



British Focusing Association NEWSLETTER

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From the Editors

Gordon Adam



We are living in unprecedented times, and some of the implications of this for Focusers can be read in the 'Living in the Age of Coronavirus' compilation of 'lockdown stories'. A more in-depth and personal account of lockdown comes in Susan Jordan's appropriately titled 'Everything has Changed'. My own lockdown contributions come in the form of a report on running my Focusing group on Zoom, and an article warning of the health implications of prolonged usage of w-fi and mobile phones. I've also written a rather different and more poetically focused article based on a striking quote by poet David Whyte.

I've enjoyed being involved as a sort of 'co-creator' of Rene Veugeler's article on teaching children Focusing in different cultures. I suggested the theme to Rene last year after seeing the post in Facebook of his smiling group of Hong Kong Children Focusing trainees, and wondering – 'what's that like to teach Focusing in such a different culture?' After some 'incubation time' and several weeks of work on both our parts (mine as editor) I think we have a nice finished product and you can read the answer to my question in Rene's article!

As 'golden-oldie' in this issue I'm delighted to be able to include a 10 year old article by Glenn Fleisch that beautifully highlights the potential healing power of interactive engagement in Focusing/therapy. In a way, in these times of social distancing, this article also serves as a reminder of the power of actual embodied presence and a reminder that everything isn't transferable to Zoom!

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Helen Bryant



I hope you enjoy this edition of the Newsletter with the inclusion of the Charles Eisenstein extract that isn't specifically concerning Focusing but that you may find interesting reading.

For myself, I found the first couple of months of Lockdown quite disorientating and was reassured to read that other people had had similar reactions including tears and loss of orientation. Articles remained unwritten and even editing almost proved too much! Thank goodness others were still able to write and I think we have a good mix of articles for you to read. I particularly loved the honesty and humility of Rene Veugeler's description of the challenge of adapting his teaching of Focusing with children from differing cultures.

We'd love to hear about anything in the newsletter that resonates with you. Maybe it could be the start of a Focusing-type conversation or the starting place for a Zoom meeting/discussion forum?

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Cover photo by Catherine Lawrence—taken just before an outdoor Focusing session by the River Avon

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News from the Sofa

By Kay Hoffmann and Peter Gill

Who could have guessed that so much would change in the world between one newsletter and the next?

Focusing has been a blessing to many people during the Covid-19 lockdown. What a difference it makes to be able to connect with another human in this meaningful and authentic way, when all around us in the media, communication is often either superficial or agenda-fuelled! It is great to see that many BFA folk have stepped up to provide extra online Focusing opportunities and are offering free or reduced-rate sessions and courses to people who have lost income through the pandemic. In the week where people were scrambling to switch to working online, Ildiko Davis provided an excellent webinar on how to navigate Zoom and some of our members began hosting weekly online Changes Groups.

When BFA recently held an online gathering of members, one of the questions we sensed into was "What is needed in the world that Focusing and BFA can respond to?" No one was in any doubt that many people would benefit from learning Focusing – especially during these isolating and anxiety-provoking times. The bigger question of how to get Focusing 'out there' seemed at first daunting, but once we had taken time (first in pairs and then in small groups) to acknowledge and encourage small stirrings of ideas, tentative shoots began to blossom into clearer visions and specific action steps. Once again it was evident that when people simply listen to one another with the kindness, respect and unintrusive curiosity of Focusing, life can move forward in creative ways.

As a result of that two-hour meeting several of our members are now working on ways of sharing Focusing more widely. If you have ideas of your own and would like some company to nurture them into action, please let us know and we will connect you with others who may be able to help.

This year's BFA Community Camp organising team remain hopeful that the event may still be able to go ahead as planned on 15th–19th August at Ringsfield Hall in Suffolk. They have come up with an ingenious way to keep the possibility open despite the uncertainty – prospective camp attendees are invited to make a provisional booking through Brown Paper Tickets without needing to make a payment. For full information and bookings see <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4522714>

Finally, we wish you all well in navigating a kind, creative course through these strange times and look forward to seeing some of you in person again on the other side!



***Kay Hoffmann** has been sharing Focusing with individuals and groups for around 20 years and also runs BFA Practitioner and Teacher training programmes. She loves finding creative ways of teaching Focusing 'from the inside out' and believes that everyone can access their felt experience in a life-giving way when provided with a welcoming, unintrusive space in which to listen to themselves. Kay lives in Bedfordshire and runs courses and workshops around the country and online. kayhoffmann1@gmail.com*

***Peter Gill** became a Focusing teacher in 2005 and is fully qualified with the British Focusing Association (BFA) and the Focusing Institute in New York. He has trained with Ann Weiser Cornell in Inner Relationship Focusing in the USA and Peter Afford in the UK. Peter is a BFA mentor and Focusing Institute Coordinator offering practitioner and teacher training, and he is also qualified in Somatic Experiencing (SE). More recently he has been training in nature connection with Wildwise and is apprenticing in holding grief circles with Azul Valérie Thomé in Devon. Peter lives in Stroud, Gloucestershire.*

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Everything has changed...

By Susan Jordan

In the middle of March I emerged from a two-week silent retreat to find that the world as I knew it had changed. When I rang an old friend, instead of stopping to hear about my retreat she immediately started to tell me about the restrictions that were coming in, the seriousness of this disease, how careful we as older people needed to be. "It's like the plague," she said. I didn't stop to Focus with it, but a part of me remained shocked and incredulous for the rest of that week, as everything gradually came to a halt prior to complete lockdown. The last afternoon (until very recently) that I spent time with a friend was a carefully distanced walk in Dartington gardens the day before they too closed. By then the world had begun to feel unsafe and a part of me that had already felt lonely and vulnerable on the retreat began to feel so again as I took in the scale of the crisis.

This morning I sensed into what's there for me now about the coronavirus. Today isn't one of the days when I feel open-hearted and compassionate and connected with the world, though I've had plenty of those days. It's one of those days when there's fear and vulnerability and a place that feels like a small, unprotected child. There have been other days when grief and anger and despair have predominated, and days when hope and faith in nature's power to regenerate have glimmered through the dark. On all of those days the beauty of the natural world has been a background, even amidst the difficult feelings, and there's always gratitude for living somewhere that has space and countryside around it – and that happens to have a low rate of Covid-19 infection.

"On all of those days the beauty of the natural world has been a background, even amidst the difficult feelings"



Whether or not I've been Focusing formally with the feelings, I've been more than usually aware of them. I'm less busy and seeing fewer people and, like many of us, have more time for being quiet on my own. And, of course, however tranquil and joyful this quiet space has been, at least some of the time, the situation throws into relief concerns about dying and losing people, about being alone and vulnerable, and about what's going to happen to the world. The political problems don't show many signs of going away, and without the political will it's hard to imagine there can be real environmental change. I notice that as I make statements like this it's easy to move away from a Focusing place of care and respect into merging with places that rant and rail and ultimately despair. Those places need me to listen to them in a Focusing way just as much as the other places do.

Like many people I've seen large pieces of my life move from person-to-person interaction to conversations between two screens – or sometimes a lot more than two, thanks to the ubiquitous Zoom. As well as seeing clients and supervisees online I've joined in meditation retreats, writing groups, Qigong classes and shamanic journeys, and attended the funeral of a much-loved Buddhist teacher. I've had Zoom and

phone talks with friends and even had a remote craniosacral therapy session. I can't say it's the same as being with real people, but it's the best we can do and I'm grateful for it, even though it seems to drain energy in a way that being with someone face-to-face doesn't.

The same goes for Focusing with other people. I'm so grateful to Fiona Parr for continuing her regular Focusing groups online, and I've had the chance to Focus one-to-one with her and with other friends. What's come has felt deep and necessary, whether it's been personal or more-than-personal, but there's still been something in me that has longed for direct human contact, in the Focusing time and outside it – a chat over a cup of tea, a chance to admire a friend's garden and stroke her cat. Nevertheless the Focusing itself is a life-saver, a safe haven where I can be with whatever is there in me and have it witnessed and reflected back. There's the preciousness too of receiving and reflecting whatever comes for the other person and sensing our shared trust in the process. The deep acceptance that's there in a Focusing partnership is special, and especially because it's reciprocal. I'm still seeing my psychotherapist online and that's invaluable, but my Focusing partnerships give me something unique and different. It's ironic that one of the people I've been Focusing with online lives less than ten minutes walk away from me but we've never Focused together in person.

In this quiet time, as on a retreat, I've found that some parts of me, normally kept away by other parts, start to emerge from their exile and let me know they want to be heard (I found myself typing 'heart' just then – they want that too). The parts that have emerged have been child parts that feel hurt and lonely and unloved, unwanted and not good enough. With them come critical parts that tell me those other parts have good reason to feel the way they do. Those critical parts have done their best to deny me access to the feelings, which seem so painful they believe I won't survive them. Sometimes it's felt as though there's been deadlock between the two sets of parts, with another part trying to open up the feelings even though they may not be ready to show themselves and the critical parts not ready to relinquish control. What comes then is often depression, a stuck place of feeling-and-not-wanting-to-feel where something is telling me that I'm bad or hopeless and my life hasn't amounted to anything, and that I'll probably die soon so it doesn't matter anyway.

Today what happened in my Focusing was different. There was a child part of me that was very afraid of opening a dark cupboard and seeing and finding out what was in there, and another part that was curious and interested to go into the cupboard, so long as I had a protector with me – in this case a tiger. There was also a part, dressed in white like a doctor or nurse, that wanted me to be cautious and go carefully. Interestingly, and maybe for the first time, the critical parts seemed to want to let go of their control – I felt a real release of tension in the back of my neck as that was happening. I didn't get as far as finding what was in the cupboard; it was enough for now that it was open.

Why am I saying all this? Perhaps because in this time of coronavirus and uncertainty about both death and life, a need is making itself known – which isn't just the pushing of a particular part – to meet myself as completely as I can and live the life that's in me as fully as possible for however long or short a time I may have. And I recognise that those parts can only let go and open up as much as they are able to in any given moment. Holding both these knowings is the wisdom of Focusing, and its gentle strength.

***Susan Jordan** is a Focusing practitioner and teacher, a Core Process psychotherapist and supervisor and a poet and writer. She lives in Ashburton, Devon, on the edge of Dartmoor, and loves the Devon landscape and the south Devon coast. She has been Focusing since the late 1990s and enjoys being a member of her local Focusing community. She has been a member of BFA since 2003. Her first poetry collection, 'A House of Empty Rooms', was published by Indigo Dreams in 2017. Her second collection will be published by Oversteps Books in 2021.*

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Bluebell photo by Susan Jordan



Focusing in the Age of Coronavirus

Some Lockdown Stories from Focusers

Mission Impossible by Peter Afford

After the coronavirus locked us all down, I was asked to run a workshop for an online conference organised by the Middle Way Society. In for a penny, in for a pound, and curious about introducing Focusing in an online format, I rather rashly agreed.

So early one Sunday evening I found myself in a Zoom meeting doing the workshop. Mission impossible! I only had one hour, whereas I usually refuse anything less than two whole days. A screen-full of around 25 people appeared in front of me, whereas I usually draw the line at 12, and hope for less. And we were online, which I have previously avoided since it's relatively easy in London to get people together in the flesh in one place – an experiential encounter, which seems the best way to introduce Focusing.

It went OK. I said a few things, such as the difference between focusing with a small 'f' and Focusing with a capital 'F', we did a short experiential exercise, they talked in pairs, and there were plenty of questions to fill the hour. There are clearly some advantages with online meetings, such as getting participants in and out of breakout rooms to work in pairs at the press of a button, instead of the normal cajoling. And it's easy to be disciplined about one person speaking at a time, since any other arrangement is evidently chaos.

However... at the end, my body had reacted to the experience in a way that it doesn't when we're all in a room together. Not to put too fine a point on it, my armpits were wet! There seems to be something inherently stressful about appearing to be socially engaged with people while actually getting little back in the way of eye contact, facial expressions, nods, grunts and laughter. Online is a brilliant substitute for face to face when the latter isn't possible, but it ain't quite the same thing!

"He wants us to sit with him, but not too close" by Sarah Hadfield

I went in to kiss my 7 yr old daughter goodnight and she burst into tears. "I want you to stay with me forever," she said, "I don't want to die and be all on my own." Her deep sobs brought tears to my eyes and memories of the childhood beginnings of my own similar fears. The challenge required to acknowledge and hold the existential angst of one so young rocked me. I held her and reflected back, "Something in you is so frightened about dying", the words hit home and the tears flowed.

After a while, I asked her what it looked like inside and she described a person with a knife through his heart. I suggested that she ask him if he wanted some company and how close he wanted us to be. She replied, "He wants us to sit with him, but not too close because of coronavirus!" We both shifted into laughter! She realised how funny this was but still went back in to check with him, "He's not worried about coronavirus, he wants a hug." A few minutes later she was fast asleep.

"Focusing has felt like being given a key" by Kate Mercer

Kate's first experiences of Focusing have taken place on an online Focusing group during lockdown

I've had several experiences of Focusing and on each occasion it has felt like being given a key which enabled me to reach and open a place deep inside my inner self. I felt encouraged to pass through and beyond sometimes painful, confusing pathways to get to a sense of a more distilled clearer self. On each occasion a word has come through, that I have then been able to look at in a more meaningful way. I would ask myself "What does this word really mean, and what is the energy behind it?"

This process feels like it is helping me profoundly. Focusing so far for me has been very impactful and has given me direction in the journey towards understanding and accepting myself unconditionally with compassion.

Working with the scared part by Ruth Friedman

At the start of lockdown I was holding a lot of fear, so I did some Focusing on it. What came up for me was that this fear was wanting to help me. It wanted me to take better care of myself. I realised that it could help me. For example – by making sure I remembered to wash my hands often, and to walk rather than taking public transport whenever possible (lockdown rules were different in Belgium), etc.

Focusing helped me to manage that part of me that was afraid and I was able to turn it around, working WITH the scared part – instead of pushing it away. Now it was supporting me in practical ways instead of taking up my energy and attention. It felt like quite a transformation!

Running a weekly Focusing group on Zoom during lockdown by Gordon Adam

Having never been involved in an interactive online group before (apart from ‘business’ meetings), I decided to shift my monthly ‘in-person’ Focusing group in Bristol to a weekly group on Zoom at the beginning of lockdown. The first trial meeting was on 29th March, and the meetings are continuing at time of writing (mid- June). I knew it might be challenging and that I would need to learn some new skills!

I was grateful to attend the very helpful preliminary BFA ‘Working Online’ Zoom talk/discussion with Ildiko Davis on 26th March, and also for a phone chat with Kay Hoffmann about running Focusing groups on Zoom. Both of these interactions equipped me with some basic knowledge and ideas about how to proceed with the group on Zoom.

The first few meetings felt ‘edgy’ and slightly awkward – meeting as a group online was new for most people, including me. We all needed to get used to the technical aspects (e.g. self-muting, switching video on and off, gallery vs. speaker view, etc) as well as being present for each other online. I remember on those first meetings feeling a sense of relief when we got paired up with someone for Focusing and got into our own ‘room’ – most of us were much more familiar and at ease with 1-1 Focusing online. Those first few meetings also left me with a strange sort of ‘jangly electrical’ energy and I almost wanted to jump about and shout as soon as the meeting ended – I usually settled for going outside and going for a long walk! This was a new experience – I generally feel relaxed and content at the end of an ‘in-person’ meeting. Thankfully this edginess has gradually settled and I no longer feel like screaming at the end of meetings!

The meeting format is: group lead-in followed by 5 minutes silence; check-in round (up to 2 minutes each); input on a Focusing theme plus discussion; Focusing in twos and threes; final group sharing. The average attendance has been ten people – much the same as the monthly ‘in person’ groups. Monthly meetings normally last for three hours and initially some people were daunted by the prospect of staring at a screen for three hours. However we’ve learned to make ourselves comfortable by moving around, lying down (with mute on and video off), just listening, etc. Also we’ve managed to bring the time down to two and a half hours which includes a 15 minute tea break at the start of Focusing time.

The group has always been open to people who want to learn Focusing from scratch and I’ve successfully managed to introduce three people to Focusing within the group since lockdown – the first time I’ve introduced Focusing online! I do this by getting in a ‘room’ with new people during Focusing time.

Apart from the Focusing time, people have really valued the ‘listening space’ that the group provides, particularly as many people were having little social contact. We have also valued the opportunity of sometimes quite deep discussions about how the coronavirus situation has impacted on us in different ways. Generally I would say that the level of sharing and discussion has deepened as the weeks have gone by and trust has developed from the regular showing up of most of the group.

It will be interesting to see what the carrying forward of this ‘weekly zoom immersion’ is on the development of the group after lockdown – I somehow can’t imagine that we’ll just go back to ‘things as they were’, although I don’t yet know what the post-lockdown group will look like! Or how long it will be before we can meet in person again!

Focusing Safely Online: A Brief Review of the Health Implications of Exposure to Electromagnetic Radiation

By Gordon Adam

I've wanted to write something about this topic for some time, but have managed to avoid doing so, partly because it is contentious – the idea that using wireless technology could be a health risk, can provoke hostility in people who are addicted to the convenience of this technology. Many people maintain that EMFs (electromagnetic fields) are safe, despite the large and ever growing body of scientific research that would indicate otherwise! Part of the problem is that this information is suppressed and denied by telecommunication companies, and largely ignored by governments, who receive millions of pounds from telecom companies in the granting of transmission licences, and other telecom revenue.

With the greatly increased level of online interaction caused by Coronavirus lockdown measures, as a health practitioner, I now feel an unavoidable responsibility to flag up the fact that **sitting at a computer for hours a day on Zoom or Skype using a wi-fi connection is not a great idea from a health point of view!** And the solution to this is very simple – **switch the wi-fi off and use a cable connection** (Ethernet cable) to the router instead!

My own first inklings on EMF effects came about 14 years ago when I used to write a monthly newsletter for my Buddhist meditation group sitting in bed with my laptop on my thighs. It took me a while to realise that every time I did this for more than a few minutes I started to get tingling in my thighs. This tingling stopped if I switched the computer wi-fi off! Round about the same time I also read about how microwave radiation from laptops can 'heat up' your testicles and lead to infertility – since then I always use a laptop on a table, or if on my lap I make sure the wi-fi link on the computer is off.

About 10 years ago I had a relationship for a couple of years with someone who is mildly electro-sensitive – this means that she is one of those people who can actually feel the physical effects of microwaves in their body. This was demonstrated to be 'real' rather than 'imaginary' (probably what I thought it was originally – it seems like most people are sceptical about EMF effects as default!) on many occasions. E.g. walking outdoors she would get a headache if we walked anywhere near a mobile signal mast, even if not yet in sight. I learned in this relationship to switch my phone and wi-fi off at all times if not being used as this made a physical difference to my partner's well-being.

There are actually millions of people across the globe who are electro-sensitive (and many may not be aware that they are). People who are highly electro-sensitive are unable to enter an intense urban EMF environment like London without getting very ill, and in the most extreme cases, very highly electro-sensitive people need to live constantly in an electromagnetically shielded environment to be able to function. For these people, the rollout of 5G technology is very bad news indeed!

In a book that I'm about to mention in more detail, the author writes *"EMFs are pretty much like coffee. Everyone is sensitive to caffeine, but to different degrees – some people get so jittery and energised, and some people can down three cups before bed and sleep just fine. And I think everyone is affected by EMFs, but some more than others."* It may be the case that some people are more susceptible or vulnerable to harm from EMFs than others—my own feeling is that everyone is affected by EMFs, but some *are more aware of it* than others.' The effect may be the slow, insidious, unfelt alteration of cell functioning in the body!

The book I referred to above is 'The Non-Tinfoil Guide to EMFs' by Nick Pineault, which is an overview of the wide-ranging effects of human exposure to EMFs. The book is written in an accessible journalistic style, and as well as explaining the science, it offers solutions in the form a number of simple, inexpensive steps that everyone can take to greatly reduce their exposure to EMFs. This promotional link for the book <https://nontinfoilemf.com/> gives a concise and accessible overview of some of the negative-health effects of exposure to EMFs. These include cancer, infertility, insomnia, anxiety, depression,

headaches—and even DNA damage and irreversible changes in cell structure and function.

The book is well researched and lists direct links and references to loads of bona fide, well-documented scientific research that shows beyond any doubt that EMFs have wide ranging insidious and destructive effects on the human body. The book was written a few years ago and most of the research relates to 3G and 4G technology—it doesn't really embrace 5G, which will have an even bigger health impact because of the number of transmitters needed and the particular frequencies used and how the signal is pulsed.

Here, in outline, are simple steps that everyone can take to minimise EMF exposure:

1) Avoid using Wi-fi: switch the wi-fi on your router OFF and use a cable (Ethernet) connection to your laptop or PC (or phone). I have two cables permanently installed – one in the living room and one at my desk in the bedroom so I can plug my laptop in wherever I am. I have managed to operate my mobile phone purely on data (i.e. using the mobile phone signal vs. wi-fi) for the last year, and you can get full broadband on your phone by using an Ethernet cable linked via an adaptor.

If you feel you can't survive without wi-fi, or a cable connection isn't possible, then **avoid sitting near a wi-fi router for any length of time and switch it off at night, or if not being used for long periods.**

2) Switch off you mobile phone at night and when you're not using it (or put it on 'flight mode'). If you need to leave it on – **keep it at a distance from your body.** Also do calls using speaker-phone vs. having the phone next to your head. The radiation from phones drops off exponentially with distance – so having it even a few inches away from your head or body makes a big difference to exposure.

3) Avoid using Smart-meters. These are mini-transmitters which send out a harmful pulsed signal. You can refuse to have a smart-meter installed or to have it removed and replaced by a conventional meter.

4) Avoid using cordless phones and Bluetooth devices. These both use EMF radiation.

5) Avoid ongoing physical proximity to transformers, power supplies, chargers, etc. Especially avoid having a charger or transformer next to or under your bed – e.g. charging a mobile phone next to the bed during sleep. The type of radiation from transformers is different to phones and wi-fi, but has its own list of health effects.

A bit of perspective—action vs. fear—doing what you can

We live in an 'electromagnetic age' and it would be virtually impossible to fully remove all of the EMFs in any particular environment without extensive and expensive shielding. I live in a house that's been converted into five separate flats. In my flat there will be the following sources of EMFs: radio waves; TV (UHF/VHF signal); mobile phone signal (both from nearby mobile phone masts, and from any mobile phones that are switched on in nearby flats); wi-fi (my own and that from nearby flats); power supplies or transformers that are switched on (e.g. the power supply for my laptop); and finally my own phone.

Short of moving to an isolated spot in the country, the only things in the above list I'm in control of are my own phone, and wi-fi, and my proximity to any power supplies. So—I choose to switch my phone to 'airplane mode' when I'm not using it, and my wi-fi is permanently switched off. Thereby, I'm taking simple steps to reduce my EMF exposure significantly—and I can test that because I happen to have an EMF meter which shows me what happens when I switch those things off—it makes a big difference!

I hope this information is helpful in enabling the making of positive choices about how to use these devices safely. Some people may notice an improvement in well-being immediately on reducing EMF levels, but it may only be in the longer term that many of us will realise the wisdom in practicing EMF vigilance!

For further information

*Pineault, Nicolas (2017). *The Non-Tinfoil Guide to EMFs*. N & G Media.

*DeBaun, Daniel (2017). *Radiation Nation*. Icaro Publishing. *Complete guide to EMF protection and safety*

*Environmental Health Trust <https://ehtrust.org/> *Directory of EMF resources (including info about 5G)*

*EMF Portal (RWTH Aachen University) www.emf-portal.net *Comprehensive listing of EMF scientific research*

For profile of Gordon Adam see page 20

Staying Connected: Reflections on Teaching Children Focusing in Different Cultures

By René Veugelers



In 2002 I started my Focusing journey in the Netherlands. I immediately felt the strength and power of Focusing. Marta and Ynse Stapert were the Focusing trainers and coordinators who influenced me most. After I became a Children Focusing Trainer I assisted them in several trainings in Europe. After the Dutch Focusing conference in the Netherlands in 2006, I became intrigued by the worldwide Children Focusing community. Over the following years I went to conferences worldwide and presented my Children Focusing work and experiences. My experiences with children and teenagers from working as a psychiatric nurse and social and art therapist from the early eighties, combined well with Focusing.

Over the years my Children Focusing approach and methods became widely known within the Focusing community. When Marta and Ynse retired, I inherited their work in a natural way and took over their training style.

Four key elements have evolved from my experience in working with groups:

- 1) Concrete experience (doing/ having an experience)
- 2) Reflective observation, (reviewing/ reflecting on the experience)
- 3) Active experimentation (planning, trying out what you have learned)
- 4) Abstract conceptualization (concluding, learning from the experience)

As a result of travelling all over the world and working in many different countries and cultures I realised that different cultures need different types of trainings and attunement. I also learned that participants from different cultural backgrounds integrate their experience of Children Focusing training into their own life, work and unique culture, in different ways.

These four key elements are integral to my own style of training, and have been developed through years of experience with different groups and different cultures. I have learned to attune to the wishes and needs of the participants in different countries and cultures. I am flexible in choosing the conditions that are needed for the safe holding environment of the group depending on the particular group that I'm working with. I also offer and integrate my daily Children Focusing practice into the training.

I would like to give some examples of my personal experiences, which highlight some differences and similarities in different cultures:

Hong Kong

My most recent experience was teaching a group of 25 participants in Hong Kong. When I arrived in Hong Kong, I immediately felt a little lost. I couldn't understand the language, the signs – even the smell outside and the atmosphere on the streets was completely different from my own country. In addition there is a 24/7 aliveness of economy in the city of Hong Kong. My safe place became my Hotel room on the 17th floor with a view over many other flats and apartments.

When I started my training program with the group, they all were very eager to learn and experience. But my usual structure and way of working did not resonate with them. Most of my small attunement exercises brought confusion and uncertainty to the group. They didn't get and understand my way of

Dynamic Focusing. Their lack of understanding led to a lot of questions – these questions were always relevant but I wanted to give them training experiences.

Working in a bigger group was difficult because it made it more difficult for people to feel safe to open up. They were all waiting for someone else to open up – like a sort of respect. Also I couldn't read their body language, so again I felt lost. It was as if my usual way of working and attuning didn't connect with them and even brought some resistance. After my tough experience of that first day, on the second day I shared my personal experience, and that I needed to find a different way in with them. I made some proposals for them to work in smaller groups of two or three people instead of working and exchanging in a bigger group – they immediately agreed to this.

I found that I became much more active as a member of these smaller groups. This slowed down both their and my own process and created much more safety for everyone. In the exchanges taking place in smaller groups, I heard and felt that each of them was looking towards the needs of the children in their culture. So, together in the main group, we acknowledged how hard it could be to connect with children in this more or less closed culture. We also acknowledged the importance of being aware of the constant bigger cultural influences.

This made my training approach and method even more precise: how you can integrate Children Focusing experience into your own process, your life, and even more importantly, how to tune into the needs of children. With this clarity and awareness, my training skills and style gained a new depth, and I also found different ways to support my lost parts and to maintain grounded presence.

And at the end of our intense training everyone felt more open, more grounded and more playful! This is our expression of that process and making of the certification picture:



Gaza

Another unique experience was my training week in Gaza with Mary Jennings and Jerry Conway. I supported them in offering a Children Focusing module at a trauma centre. Again the staff and workers were very eager.

The group had been trained in Focusing for adults, by Mary and Jerry and we prepared a module for working with traumatized children. Immediately with my opening exercise I felt their tension and hesitation to go inside and explore their own process. Their need was more for how to be and work with children and give them a happy and joyful experience and positive input. I understood their need in their complex life situation and I explained how Focusing worked for me and how to support sadness, anger, anxiety, grief and trauma. I explained to them that the more they were able to hold and be with their own felt senses related to these essential emotions, the more they would be able to hold and be this with the children. They understood but their resistance stayed.

I made my training very practical with smaller steps and supporting participants to integrate their own life experience into their work. It was treading a thin line: are they able to Focus themselves and face their own deeper emotions and felt senses, and to slow down their (understandable) need to support the children and give them something positive. I felt that something different and additional to the traditional Focusing process was needed.

During the training days it felt a bit artificial and I wondered if they really understood my goals and intention. Every day we made a huge space for questions related to understanding the behaviour of the children in a different way, and I realised from the sensitivity of their reactions and feedback that they easily felt judged.



The last day was very special and unforgettable. They repeatedly asked me how all this could work for children and they want to see me do it in practice. So, on the last day we agreed to bring some children to practice. I felt overwhelmed because there were more than 20 kids, ranging in age from three or four to late teens. (They had brought their own children, their family members). Without speaking their language, I immediately connected with them and three of my students were able to hold the group and offered some of the exercises from our training. What was really special was that I also felt the need of the children for something positive, AND how challenging it can feel not to be able to solve their problems immediately.

Throughout this whole day I was able to be a part of the group of children AND I supported the three students to slowly integrate the new Focusing language and interventions into their existing way of

working. Basic Children Focusing questions or instructions like: “Where do you feel it?” or “Invite your hand to express how it feels inside” or “Say hello to yourself and all that is alive and noticeable inside” became magical moments because the children immediately understood this different way of working (and the students of the centre could practice their newly learned skills and how to integrate these into their own unique way of working).

We all felt that the holding space and environment is also an important influence in this process.

This picture on the previous page captures some of the aliveness and connection.

Summary

I learned that different cultures need different types of trainings and attunement. I also learned that participants from different cultural backgrounds integrate their experience of Children Focusing training into their own life, work and unique culture, in different ways. It needs time, space and an open attitude from me as a trainer to hold and be aware of their cultural influence and background, and accepting that we can't go faster than the slowest process!

Despite all of my training experience, I never know in advance how a foreign training will go. Important aspects are:

- It is an adventure and challenge to take care of my own presence: what do I need to stay grounded in a different environment?
- How this influences me as a trainer?
- Are my usual exercises attuned to the need of the participants?
- How the participants are able (or not yet able) to find a transition into their own unique way of working?
- How can I stay flexible and open to their current life situation and integrate this into their training experience?
- It is a adventure to create an open training atmosphere where the participants feel safe, understood and are able to integrate new skills in their own unique way.

Related to the Children's work:

- A child will immediately notice and feel the different approach and attitude. (They are natural Focusers at every age!)
- This is beyond language! It is more about the way you are in presence and how you are offering interventions (instead of offering solutions)
- Each child has a need to be heard and seen in their specific environment and life situation.

If you have questions about the possibilities of the Children Focusing approach or training, my contact details are below, or look at the (new) Children page of The International Focusing Institute website where you can find a contact person in your country:

<https://focusing.org/felt-sense/children-and-focusing>

René Veugelers is a Focusing Coordinator specialising in Children's Focusing, with an emphasis on the non-verbal world. He teaches parents, therapists, teachers and others how to be with children in a Focusing way, how to (re)connect to their own inner child and how to work with their creativity. His experiences as an Art therapist and psychiatric nurse, and his training in Emerging Body Language (EBL), embrace an expanded richness of creative elements and support a natural unfolding of creative process. René lives and works in the Netherlands and teaches internationally. He is renowned as an enthusiastic and inspiring teacher.

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Co-Presencing in Wholebody Focusing-Oriented Therapy: Carrying forward blocked process and structure-bound states through interactive engagement

By Glenn Fleisch

One of the biggest challenges as a therapist is working with what Gendlin calls structure bound states. These are repetitive or fixed behavioral or reaction patterns that tend to persist over long periods of time. I have found that these structure bound states (or chronic blocked process) sometimes tend to remain even after years of Focusing and therapy. There are times, however, when we are able to access and process a long-term stoppage or repetitive pattern. In this article, I am going to share some of my experiences in utilizing my "Co-Presence experiencing" as a resource with clients to facilitate the working through and carrying forward of the deeply stuck places. Often these very ingrained and embodied patterns seem to require a more engaged, expressive, dramatic interactive engagement in order for their transformation to unfold. I hope some of my examples will demonstrate this process.

Co-Presencing in Wholebody Focusing-Oriented Therapy

Co-Presencing is an interactive-relational space of shared experiencing. In the space of Co-Presence, I become more attuned to the whole field of experiencing between myself and my client, one that includes attention to energy, movement, gesture, posture, images, sensory-affective information, etc. Essentially, whatever crosses our shared field of consciousness is part of the Co-Presencing process. This opens our awareness to register, resonate and metabolize every nuance of experience in the shared field, allowing something fresh, alive and genuine to come forward in each moment of therapy.

In this space of Co-Presencing, we become informed by the natural emergence of "something" that arises from the support of grounded presence. My presence becomes organically attuned to the presence and embodiment of the client, who is supported to invite and wait for whatever emerges into awareness. We don't have to know what is coming, or what to do, but trust in the body-wisdom to do the listening and inform us of what might be unfolding here. This forms the foundation of an authentic living together in therapy. I become informed by everything that comes into conscious awareness, not only reflecting back an empathic felt understanding of what my client might be experiencing, but also what the experiential process might be implying as needed here.

I want to offer some examples that highlight this interactive, expressive element of Co-Presencing in therapy with chronic blockages, highlighting how relational engagement can awaken and activate the life-energy in stuck places that had been stopped or frozen:

Example #1

A client named Sam in his mid- 50's, was in recovery from alcohol abuse and, later in our therapy, also confronted and stopped a pattern of sexual addiction. Sam was able to drop into a space of deep feeling and expressing, and was open to working in a whole body way (including standing), so that our work proceeded well for quite a while. Then we seemed to hit a bit of an impasse, especially when he began to explore the sexual addict part of himself- and sensed a very deeply wounded place that had been abandoned and abused as a young child. Sam described how this young part of him had been yearning for a very deep connection that never happened.

So as we were standing, I felt his (the very young boy's) eyes looking toward me. I could sense something in me that wanted to turn away, to look down and avoid the longing and desiring of presence those eyes were expressing. I then took the step of stating, "I can really feel those eyes wanting contact with mine." "Yes", said Sam, "I think this is the deep wound, not just the physical/sexual abuse, but the sense of absence, no one there." He said, "If you could stay connected with my eyes, that would mean so much..." which we did (during several sessions), often for 10-15 minutes. This was at first extremely challenging for a part of me that doesn't like to be seen so closely, yet after a while, felt more and more ok.

As we stayed in that space, I felt that a scene was unfolding of a boy (maybe age 2 or 3) being looked at lovingly by his father, and in me, a sense that I could be that father to that boy and the boy in me who also experienced a deep wound of father abandonment. During one poignant session, tears came to both of us as we allowed this process of close eye contact to unfold. Sam said, "Thank you so much, for staying present with me. This is what it needed." I noticed that his hands were gently touching and moving up and down his torso. It felt like something important was being evoked and experienced there. When I pointed this out, he affirmed, "Yes, this eye contact feels very healing inside. It feels like there is a laying down of new tracks inside me here, going on right now."

Example #2

I have been working with the client named Bill for about four years. It became clear that he'd suffered multiple traumas in early life, but had operated with such dissociation and substance abuse that there was little awareness or experiencing of suffering. We have identified at least two or three recurrent parts that inhabit his inner world and that play themselves out in our therapy space together: the acting-out addict (like a teen on the loose); a pseudo-parent who permits the acting-out; a very insecure, anxious, lonely young child who feels very badly about himself and is always seeking approval and trying to please. All these characters have come out in various stages in our therapy.

At the time of this scenario, Bill had decided to stop using drugs and alcohol, which triggered an upsurge of anxiety, terror and despair. In a recent session, he described this young place in him as feeling "being out in the cold" without the drugs, a sense that it is lost in a cold, cruel, uncaring world.

What came out was "Why is it necessary to suffer? Wasn't it enough as a child?" I felt this in my body as a crying out from that very young child who felt left out in the cold (not connected with a mother's love and warmth) – something that I had also experienced. "Where's the mother? How do you evoke the love of the mother?" An image came to me (that I did not share until later in the session) of Bill as a young boy surrounded by a circle of loving women. I invited "Maybe you can sense what this place might need or want now?" "It wants you to tell me that you have confidence in me – that you believe I can stop using – that you support me and my healing and be there for my recovery...." I said, "Yes, of course, and what is coming for me is to see if it feels ok to hold your hands, and also to take some time to connect with my/our body so that what comes from me is a genuine expression from inside." "Sure." So we took a couple of minutes of silence, then I just allowed the words to come from the living body of our felt connection. As I reflected back my sense of confidence, support, caring, and his courage for being willing to open to this deep healing, our bodies naturally began to sway side to side. I felt like we were rocking a baby, being soothed by the movement and energy from the Mother.

As I shared the words, it felt like an energy was being transmitted through our hands and grounded co-presence. His whole energy-body transformed and suddenly he began to sing a prayer in a beautiful soulful way. Then he said the prayer in English, something like, "God, please grant me the strength and desire to gain salvation, to heal and grow in mind and spirit. I need your help to reach my salvation." We then stood hands in hands in silence for another minute, with bodies still swaying. In me, I felt my heart open and a wave of love swept through me. We then sat and talked a bit before ending the session. I could feel that his whole being had gone through a deep transformation.

Example #3

I have been working with Jane for many years. As a victim of severe verbal, sexual and physical abuse as a young girl, her system had developed a very ingrained pattern of withdrawing into states of sleep, disconnection, passivity and inactivity that at times could mimic a catatonic state of frozenness. While we have made progress in many areas of her living, this pattern has always remained. It had been relatively inactive, until recent episodes when her husband would act up with aggression and anger. As we explored this pattern, Jane said, "It just wants to lay in bed, not get up and not have to do anything." This time as she described this, I felt something different. I got a strong sense of the withdrawing part having an aliveness of its own – like it was asserting itself in its own way.

So I invited Jane to sense if she would like to allow this place to express itself more outwardly here. She took some time and said, "Yes, I can feel it saying "NO!!!" You can't make me go out there into that abusive world." I reflected this back and invited us to stay present with that place, maybe letting her whole body inhabit that part. She went on, "It's saying "no" to other people, to the world, to violence... It has a

strength that I never realized before." As she was speaking, I invited my body to be that young part in order to experience a deeper resonance with that part of herself. And as I did, I felt a sequence of anger, a sense that it was carrying a burden that it shouldn't have had to carry (since her parents didn't respond to early cries for help and protection). I asked Jane if it was okay to share what I had just been experiencing. She agreed and as I shared what had come for me, I could see that something deep in Jane felt moved as tears came to her. Jane said that she felt touched and moved, that in this place which most of the time had been badly maligned, she could now feel the positive life energy there. She could feel more of the "No I won't," "You can't make me," "You won't hurt me anymore," infuse her whole body. I also had a strong sense of both of us being protective adult to that place.

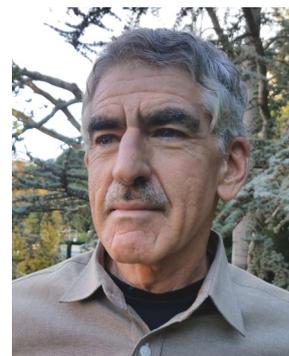
Conclusion: Co-Presencing as relating at the edge and filling in what needed to happen

Since we are relational beings, and early life traumas are interpersonal in nature, their healing and resolution requires a new relational experiencing. Empathic attunement and whole body resonating with the larger field of experiencing allows for something to emerge into awareness that wants or needs attention. In addition to establishing grounded presence, being with what comes in a listening and Focusing oriented reflective space, there are times when this more active, engaged living through together seems necessary for allowing blocked and exiled places to emerge, explore and express themselves. This activates the blocked process and seems to allow the stoppage to start to flow again into its own life possibilities. It feels like a truly authentic relating at the edge of awareness, and stretching me to go beyond my own limitations in order to offer myself in authentic ways to my clients. I hope that these examples give a flavor of the multiple avenues of carrying forward that can organically arise and be allowed expression in the space of Co-Presencing.

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The Door Swings Open...or Does It?

A poetic Focusing reflection on a quote by David Whyte

By Gordon Adam

As human beings we have this immediate gateway –
you’ve just to articulate exactly the way that you’re exiled,
exactly the way that you don’t belong,
exactly the way that you can’t love,
exactly the way that you can’t move...
and you’re on your way again. You’re on your way home.
If you can just say exactly the way that you’re imprisoned –
the door swings open.

David Whyte

I came across this quote several years ago at a Wholebody Focusing workshop with Kay Hoffmann in Bristol. I was trying to find another poem by David Whyte on my phone but stumbled upon this quote instead. The words felt very resonant with Focusing and were well-received by those at the workshop.

I recently read the quote at my Focusing group and invited a ‘felt sense response’ from the group. This led to an opening up of different aspects of the quote. A friend I sent the quote to responded “Wow, is that really true?” My response was “Well, like a lot of things it’s partially true.” I had a sense that there might be some value in exploring what was ‘true’ and what was ‘partially true’ in the quote and I continued this process by bringing it into a Focusing session a couple of days later. The idea for this article arose from that Focusing session, where I ‘unpacked’ different aspects or levels or responses to the quote. This involved an interesting evaluation of the ways that Focusing works (or doesn’t work) and of psychological healing in general.

‘Articulation’ (I): Saying it exactly as it is... and being heard

“If you can just say exactly the way that you’re imprisoned – the door swings open”

This resonates very much with the ‘articulation’ that happens in Focusing, where I take time to find the most ‘exact’ words I can that fit with my particular experience, or felt sense. Finding those words, saying them aloud, and then hearing them back can often enable some movement, or ‘shift’ or ‘living forward’ of my inner experiencing. For me, the shift, if it comes, usually happens either when I say the words, or sometimes when I receive them back again from my companion (either immediately or just after).

Herein comes the first inadequacy of the quote – there is no mention of being heard – and this is significant! For years and years, before I discovered Focusing, I was able to write down ‘exactly’ what I was feeling (over and over and over again)... but no one heard it, and no doors swung open! And I doubt if saying it aloud to no one in particular would have made much difference – what was missing was being listened to, being heard, being witnessed.

So I would suggest that ‘saying it exactly as it is’ constitutes only *one part* of a bigger healing process – another important part is being heard, witnessed, understood, or validated.

‘Articulation’ (II): Expressing it exactly as it is... and being witnessed

“As human beings we have this immediate gateway – you’ve just to articulate exactly...”
The “we” implies that all human beings have this option or capacity – is that true? Does everyone have this ‘gateway’? I would say no, at least not in the terms of *verbal* articulation – that’s one reason why ‘classical’ Focusing doesn’t work for everyone. Here is a dictionary definition of articulate (as a verb): “to speak or enunciate words clearly and distinctly”. Or as an adjective: “able to express oneself fluently and coherently”

What about the many people who can't articulate through speech? Does the mean the door will stay closed forever? At this point something in me feels angry at the quote for somehow being elitist or discriminatory! HOWEVER, if I let the quote shift into the level of *metaphor*, then the angry part in me settles down again!

As metaphor, I can interpret 'articulate' more freely. Then it could mean articulate through sound, position, movement, gesture, image making, etc. And perhaps (and I'm not sure about this) all of us as humans can *express* our inner essence, in one way or another, in the right supportive conditions and in some way that could be witnessed – e.g. maybe even on a stage, or in a particular job or role in life.

And this could correspond to the more diverse forms of Focusing that have evolved from the recognition that not everything can be expressed in words – e.g. Wholebody Focusing, Children Focusing, Focusing with Art, etc. And in some of these forms of Focusing, 'being witnessed' or 'being seen' becomes more important than 'being heard'.

Implicit Empowerment

When I do a Focusing demo for a group of people who are new to Focusing, I'm conscious that I'm acting as a sort of 'Focusing role-model', and that what comes up for me in the demo can potentially enable or limit the inner territory that is deemed appropriate to explore for the group. So, for instance, if I get in touch with deeper emotions in the demo, this implicitly gives permission or empowers the others to access this level of experiencing in their Focusing, if that is what needs attention for them.

Correspondingly, in the David Whyte quote, I like it that he gives permission and even validates that the reader might feel exiled, or that they don't belong, can't love, can't move, or feel imprisoned. This is a sort of implicit acknowledgement of the importance of these big powerful basic human needs, and that one or more of those needs may be unmet in us... and, in turn, he is giving the reader permission to express this – a message of something like 'It's ok to feel these things, and it's ok to express that' – this too is part of being human! This feels affirmative and supportive.

Imprisonment

The idea that we might be in some way imprisoned is powerful. Staying with the idea of the quote as metaphor, what might 'imprisonment' translate to in felt reality?

If I am imprisoned, then I'm not free to be fully who I am. In psychological terms, this could mean that I'm identified with a part of myself (to the exclusion of other parts), emotionally shut down or disconnected, depressed, addicted, dissociated, traumatised, or caught in a 'tangle', or simply feel stuck in my life. Of course the imprisonment could also be literal and I could be actually physically enslaved by another person or group of people or by a political regime.

There is something of me that is not being allowed or permitted – and this may be conscious or unconscious. People may be unconscious of being imprisoned. The realisation of imprisonment may be an important first step in eventually escaping from the prison – although this process could be ongoing over many years of a person's life.

Home

"You're on your way home" What is home? What does it mean to feel at home?

John O'Donohue says "Your body is your home; your body is the only home that you have in this universe." So maybe feeling at home means that I feel comfortable and at ease in my physical body, 'in my own skin'. The song 'Honestly Ok' by Dido comes to mind – here is part of it:

I just want to feel safe in my own skin
I just want to be happy again
I just want to feel deep in my own world
But I'm so lonely I don't even want to be with myself anymore

Home could also mean my external home – my house, or something bigger that I belong to – my community, town or country. Or maybe it's something even bigger – do I feel at home on the planet, in the universe? Do I feel at home in existence?

As metaphor, maybe 'at home' means whole, embodied, grounded, integrated, unified, at peace, belonging, in harmony, being fully oneself, fully human, or even enlightened.

"On your way" suggests that home is a destination? So what does it mean to arrive home? Maybe Derek Walcott has the answer in his poem 'Love after Love':

Love after Love

The time will come
When, with elation,
You will greet yourself arriving
At your own door, in your own mirror,

And each will smile at the other's welcome,
And say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
To itself, to the stranger who has loved you

All your life, whom you ignored
For another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

The photographs, the desperate notes,
Peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott

The door swings open

"The door swings open" interpreted literally suggests immediate escape, freedom or salvation – this does not correspond with my experience of reality! As metaphor it corresponds quite well with the shift or living forward that happens in Focusing, but only if I understand that each shift is a *step in an ongoing healing process*, and not some sort of ultimate liberation or enlightenment (though I don't wish to preclude this as a possibility!)

As metaphor, the door swings open once and imprisonment is replaced with freedom. In reality, it is more likely that the door will open and close many, many times – AND – I may or may not choose to walk through it!

The door swinging open, on its own, is a bit like articulating but not being heard! The extra bit that's needed is a readiness and willingness to walk through the door. Translated into Focusing language, the door swinging open could be a felt shift – maybe I suddenly get new perspective on a situation that I've been stuck in for a while, but to bring that new awareness to fruition, I need to *act* on it. As Gendlin himself says "Focusing as such does not sufficiently provide moving out. There also needs to be a movement outward, into interaction."

Conclusion

The conclusion is that there is no conclusion, and this reflection probably raises as many questions as it provides possible answers or interpretations. Life is an ongoing process of journey and change, during which there will hopefully be times when I step out of various prisons and temporarily feel at home in my own skin and in the universe. Even death could be seen as the entrance into some new phase of journeying (where I might possibly feel quite at home!)

I'll end where I started, with a poem by David Whyte – *Finisterre*, which could be translated as 'end of land' or 'end of the world' – but of course at the end of whatever phase we've been in, is the beginning of

the next...

Finisterre

The road in the end taking the path the sun had taken,
into the western sea, and the moon rising behind you
as you stood where ground turned to ocean: no way
to your future now but the way your shadow could take,
walking before you across water, going where shadows go,
no way to make sense of a world that wouldn't let you pass
except to call an end to the way you had come,
to take out each frayed letter you brought
and light their illumined corners, and to read
them as they drifted through the western light;
to empty your bags; to sort this and to leave that;
to promise what you needed to promise all along,
and to abandon the shoes that had brought you here
right at the water's edge, not because you had given up
but because now, you would find a different way to tread,
and because, through it all, part of you could still walk on,
no matter how, over the waves.

David Whyte



Footnote: Cape Finisterre, (a.k.a. Cabo Fisterra or Cabo Finisterre) is a rock-bound peninsula on the west coast of Galicia in Spain. In Roman times it was believed to be the end of the known world. (Wikipedia)

Photo of Cape Finisterre by Mmacbeth <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28919188>

Gordon Adam lives in Bristol, UK. He is passionate about Focusing and in building Focusing community. He leads introductory workshops in local communities, runs an open monthly 'changes' type Focusing group, sends out a regular local Focusing newsletter and is co-creator of the BFA Focusing Community Camp. Gordon has been running 5-day Focusing retreats on Dartmoor and in the Southwest for the last 10 years, combining Focusing with periods of silence, immersion in the natural world and temporary community. He also works as a homeopathic teacher and supervisor and is editor of this newsletter.

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'A More Beautiful World Shimmers Just Below the Surface'

By Charles Eisenstein

This is an extract from 'The Coronation' —an essay written in March as one response to the Corona Virus.

There is an alternative to the paradise of perfect control that our civilization has so long pursued, and that recedes as fast as our progress, like a mirage on the horizon. Yes, we can proceed as before down the path toward greater insulation, isolation, domination, and separation. We can normalize heightened levels of separation and control, believe that they are necessary to keep us safe, and accept a world in which we are afraid to be near each other. Or we can take advantage of this pause, this break in normal, to turn onto a path of reunion, of holism, of the restoring of lost connections, of the repair of community and the rejoining of the web of life.

Do we double down on protecting the separate self, or do we accept the invitation into a world where all of us are in this together? It isn't just in medicine we encounter this question: it visits us politically, economically, and in our personal lives as well. Take for example the issue of hoarding, which embodies the idea, "There won't be enough for everyone, so I am going to make sure there is enough for me." Another response might be, "Some don't have enough, so I will share what I have with them." Are we to be survivalists or helpers? What is life for?

On a larger scale, people are asking questions that have until now lurked on activist margins. What should we do about the homeless? What should we do about the people in prisons? In Third World slums? What should we do about the unemployed? What about all the hotel maids, the Uber drivers, the plumbers and janitors and bus drivers and cashiers who cannot work from home? And so now, finally, ideas like student debt relief and universal basic income are blossoming. "How do we protect those susceptible to Covid?" invites us into "How do we care for vulnerable people in general?"

That is the impulse that stirs in us, regardless of the superficialities of our opinions about Covid's severity, origin, or best policy to address it. It is saying, let's get serious about taking care of each other. Let's remember how precious we all are and how precious life is. Let's take inventory of our civilization, strip it down to its studs, and see if we can build one more beautiful.

As Covid stirs our compassion, more and more of us realize that we don't want to go back to a normal so sorely lacking it. We have the opportunity now to forge a new, more compassionate normal. Hopeful signs abound that this is happening. The United States government, which has long seemed the captive of heartless corporate interests, has unleashed hundreds of billions of dollars in direct payments to families. Donald Trump, not known as a paragon of compassion, has put a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions. Certainly one can take a cynical view of both these developments; nonetheless, they embody the principle of caring for the vulnerable.

From all over the world we hear stories of solidarity and healing. One friend described sending \$100 each to ten strangers who were in dire need. My son, who until a few days ago worked at Dunkin' Donuts, said people were tipping at five times the normal rate – and these are working class people, many of them Hispanic truck drivers, who are economically insecure themselves. Doctors, nurses, and "essential workers" in other professions risk their lives to serve the public. Here are some more examples of the love and kindness eruption, courtesy of [ServiceSpace](#):

*Perhaps we're in the middle of living into that new story. Imagine Italian [airforce](#) using Pavoratti, Spanish [military](#) doing acts of service, and street police [playing guitars](#) -- to *inspire*. Corporations [giving](#) unexpected wage hikes. Canadians [starting](#) "Kindness Mongering." Six year old in Austr-*

lia [adorably gifting](#) her tooth fairy money, an 8th grader in Japan making 612 [masks](#), and college kids everywhere [buying groceries](#) for elders. Cuba sending an army in "[white robes](#)" (doctors) to help Italy. A landlord allowing tenants to [stay](#) without rent, an Irish priest's [poem](#) going viral, disabled activists [producing](#) hand sanitizer. Imagine. Sometimes a crisis mirrors our deepest impulse -- that we can always respond with compassion.

As Rebecca Solnit describes in her marvellous book, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, disaster often liberates solidarity. A more beautiful world shimmers just beneath the surface, bobbing up whenever the systems that hold it underwater loosen their grip.

For a long time we, as a collective, have stood helpless in the face of an ever-sickening society. Whether it is declining health, decaying infrastructure, depression, suicide, addiction, ecological degradation, or concentration of wealth, the symptoms of civilizational malaise in the developed world are plain to see, but we have been stuck in the systems and patterns that cause them. Now, Covid has gifted us a reset.

A million forking paths lie before us. Universal basic income could mean an end to economic insecurity and the flowering of creativity as millions are freed from the work that Covid has shown us is less necessary than we thought. Or it could mean, with the decimation of small businesses, dependency on the state for a stipend that comes with strict conditions. The crisis could usher in totalitarianism or solidarity; medical martial law or a holistic renaissance; greater fear of the microbial world, or greater resiliency in participation in it; permanent norms of social distancing, or a renewed desire to come together.

What can guide us, as individuals and as a society, as we walk the garden of forking paths? At each junction, we can be aware of what we follow: fear or love, self-preservation or generosity. Shall we live in fear and build a society based on it? Shall we live to preserve our separate selves? Shall we use the crisis as a weapon against our political enemies? These are not all-or-nothing questions, all fear or all love. It is that a next step into love lies before us. It feels daring, but not reckless. It treasures life, while accepting death. And it trusts that with each step, the next will become visible.

"What can guide us, as individuals and as a society, as we walk the garden of forking paths? At each junction, we can be aware of what we follow: fear or love, self-preservation or generosity. Shall we live in fear and build a society based on it? Shall we live to preserve our separate selves? Shall we use the crisis as a weapon against our political enemies? These are not all-or-nothing questions, all fear or all love. It is that a next step into love lies before us."

Please don't think that choosing love over fear can be accomplished solely through an act of will, and that fear too can be conquered like a virus. The virus we face here is fear, whether it is fear of Covid-19, or fear of the totalitarian response to it, and this virus too has its terrain. Fear, along with addiction, depression, and a host of physical ills, flourishes in a terrain of separation and trauma: inherited trauma, childhood trauma, violence, war, abuse, neglect, shame, punishment, poverty, and the muted, normalized trauma that affects nearly everyone who lives in a monetized economy, undergoes modern schooling, or lives without community or connection to place. This terrain can be [changed](#), by [trauma healing](#) on a personal level, by systemic change toward a more compassionate society, and by transforming the basic narrative of separation: the separate self in a world of other, me separate from you, humanity separate from nature. To be alone is a primal fear, and modern society has rendered us more and more alone. But the time of Reunion is here. Every act of compassion, kindness, courage, or generosity heals us from the story of separation, because it assures both actor and witness that we are in this together.

I will conclude by invoking one more dimension of the relationship between humans and viruses. Viruses are integral to evolution, not just of humans but of all eukaryotes. Viruses can [transfer DNA](#) from organism to organism, sometimes inserting it into the germline (where it becomes heritable). Known as horizontal gene transfer, this is a primary mechanism of evolution, allowing life to evolve together much faster than is possible through random mutation. As Lynn Margulis once put it, 'we are our viruses'.

And now let me venture into speculative territory. Perhaps the great diseases of civilization have quickened our biological and cultural evolution, bestowing key genetic information and offering both individual and collective initiation. Could the current pandemic be just that? Novel RNA codes are spreading from human to human, imbuing us with new genetic information; at the same time, we are receiving other, esoteric, 'codes' that ride the back of the biological ones, disrupting our narratives and systems in the same way that an illness disrupts bodily physiology. The phenomenon follows the template of initiation: separation from normality, followed by a dilemma, breakdown, or ordeal, followed (if it is to be complete) by reintegration and celebration.

Now the question arises: Initiation into what? What is the specific nature and purpose of this initiation? The popular name for the pandemic offers a clue: coronavirus. A corona is a crown. "Novel coronavirus pandemic" means "a new coronation for all."

Already we can feel the power of who we might become. A true sovereign does not run in fear from life or from death. A true sovereign does not dominate and conquer (that is a shadow archetype, the Tyrant). The true sovereign serves the people, serves life, and respects the sovereignty of all people. The coronation marks the emergence of the unconscious into consciousness, the crystallization of chaos into order, the transcendence of compulsion into choice. We become the rulers of that which had ruled us. The New World Order that the conspiracy theorists fear is a shadow of the glorious possibility available to sovereign beings. No longer the vassals of fear, we can bring order to the kingdom and build an intentional society on the love already shining through the cracks of the world of separation.



Charles Eisenstein is an American public speaker and author. He is also a visiting teacher at Schumacher College, Dartington, UK.

<https://www.schumachercollege.org.uk/search/node/charles%20eisenstein>

His work covers a wide range of topics, including the history of human civilization, economics, spirituality, and the ecology movement. Key themes explored include anti-consumerism, interdependence, and how myth and narrative influence culture. For the full 'The Coronation' essay see <https://charleseisenstein.org/>

I chose an extract from this article, not because I necessarily agree with everything Charles Eisenstein says, but because his reflections on the impact of the virus resonated with something in me about a nascent intention to participate in this one life a little more intentionally. For me, this means looking for other perspectives than my own; living a little more slowly and kindly in a way that has more meaning for myself and for the world. Focusing is one way to access our deeper selves and live with more connection and openness with our 'stopped processes' and with each other. Maybe the virus carries a prompt for each of us to spend some time reflecting on our lives, realising, possibly, how much our views and understandings of ourselves and each other might expand. Maybe something is calling us.

Helen Bryant (assistant editor)

Two Poems for Covid Times

Postcards from god (1)

Yes, I do feel like a visitor,
a tourist in this world
that I once made.
I rarely talk,
except to ask the way,
distrusting my interpreters,
tired out by the babble
of what they do not say.
I walk around through battered streets,
distinctly lost,
looking for landmarks
from another, promised past.

Here, in this strange place,
in a disjointed time,
I am nothing but a space
that sometimes has to fill.
Images invade me.
Picture postcards overlap my empty face
demanding to be stamped and sent.

'Dear . . .'
Who am I speaking to?
I think I may have misplaced the address,
but still, I feel the need
to write to you;
not so much for your sake
as for mine,

to raise these barricades
against my fear:
Postcards from god.
Proof that I was here.

Imitiaz Dharker

Keeping Quiet

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still
for once on the face of the earth,
let's not speak in any language;
let's stop for a second,
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines;
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would not look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victories with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity.

Life is what it is about...

If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with
death.

Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Pablo Neruda

(translated from the Spanish by Alastair Reid)

Practitioner Profile: Marion Stumpe



Focusing first crossed my path about 15 years ago when Dhanakosa, a Buddhist retreat centre in Scotland, had just started to run Focusing retreats. A friend who had been on this first retreat loved Focusing so much that he told everyone about it. Intrigued by his enthusiasm, I accepted his offer to lend me Ann Weiser Cornell's book 'The Power of Focusing'. The more I read about it the more I knew that this was for me. However, I also quickly learned that I just could not do it. It was somehow beyond me; to come into a loving, accepting relationship with myself and to sense curiously and intimately into it. Now looking back, I know that even after years of meditation practice it did not feel safe enough to be so intimately present to my experience.

Early childhood experiences had left me with a sense that the world was an unsafe place and a need to be on guard all the time. It just did not feel safe to be present to my experience and I habitually fled into the seeming comfort and safety of a 'not here-ness'.

In the years after this initial encounter with Focusing the safety and holding of a loving relationship gave my being a chance to start softening and feel less threatened by my inner and outer world.

When the opportunity of attending an 'Introduction to Focusing' workshop came up in 2011, I sensed a readiness that proved right. I still fondly remember this first direct experience of the Focusing process and Focusing partnerships – the beauty, the power, the intimacy and the connectivity of it. All my life I had struggled to feel connected, alive and present and there for the first time in my life I felt wonderfully connected to myself, others and life in general.

Since this introduction I have been on the most awe-inspiring, life-giving, and sometimes deeply challenging and painful journey with Focusing. Right from the beginning I knew that Focusing would take me to what my heart had been desiring for so long – freedom, aliveness, peace, and ease. And I knew that I had to be willing to go through the darkness and continue travelling when I could not see the road ahead. There is a poem by Rumi that became my guiding star:

Don't turn away.
Keep your gaze on the bandaged place.
That's where the light enters you.
Rumi

Whilst others were experiencing beautifully unfolding Focusing processes and 'refined' felt senses, nothing of such subtlety showed up in my experience. Focusing for me, in the early years, was about becoming more grounded, remaining present amid what at times felt like an inner battlefield, and keeping myself safe. I was returning repeatedly from either self-identification or dissociation to being kindly in relationship with what was here in my experience.

My journey with Focusing has taken me from Ann Weiser Cornell's Inner Relationship Focusing and Gendlin's original teachings to Kevin McEvenue's Wholebody Focusing. Finding Wholebody Focusing has felt like a 'Homecoming' and set me 'Free'.

It felt love

How
Did the rose
Ever open its heart

And give to this world
All its
Beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light
Against its
Being.

Otherwise
We all remain

Too
Frightened.

Hafiz

The whole-body sense of Presence which we emphasize in Wholebody Focusing and which we come to embody has been such an encouragement of light for me. My favourite quote from Kevin: "When a part of me feels loved, it awakens to its own healing" also beautifully expresses how Wholebody Focusing has set me free. It's been enabling me to let go of a lifetime of fear, rigidity, numbness and ill-health. Instead now, 'I am at home with me' and 'Peacefully rest on this earth'. These are inner states of being I never dreamt possible or even knew existed. I am now 'Standing on my own two feet with inner strength, power and safety'. It feels amazing to notice that 'I am solidly and safely here weathering the storms' during this current Covid-19 situation, which would have completely swept me away in the past.

As a natural continuation to my personal practice of Focusing I trained to bring Focusing to others. And more recently I have found my place with it in work by bringing it into the Resilience Coaching work I do. I am passionate about being a safe space that supports inner unfolding, healing and outer change processes in myself and others.

In essence, I am now living, breathing, embodying Focusing every moment of my life.

Marion Stumpe teaches Focusing 1:1 on Skype/Zoom and in person in Edinburgh, Scotland. She has trained with many inspiring teachers in different approaches and found her 'home' in Wholebody Focusing. Her approach to teaching Focusing, however, is more fluid and has influences from Inner Relationship Focusing, Gendlin's original teachings, Wholebody Focusing and her work as a Resilience Coach. At the heart of both her Focusing and her Coaching work, lies an emphasis of creating an empathic space for others, where they can safely bring their whole self and become an alchemist for their own healing and transformation.

marion_stumpe@hotmail.com

Forthcoming Workshops & Events

July and August 2020

A Companion for the Journey (BFA Skills Certificate Level 2) A weekend workshop with Peter Gill
Bristol (South West). 4th/5th July. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Thinking with the Felt Sense A weekend workshop with Peter Afford
London (Clapham) 4th/5th July. www.focusing.co.uk peter@focusing.co.uk

Deep Listening A day course with Peter Gill
Frome (Somerset) 19th July. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Creativity and Criticism (BFA Focusing Skills Workshop 4) A weekend workshop with Peter Afford
London (Clapham). 25th/26th July. www.focusing.co.uk peter@focusing.co.uk

BFA Focusing Community Camp 4-day residential camp
Suffolk (Ringsfield Hall). 15th—19th August. <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4522714>
focusingcamp2020@gmail.com

September and October 2020

Companionship (BFA Skills Level 3) with Fiona Parr
Online. 2nd to 23rd September. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

Introduction to Focusing: The Essence of Focusing (BFA Skills Level 1 and 2) with Fiona Parr
Online. Starting 8th September. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

Practitioner Training (Prerequisite: BFA Skills Course or equivalent) with Fiona Parr
Online. Starting 8th September. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

No Holding Back: Deep Dive Focusing course A 12 week closed-group course with Peter Gill
Online. Starting 14th September. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Intuition and the Implicit (BFA Skills Workshop 5) with Peter Afford
London (Clapham) 19th/20th September www.focusing.co.uk peter@focusing.co.uk

A Helping Hand (BFA Skills Workshop 3) with Peter Gill
Bristol. 26/27th September. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Introduction to Focusing - Improving our relationship with ourselves with Suzi MacKenzie
Brighton (South East). 26th Sept. www.suzimackenzie.com/focusing-training suzimac55@hotmail.com

Reminding Suggestions (BFA Skills Course Level 4) with Fiona Parr
Online. 30th September- 28th October. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

Practitioner Training New programme commencing October 2020 with Kay Hoffmann.
Email Kay for details kayhoffmann1@gmail.com

Let Your Body Make Your Mind Up A weekend workshop for experienced focusers with Peter Afford
London (Clapham) 3rd/4th October. www.focusing.co.uk peter@focusing.co.uk

The Landscapes of Grief A six week course with Peter Gill
Online. Starting 20th October. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Untangling the knots (BFA Skills Workshop 4) with Peter Gill
Bristol (South West) 24th/25th October. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

The Gifts of the Body in Focusing and Companionship 3 day residential workshop with Kay Hoffmann
Purley Chase Centre, Atherstone. 30th October /1st November. Email kayhoffmann1@gmail.com

November and December 2020

The Path to Wholeness (BFA Skills Workshop 5) with Peter Gill
Bristol (South West). 21st/22nd November. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

The Felt Sense of our Future A weekend workshop with Peter Afford
London (Clapham). 28th/29th November. www.focusing.co.uk peter@focusing.co.uk

Blocks and the Inner Relationship (BFA Skills Course days 3 and 4) with Suzi MacKenzie
Brighton (SE). 28th/29th November. www.suzimackenzie.com/focusing-training suzimac55@hotmail.com

Applied Focusing (BFA Skills Certificate Level 5) with Fiona Parr
Online. 2nd—23rd December. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

Path of the Focusing Practitioner 3.5-day residential retreat for certified and almost-certified Practitioners with Kay Hoffmann. Atherstone, Warwickshire. December 4th – 7th. kayhoffmann1@gmail.com

Companionship (BFA Skills Certificate Level 3) with Fiona Parr
Online. 8th—22nd December. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

New Year Focusing Retreat A 5-day residential retreat for Focusers with Gordon Adam
Devon (Dartmoor). 29th Dec 2020—3rd Jan 2021. www.focusing.org.uk/event/new-year-focusing-retreat

Local Focusing Groups

Brighton and Sussex Focusing Circle. Meets monthly in Brighton, usually on the fourth Saturday of the month from 2–4pm. Contact: Anna anna@workpsychologyhub.co.uk

Bristol Insight Focusing Group. Meets monthly in Bristol on the second or third Sunday of the month from 10am–1pm. Contact: Gordon gordonadam@blueyonder.co.uk

London Focusing Circle. A list of people in the London area who are available for Focusing partnership. £5 joining fee. <http://www.focusing.co.uk/circle.html>

Manchester Focusing Practice Group. Meets in Manchester for a morning once a month from 10.30am to 1pm usually on a Sunday. Contact Wendy wendy.brocklehurst@btinternet.com

Sheffield Focusing Group. Meets weekly at Sheffield Central Library on a Saturday morning/afternoon or Wednesday evening. www.solar-active.com/focusing_group Contact: david@solar-active.com

South Yorkshire Focusing Group. Open group which meets monthly.
Contact: Hugh hughknopf@rocketmail.com

Stroud Focusing Circle. Meets monthly in Stroud on the first Wednesday of the month from 7.30–9.45pm. Contact: Peter livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Resources & Further Information

British Focusing Association (BFA) www.focusing.org.uk

For further information about all matters relating to Focusing in the UK, including list of practitioners, articles, events, training, resources, etc.

To see past issues of the newsletter click on 'Resources' on the home page, or www.focusing.org.uk/resources and scroll down till you see 'Newsletters' and click on the button.

To sign up to receive this newsletter regularly go to the home page of the BFA website. Enter your email address in the subscribe window on the right below the pictures .

BFA Facebook Forum www.facebook.com/groups/206601209671323/

An easy way to quickly connect with other UK Focusers and to see and post events.

The International Focusing Institute www.focusing.org

The International Focusing Institute (formerly The Focusing Institute) is the 'world HQ' of Focusing and is a source of all sorts of information about Focusing. The website gives access to the Gendlin Online Library as well as lots of articles on a wide range of subjects by other Focusing teachers. The website also carries nearly 100 (30-50min) audio interviews conducted by Serge Prengel with a wide variety of Focusing teachers that have been recorded since 2008. These can be streamed or downloaded from the website.

The European Focusing Association (EFA) efa-focusing.eu

Newsletter Involvement & Contributions

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome and invited. This includes articles, poems, book reviews, photographs, news, event & group details, etc.

Articles should generally be in the range of 500—1200 words. Inclusion of articles will be at the discretion of the editors. Some contributions may be held over for inclusion in a future issue. Please feel free to contact us if you would like to discuss an idea you have for an article.

Help in producing the newsletter is also welcome and we invite anyone who would like to be involved to get in touch—this could be editing, design & layout, proof-reading, distribution, etc.

Feedback & Ideas

Your feedback is invited! We would really like to know what you think of the newsletter and if you have any suggestions or ideas for its development. Please send an email with feedback to Gordon. We hope to add extra features in forthcoming issues.

Forthcoming Issues of the Newsletter:

We currently aim to publish the newsletter 3 times a year and would appreciate receiving your submissions as soon as possible for the next issue in November 2020. The deadline for receiving contributions for this issue is **31st September 2020**.