inspiration and support you in your journey with Focusing.

Website Launch

This first issue has been timed to coincide with the launch of our new website, which will make it much easier to find out information about Focusing. We encourage you to have a look at the wealth of information on this site.

<http://www.focusing.org.uk>

Focusing School 2014

After the tremendous success of the first UK Focusing School in 2011, we are pleased to announce the dates for the second Focusing School on October 22nd - 26th, 2014 at Belsey Bridge, Ditchingham, Bungay, Suffolk, NR35 2DZ.

<http://www.cct.org.uk/belsey-bridge/introduction>. We are finalising the details for this and we will be taking bookings later in the year. You can sign up to show your interest here <http://eepurl.com/zLSjv>. BFTA exists to support Focusing Teachers and the development of Focusing in the UK. We aim to bring the felt sense into all our decision making by careful listening to each other and making decisions based on consensus. We hope that in the future it might be possible to set up an organisation to support all those interested in Focusing whether they be Focusing Teachers or not. We hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Warm wishes to you all.

Fiona Parr and Jerry Conway



How BFTA began (the unauthorised version)

Feature article by Peter Afford

Once upon a time, there was a British Focusing Network. It began in the late 1980s when Rob Foxcroft, Barbara McGavin and I met up for a lavish cream tea near Bath to make something happen around Focusing in Britain. Other people who got involved back then were Wendy Webber, David Guinness, Lü Ormiston and Rosemary Pritchard. We hung out and did Focusing together at some delightful weekend meetings at Wendy's Beacon Centre in Devon, and Barbara graphic-designed us a beautiful newsletter.

After a while, we thought we should get more organised about training people to teach Focusing, so we formed the British Focusing Teachers' Association. The first meeting was at my dark and dingy old flat by Clapham Common in March 1994, with ten of us hammering out a rough structure for an organisation to certify



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others to teach. We thought it was a bad idea to expect everyone who wanted to teach Focusing to make the expensive pilgrimage to the USA to be certified by the Focusing Institute, and it would be better to complement the Institute system with a local home-grown one.

The early meetings were hard work! We wanted to work consensually, so everyone had to agree on everything. The 'everyone' included both the existing teachers and their students who wanted to train to become teachers themselves, so there were mixed agendas. We learnt the hard way that focusing and organisational structures do not make easy bedfellows. For example, we started meetings with the 'business' discussions so we could afterwards relax and share the ways we were using Focusing – but the business expanded to fill the time available, so we never got to relax. BFTA meeting-goers of modern times will be familiar with the format that evolved later of leaving the business agenda of the AGM to the end of the weekend, so that the looming deadline motivates us to make the necessary compromises to get something agreed.

By the end of the 90s, everyone was so exhausted with organisational wrangling that BFTA was dead in the water. It was only a meeting of Barbara, Lü and myself in Bath in the summer of 1999 (combined with a visit to a nice tea shop) that brought it back to life. We decided that making the effort to reform was a better option than dropping the whole project. And just as well, for if BFTA had died, a lot of hard work would have gone to waste. By that time, we had the Articles of Association, and the format of Focusing Skills certificates, and Practitioner and Teacher certificates that are the basis of

BFTA's activities today.

Sometime in the early 2000's we got the hang of running the meetings in a way that felt convivial, that minimised the opportunities for wearisome conflict, and that allowed for copious amounts of focusing time. Along the way, we visited some lovely centres and parts of England – amongst them Jenny Brickett's Apple Tree centre in Shropshire, an old Quaker house called Lattendales near Penrith, and Haybergill in Cumbria which we returned to this year. Birth can be painful, and the birth process of BFTA was frequently agonising. But I am glad to have participated in it. The experience taught me a lot about mixing the people and the organising aspects so that something gets done without individuals feeling trampled upon. I think some of the traditional ways of running associations – committees, minutes, procedures – allow for fairness, transparency, and for each person's voice to be heard, even if they are a discipline that requires some work. Forming a group to work together is quite different from people meeting to share their enthusiasm for something. BFTA has become a community of friends that functions well, and I'm now very relaxed in my confidence that it will continue to go from strength to strength in the future.



‘How come the experience of Focusing with different people is so different, when I’m the same person?’

Focusing thread by Susan Jordan

I have several responses to this, and they are coloured by the fact that I am a psychotherapist as well as a Focuser. They aren’t definitive explanations, just ways of framing things that I’ve found helpful. Other people may well have a different sense of what’s happening here.

It’s a familiar idea in psychotherapy that a ‘field’ arises between two people who are engaging with one another. The field includes not only our explicit feelings and intentions but also what’s implicit. This may be parts of ourselves that we have already welcomed and made a relationship with, and it may also be parts of us that we are not comfortable with or have ‘exiled’ from our awareness. When we Focus with a particular companion, we may be subtly drawn towards those areas that the companion is more open to, even though both Focuser and companion have the intention to remain open to everything. This can happen in psychotherapy too.

In a similar way, the ‘field’ is affected by what is happening in us right now. It’s a common experience that if we listen responsively to someone who is Focusing, something in us will resonate with their process. When we come to Focus ourselves, we may then find that what arises in us is somehow related to the other Focuser’s session, even though we may have started from a very different place. This resonance and ‘tuning in’ to one another can create a deep connection between Focuser and companion. For me

it’s one of the things that make Focusing partnerships special.

In ordinary interactions, different people can bring out different things in us because of the mood they’re in or the way they respond, and I think something similar can happen in a Focusing partnership. Although the companion’s main job is to reflect back what the Focuser says, the way they do this, the things they pick out as important or their subtle indications that they like and support something the Focuser has said – or the reverse – can have an effect on the direction of a Focusing session. This can often bring about something new and surprising. However, if I’m Focusing with, say, deep grief and sorrow and I can sense that my companion is finding it hard to stay with me, I may back off from going further. Or, for instance, if I’m spending time with something inside that’s feeling cranky and dissatisfied and my companion is keen for me to find the life forward direction, there may be a bit of me that feels I should go with that. Obviously a perfect Focusing companion would be able to be with everything without flinching and without agendas, but we aren’t perfect. We all slip in and out of what Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell call Self-in-Presence – those spacious, compassionate, accepting qualities with which we can embrace our own or someone else’s ‘somethings’ – and sometimes a Focusing session can be the richer because of it.

In many kinds of psychotherapy it's accepted that our response to another person may be coloured by what's called 'transference' – feelings and assumptions that we have carried over from people and situations in the past. In a Focusing partnership it's possible, though by no means inevitable, that transference feelings may arise, either for the Focuser or the companion. If these feelings can be acknowledged, they can become part of the process. A Focuser once said to me, when I was still relatively new to Focusing, "I'm really feeling I don't trust you." I managed to reflect back what they had said, while silently trying to acknowledge the parts of me that felt hurt and self-doubting. The session continued in a way that was fruitful for the Focuser and we were able to talk about it afterwards. It can also happen – though not often – that the feelings emerge in a way that's more of a 'hijack', to use Ann and Barbara's term. The Focuser may become angry or irritated with the companion, or vice versa, and Self-in-Presence may be temporarily lost. It's not likely that you will find yourself in this

situation, but even if you do there is always the option to Focus later with what has arisen for you, perhaps with a different companion.

Although it's useful when you are learning Focusing to practise with as many people as possible, you will probably want to find one or more regular Focusing partners. Once you have a regular partner, the partnership will develop in its own way and you will both come to know what works best for each of you. What you will also find is that each Focusing session is unique: the process is not only different with different people but different each time with the same person. What comes when we give our attention to the felt sense is always fresh and often surprising. That's the delight of Focusing.



Members' Corner

In this issue we meet Jenny Brickett ... And Peter Afford

Jenny Brickett

My name is Jenny. I first discovered Focusing in 1998, when Peter Afford came to lead a workshop at my Apple Tree Centre, on the Shropshire/Welsh border. At the Apple Tree we offered workshops on therapies, meditation, Earth energies – anything "New Age", as it was inadequately described in those days. It turned out to be one of the last workshops we held before we closed and life moved on into other things.

I trained with Peter in Sheffield for two years, becoming a practitioner in 2000, and continuing my teacher training with Barbara McGavin in Bath until qualifying in 2004. But I was not long qualified when my husband's health began to deteriorate and my giving introductory sessions and running courses became increasingly more difficult to sustain. My role as a carer gradually took

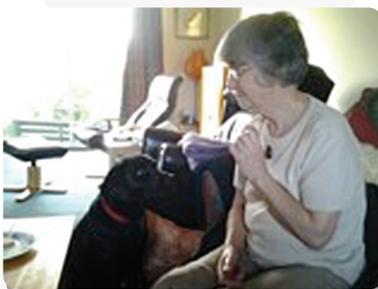
over completely until John finally ended up in the dementia wing of a very wonderful local nursing home, where he died seven months later, in April 2012.

I have found Focusing invaluable in my own life. Dealing with the feelings in my body (rather than trying to get my head around things) has been my lifeline. Learning to be in a state of Presence has been my salvation.

I am once again at a crossroads in my life. This is my chance to fulfil my as-yet-unattained goals. I plan to return to my Focusing work – teaching if that is what unfolds. I would like to work especially with Listening and to go more deeply into Interactive Focusing, as a personal tribute to Janet Klein, whose passion so stimulated my interest.

Through these two skills, I would like to move towards sharing the Focusing qualities without the person with whom I am sharing having to commit to a formal Focusing training. (Peter has called this “Focusing by Stealth”.)

We live in a troubled world! We are going to need new ways of Being to survive. Perhaps I can bridge the gap between trained Focusers and people who do not know that they have this ability.



.....
And now, Peter Afford ...

About myself

Focusing is the best thing I ever learnt to do. I discovered that I had feelings and could do empathy, like other people, and was therefore human. It taught me that bad feelings can become good feelings if I only attend to them. And daily it reminds me that my thoughts, beliefs and ideas, arise in the context of my bodily felt experience – so that if I want some new ones, that’s where I go to let them come.

In teaching Focusing and Listening over the years, I have had many deeply satisfying experiences and survived a few hair-raising ones. It feels as fresh and alive as when I started, but thankfully much less nerve-racking. I nudge people towards seeing the implicit opportunities for natural focusing, and I encourage them to be warm, engaged listeners. I like teaching the more elaborate stuff like decision making, dreams and creative thinking. The simplicity and implicit vulnerability of coming back, fair and square, to real feelings in the moment is, for me, what makes Focusing stand out in the jungle of psychospiritual practices. And my ongoing experience keeps reminding me of the potential to work with the implicit felt sense in many areas of human affairs. We may have only just begun

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We are finding it a wonderful alternative to the more typical 'changes group' or 'focusing circle'.... We interact with the environment and find it present in our focusing and in our relationships....

It's a very joyful time for all of us and although so far we are a small band we are loving it and finding it a wonderful anchor for the rest of the month. Focusing and walking ... being outside, close to the elements seems like a joyful way to be in touch with my own 'elements' ... how is it in here today? Walking brings movement to the process I walk forward briskly, slowly, round in circles ... my companion faithfully stays with me ... patiently accepting, standing, looking at the view, staring at this little patch of ground, this tiny green shoot, listening to that call of the geese as they fly overhead. Sheer magic :-)

Would you like to come too? ... Email me at claire.carter@gmail.com to join a list for monthly email reminders. We meet at Wimpole Hall between Cambridge and Bedford, 8.15 a.m. third Saturday of the month ... or just come along!!

Claire

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Focusing initiatives

By Claire Carter

Focusing walking

A group of us here in Cambridge have recently started focusing and walking together once a month. It's a real joy.

Want to receive more Focusing newsletters?

How to sign up

You can!! But only if you opt in by signing up on our form. You can sign up to receive them by clicking [here](#) or paste <http://eepurl.com/zsEWH> in your browser.

We will also be putting a link on our [website](#).

Thank you for reading our first edition.