



British Focusing Association NEWSLETTER

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From the Editor

Gordon Adam



At the beginning of July I only had two items for this newsletter – Vicki's article and Rob's profile. This prompted me to push ahead with something I'd wanted to do for a while – to write about Focusing Partnership. To gather information for this I created an online survey which I sent out to everyone in BFA and to the local Bristol Focusing community. The whole thing was processed very quickly – from sending out the survey to completing the article took only 10 days! The resulting seven page article provides interesting reading and a sort of 'reality check' of the state of Focusing partnerships in the UK.

I'd like to thank Vicki Thomas, Sandy Gee, Ella Higgs and Kay Hoffmann for trialling the questions/survey, everyone who completed the survey, and also Ella Higgs and Catherine Flynn for reading the article and giving helpful editing suggestions.

Another article from Catherine Flynn materialised at the beginning of July which raises an interesting point about the 'visibility' of Focusing in the therapy world, and then I also remembered that I could include a golden oldie – in this issue it's the lovely explanation of Focusing by Ann Weiser Cornell – 'Three Key Aspects of Focusing' which dates back to 1998, and clearly explains the difference between Focusing and other 'similar' therapeutic modalities.

Towards the end of producing the newsletter I realised there were no photos in any of the articles so I decided that a nostalgic photo trip back to the first Focusing camp in 2017 would be in order. It's nice to be reminded of the exuberant energy that the camp generated!

I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter!

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A small but enthusiastic appeal to raise the profile of Focusing in the world of therapy

By Catherine Flynn

I recently qualified as a Focusing Practitioner and also as a counsellor – two journeys which now converge as I continue in development as a counsellor integrating the principles of Focusing in private practice. Many counsellors list their profile on the BACP website (*British Assoc. for Counselling & Psychotherapy*), something which I also did. When a counsellor creates their profile, they choose the type of therapy that they practice. There are the big guns such as person-centered, CBT and psychodynamic, plus a number of others e.g. gestalt, Adlerian, eclectic, Jungian, phenomenological, primal therapy, systemic, transpersonal, behavioural & psychosynthesis.

It left me wondering how a potential client would find a counsellor who is Focusing-oriented. It is a delightful truth that Focusing can be integrated into any modality, but it does leave me wondering - how can a practitioner who has integrated Focusing let people know about that delightful truth?! It feels a bit like a particularly juicy apple hidden in a barrel of apples. How does one publicise that training in Focusing so that clients who want to 'work with the body' or work with a counsellor who has experience of Focusing be able to 'search' effectively for that counsellor? Additionally, it feels to me like many people in the counselling community 'know' about modalities such as EMDR, IFS, somatic experiencing, but Focusing lies somewhere more in the undergrowth of it all.

What would Gene have said to me about all this – I mean, he'd definitely notice that something in me is pretty keen to let everyone know about Focusing! Perhaps there is a part of me that really just wants it to be more 'recognised' in the field, and I am aware of a need to reassure that part. I also wonder if perhaps I should count it as part of my mission to help raise the profile of Focusing if I can – in my own small way!

Anyway, I emailed the BACP to ask if they would add 'Focusing' to their list of 'types of therapy'. They came back to say: "*I have passed your suggestion to the Directory Team but with their being so many modalities we simply would not be able to list it however it may be something that could be added in the future as an additional specified search.*"

So even though I got a 'no' back – it wasn't a 'shut door' kind of no. Therefore, I'd now like to invite any counsellors out there who feel drawn to doing so, to also ask the BACP if they might consider adding 'Focusing' as a 'type of therapy' to their Directory listings page. Perhaps they will change their mind? Who knows?!

I recently watched *The Wisdom of Trauma*, a film featuring Gabor Mate. After the event, an email was sent to all the subscribers letting them know about 'Resources' in relation to the documentary. I was curious to find out if Focusing would be listed under 'Trauma Healing Modalities' – it wasn't. And so I emailed the team to ask if they would add it. And they did!

Does this article stir anything in you? Am I missing a very obvious point in some way, or does it resonate with you as something that you also feel? I'd appreciate hearing from you.

Catherine Flynn is a counsellor & Focusing practitioner working in private practice in Bristol. She is also a mother of four boys – two sons aged 8 and 11 and two step sons aged 24 and 25. Catherine is passionate about bringing Focusing into counselling practice and enjoys connecting with others who are also on this journey.

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A Review of Focusing Partnership Experiences of UK Focusers

By Gordon Adam

My intention in writing this review is to explore both the practical aspects of Focusing partnerships and also the benefits and difficulties that people experience from Focusing with a partner or partners. In order to get some 'measure' of how people Focus in general and their experiences of partnership, I created a survey which was sent to around two hundred Focusers in the UK. This article draws upon the response to the survey and also includes some of my own reflections about Focusing partnerships.

Introduction

I discovered Focusing at the beginning of 2007 and within a month or two I had formed two Focusing partnerships with people who attended the same introductory workshop. In my first year of Focusing I Focused with each partner roughly every two weeks and also attended a monthly meeting of the group that formed following the workshop. A year later I was Focusing twice a week on average, with three regular partners and a number of 'occasional' partners. Fast-forwarding to 2021, I now have six regular Focusing partners, and about the same number of occasional partners.

These Focusing relationships form a central part of my 'human support system' and I can't imagine my life without them. The core impulse to write this article comes from a wanting to acknowledge and validate the richness and enlivenment that these relationships bring to my life.

Focusing Partnership Survey

The survey was sent to members of BFA and also to my Bristol Area Focusing Community contact list – so in total to around 200 Focusers with varying degrees of Focusing experience. 65 people had completed the survey at time of writing this report. Here follows a review of the responses by question:

How long have you been Focusing for?

This ranged from less than a year to over 20 years, averaging at around 10 years of Focusing experience. 15% of respondents have been Focusing for over 20 years.

How often do you Focus with a partner?

This ranged from occasionally to several times a week, with the most popular response (45% of people) being once a week. About 13% of people Focus occasionally, and 16% Focus several times a week.

How many regular Focusing partners do you have?

The most popular response was one partner (45%). About 36% of people have two partners, and about 20% have three or more partners. One person reported having more than five regular Focusing partners.

How many occasional Focusing partners do you have?

The majority of people (72%) have one or two occasional Focusing partners. 17% have three to five occasional partners, and 11% have more than five occasional partners.

How long have you been Focusing with your partner of longest standing?

'Several years' was the most popular (47%) answer, with 13% having a partner for less than a year, 22% for five to ten years, 17% for ten to twenty years, and one person reported having a Focusing partner of over twenty years standing!

Would you like to have more Focusing partners?

40% of people say they would like more Focusing partners.

Do you Focus alone?

One person reported always Focusing alone, 32% of people occasionally Focus alone. Nearly half of re-

spondents say they 'often have Focusing moments', and 13% of people occasionally have such moments.

Are you part of a Focusing group?

Most people who responded to the survey (57%) are part of a Focusing group.

About half of the above attend their group regularly and the other half occasionally.

Only around 47% of groups seem to meet regularly (this may have been influenced by covid-19). About half of the groups normally meet in-person, and the other half meet either online or meet both in-person and online. Some people have included ongoing training workshops, retreats, online BFA meetings, and the Focusing camp as 'group' settings.

Several groups seem to have successfully adapted to meeting online during the pandemic whilst others have stopped meeting in this time. Average (60%) group attendance is five to ten people, with 30% meeting in a smaller group, and 9% meeting in a group of more than ten people.

Are you a member of a WhatsApp Focusing exchange group?

34% of people replied 'yes' to this. Most of those (65%) use the group occasionally, 30% have yet to use their group, and one person reports using their WhatsApp group regularly.

One person reported finding it hard to find time to respond to WhatsApp partnership requests.

Outside of covid restrictions, how do you normally Focus?

About half of people (51%) Focus either exclusively or mostly online or by phone.

31% of people Focus both online and in-person, and 18% Focus either exclusively or mostly in-person.

How long does each person Focus for typically?

The most common Focusing time is half an hour (61%). About 27% of people usually Focus for 20 minutes, and a small number of people (5%) Focus for 45 minutes or longer.

How much non-Focusing interaction time (e.g. chat or check-in) do you typically have with your partner in a session?

This varies from a few minutes (19%) to thirty minutes or longer (16%), with most people (65%) in the middle, taking ten to twenty minutes to interact outside of actual Focusing time.

How often do you talk about the content of each other's session after Focusing?

The most popular answer (39%) was 'sometimes', with a few people (5%) reporting that they usually or always discuss the content of the Focusing sessions. 29% say they 'rarely' discuss content, and 11% only do so with some partners.

A number of people commented that they only discuss content with permission from the Focuser or if the Focuser initiates it themselves.

"Only with my partner's permission...you just sometimes feel that this is appropriate with some people...it makes sense in the moment...and I feel it can enhance the Focusing experience"

"I like the flexibility to talk about my session or not. I almost always talk about my Focusing insights with other people in my life with whom I have a deep sharing"

Would you describe your Focusing as being in any particular style?

- Inner Relationship/Treasure Maps Focusing 44%
- No particular style/eclectic 41%
- Wholebody Focusing 23%
- Classical (Gendlin's steps) Focusing 15%
- Relational/Interactive Focusing 13%
- Children Focusing – one person
- Community Wellness Focusing – one person

"My style tends to be something like – gently wait and see what wants my attention, and then I may use elements of, say, Inner Relationship Focusing if I am with a particularly critical part, or more of a classical 'felt sense of all of that' at other times"

"I switch between different styles depending on my need"

"I quite often adapt the Focusing style to that of my partner"

Do you have social contact with your Focusing partners outside of Focusing?

The majority (66%) report that they 'sometimes', 'usually' or always' do, however 34% report 'never' or 'rarely' doing so. 45% of people say that friendships outside of Focusing 'sometimes' develop with Focusing partners. 34% say that friendships 'rarely' or 'never' develop.

"Some strong friendships have developed where we meet outside of Focusing. I would also say that there is another kind of friendship where we still wouldn't meet outside of Focusing, but there is the warmth and interest of a friend in the before and after periods of the Focusing"

Do you Focus outdoors?

50% of people 'never' or 'rarely' Focus outdoors, and 48% 'sometimes' Focus outdoors. One person reports always Focusing outdoors.

If you Focus outdoors, how would you say this informs or supports your Focusing experience?

"Brings resources and allows a bigger container for the process. Allows interaction with a bigger living system"

"Being in nature helps to strengthen a feeling of interconnectedness, making it easier to slow down and allow my inner process to unfold in its own time. Any grounding exercise when the ground is the actual earth feels very supportive and opens something up within me"

"I feel the challenge is finding the right kind of space – somewhere quiet and comfortable, without too many people. But sometimes being in nature really informs the Focusing experience and brings in different dimensions that wouldn't be present in a wholly 'inner' experience"

"It opens and widens into a furthering of the felt sense. It somehow allows more to come in and gives the sense of freedom which unfolds into a deeper connection"

"I often solo Focus while walking my dog...frequently when we get to the park"

"Solo Focusing is easier for me outside"

"Bigger sense of presence. Feel more part of a 'bigger picture'. More 'elemental'. Less introverted."

"It feels more relaxed and spacious"

"Only in good weather, otherwise I don't feel comfortable enough to go inwards"

"I prefer to Focus indoors, I find it more containing"

How did you meet your Focusing partners?

Most people (78%) met their Focusing partners at a Focusing workshop or retreat. 39% met at a Focusing group. 13% asked a friend to Focus with them. 13% found their partner through an online or WhatsApp 'find a partner' facility. Some people met their Focusing partners through teaching/ training courses or through mentoring – this includes a teacher or mentor forming a partnership with a student. Some people only Focus with a partner at Focusing group meetings:

"I haven't got a regular partner...I don't as yet feel this is necessary for me. In the group once a month I tend to be with a different person each time."

Please specify any difficulties or issues that you find have arisen with your Focusing partners or within Focusing sessions.

Around 50-60% of people reported having difficulties or issues. Common issues are:

- Technical/connection problems when Focusing online
- Difficulties in hearing (what the partner is saying); issues with background noise or lack of privacy (either indoors or out)
- Not feeling fully listened to, or heard; the companion not being 'fully present' or distracted in some way (e.g. mobile phone messages, writing things down, fidgetiness)
- Problems with holding boundaries – e.g. too much 'non-Focusing' chat; the Focuser talking a lot during their session without much pausing to sense in; Focuser running over the agreed time
- Clashes in Focusing styles

- Being triggered by the content of the Focuser's session and finding it difficult to hold presence
- Issues with commitment, regularity, scheduling sessions, finding suitable times
- People new to Focusing having limited companioning skills
- Feeling judged by the companion (in or out of the Focusing session)

"When Focusing in a large group with someone new, I have sometimes had partners whom I feel are not really 'there' with me. This feels very isolating and uncomfortable, but I haven't always felt to name this and ask for what I need in the session e.g. 'more reflections so I can feel you there'"

"People sometimes just stop the partnership, and it isn't always clear what's going on for them. It feels like there is something in the relationship that isn't working for them but it doesn't get spoken about in a Focusing way – they don't seem up for addressing it, or consider that as an option"

"Difficulty in knowing how to end a partnership"

"Feeling judged by my partner in conversation outside of Focusing"

"Not enjoying listening to the Focuser because of their Focusing style"

"Fielding unwanted advice – in and outside of the Focusing"

"Sometimes a slight sense that the other person or I have tried to guide the session in a particular direction"

"My Focusing partner asking me to give an opinion on the content of their session, making me feel uncomfortable"

"Issues around how near or far I can accompany the Focuser in the way they want to be listened to"

"Being on a different wavelength (to the companion) and feeling they can't relate at all – not feeling heard enough...it shows in the tone and manner of their reflection"

"Wondering if I go too 'deep' with personal issues"

"Finding it hard to ask for what I want"

"Finding a suitable companion nearby to meet in person"

"When someone has come to the group who is not, in fact, practising Focusing, maybe because they have very little experience in it or have not fully understood the principles. They may think they are practising Focusing, but are not."

What do you value most about your Focusing partnerships?

I've grouped responses under headings, in order of frequency of mention, with the number of mentions in brackets. A selection of representative comments are included below each heading:

CONNECTION (17)

"Real connection, preciousness of doing inner work together, like-minded companions"

"Connection, acceptance, and gentle self-discovery"

"A real genuine sense of connection"

"The nourishment of deep connection within a safe, clear, structured interaction"

"We have a strong depth of connection which means I have been able to have some very powerful Focusing experiences"

SUPPORT (9)

"My Focusing partnerships are an important and supportive part of the fabric of my life"

"Being listened to and supported in listening to myself"

"Support, connection, mutuality, intimacy. A place to be totally open and curious"

"A supportive presence"

FRIENDSHIP/COMMUNITY/BELONGING (8)

"I have made some very close and precious friends through my Focusing partnerships"

"Kinship, friendship, sense of community and belonging"

"Creating a community of like-minded people, friendship"

"Deepening of friendship through Focusing together"

LISTENING/BEING HEARD (8)

"Being heard by someone who listens deeply"

"Being listened to and supported in listening to myself. The privilege and specialness of hearing someone else"

"Deep listening to each other and a unique level of understanding each other"

"When your trusted and regular partners really 'see' and 'hear' you in all your aspects and parts and vulnerabilities, it helps you to feel safe and loved"

SPACE (6)

"A space to be me, with all that makes me up, deep relief"

"Knowing that the Focusing space can accommodate anything that arises"

"It is a safe and containing space in which I am able to go into my process"

"All being welcome in this space"

SHARED/MUTUAL (6)

"Sharing a Focusing journey together over years"

"Shared humanity"

"Shared understanding"

"Invaluable source of mutual support and exploration"

TRUST (5)

"Trust and familiarity"

"Able to be authentic if I trust the partnership"

"The intimacy and trust that form in such a short time"

BOUNDARIES (5)

"Safety in boundaries"

"Clear boundaries around time"

"Clean and firm boundaries"

PRESENCE (4)

"Mindfulness, presence, compassion – cultivation of all of these"

"Presence and quiet"

INTIMACY (4)

"Intimacy and connection"

"Trust, support, intimacy"

NON-JUDGEMENTAL (4)

"Lack of judgement"

"Non-judgemental attitude"

CONTINUITY (3)

RESPECT (3)

SAFETY (3)

EMPATHY (3)

MEANINGFUL (2)

UNDERSTANDING (2)

KINDNESS (2)

BEING WITNESSED (2)

Any other comments about your Focusing partnerships?

"I love the diversity and what particular things are possible and evoked with different partners"

"If people have been trained in different methods or aspects or types of Focusing, that could possibly be a challenge in partnerships – unless they had a flexible approach"

"The most beautiful and life-giving thing – it's LOVE – loving and being loved"

"I feel like a long-term partnership is super-important for both our abilities to maintain long-term processes,

"which are very different from workshops and one-time practices"

"I wish I had more stability in my life so that I can commit to more regular sessions – they are so nourishing when they do happen!"

"I have different experiences with different people. I have become much more aware of how much the presence of the partner brings to my Focusing experience. I am more aware of not Focusing with people who are unable to hold me properly in the process"

"I really appreciate the unhurried sense of a Focusing partnership, where a deep human connection can take its time to form within the safety of a Focusing setting"

"Provides a deeper friendship and connection"

"Very sad that my longest partnership finished this year because of my partner's lack of time. Feel disinclined to start again with someone new"

"One of my partners is my husband and it has been immeasurably important in our relationship – for both working things out between us and our overall growth"

"I wish some of my other friendships had the kind of openness and receptivity that's possible in a Focusing partnership"

"I like Focusing with a variety of different people – it's enriching and enlivening!"

"I love how Zoom has made international Focusing possible (all my partners are overseas) however I would like to know someone closer by who I could Focus with in-person sometimes"

"They really enrich my life. I can't imagine not having them now"

Some reflections on the survey

Soulful connection

It's interesting that 'connection' was the single most used word in people's valuation of their Focusing partnerships, especially as I don't think Eugene Gendlin set out to create a process that was primarily about enabling deep/meaningful/soulful connection between its participants! I don't think Focusing was ever intended to be a relationship-building practice (although of course it depends on the Focuser – companion relationship for its effectiveness).

This highlights for me the deep need we have to connect with each other in a meaningful way and how Focusing is one modality that enables this to happen very effectively through its structure of Focusing partnerships. I would add that when I have reviewed feedback received from people who have attended the Focusing retreats I've run over the years, the thing that people value above anything else (even more than 1-1 Focusing) is the group, and the support and connection and sense of community that it enables.

The word 'soulful' didn't come through in the survey, however this word could act as a sort of 'container' for some of the other words that people did use – e.g. '*deep connection*', '*meaningful*', '*love*', '*friendship*', '*shared*', '*mutual*', '*kinship*', '*empathy*', '*kindness*', '*understanding*', '*trust*', '*presence*', '*intimacy*' – all of these are expressions of what could be called 'soulful connection'.

Focusing community

"Kinship, friendship, sense of community and belonging"

Focusing community is another important 'side effect' of Gendlin's Focusing process. I feel strongly about Focusing community, and believe that it contributes to and enables something important beyond the benefits of 1-1 Focusing with a partner. This is around a sense of identity, belonging, meaningful connection with a group of people, or feeling part of a 'tribe'. I've received great support from being part of Focusing community on different levels – locally, nationally, and since attending the International Focusing Conference at Cambridge in 2016 – globally!

Focusing community is real and it makes a difference! I experience it on different levels: through having a network of Focusing partners; through ongoing involvement in a local Focusing group; through produc-

ing the newsletter; through running Focusing retreats; and through attending Focusing events and gatherings, either in-person or online.

Safety, structure, boundaries and continuity

A number of people seem to value the qualities of interaction that Focusing enables, beyond an ordinary friendship:

"I wish some of my other friendships had the kind of openness and receptivity that's possible in a Focusing partnership" and "Provides a deeper friendship and connection"

I would suggest that the safety enabled by the reciprocal and non-judgemental structure of Focusing partnership is key in enabling this 'deepening' to happen. Boundaries and regularity/continuity of the Focusing relationship also supports this deepening.

Diversity of Focusing partners

In the same way that something 'extra' is enabled by Focusing in a group, or Focusing outside, something extra is enabled by having several Focusing partners:

"I have different experiences with different people. I have become much more aware of how much the presence of the partner brings to my Focusing experience"

"I love the diversity and what particular things are possible and evoked with different partners"

Having had multiple Focusing partners for many years, I really appreciate how each partner, or the 'energy field' of each partnership, enables something slightly different to happen in my Focusing experience. Or putting this another way, each of my Focusing partners enables me to access slightly different inner territory – and I greatly value this facility to venture into different aspects of my body-mind. I would highly recommend having at least two regular Focusing partners if possible.

Difficulties and issues arising – Focusing partnership guidelines

The survey revealed that there are a range of difficulties and issues arising for people, which I have grouped into headings. It feels beyond the scope of this article to go into this much further right now – however, perhaps readers of the newsletter might like to offer suggestions as to how to manage or resolve some of the difficulties raised? If so, this could be material for a future article.

One thing I would like to mention in response, is the desirability, in my opinion, of having clear and concise guidelines, in writing, about the protocol of Focusing partnership. Some Focusing teachers have created such guidelines and give them to their students.

I created my own guidelines based on a version given to me by Lou Ormiston in 2009. This comprises one side of A4 and gives clear guidelines for both Focuser and companion about the 'do's and don'ts' of Focusing partnership. I give it to everyone who comes to my Focusing group and retreats. Its purpose is to support safety and boundaries in the Focusing process and it acts as a sort of 'code of conduct' that group or retreat participants agree to adhere to. It supports us all in being 'on the same page' in the Focusing partnerships. If anyone would like a copy of these guidelines let me know and I can email them to you.

Gordon Adam lives in Bristol, UK. He is passionate about Focusing and the power of Focusing community. He runs an open fortnightly '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 12 years, combining Focusing with periods of silence, immersion in the natural world and temporary community. He has recently run a series of workshops on 'Focusing with Poetry' which has led to the formation of an ongoing group. Gordon also works as a homeopath and supervisor and is editor of this newsletter.

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Summer Focusing Camp: A Photo Reminder

In the absence of any actual in-person gatherings this year or last, here is a reminder of what that looks like! Photos from the first Focusing camp at The Barns Centre in 2017 by Gordon Adam and Jane Brown.





Three Key Aspects of Focusing

By Ann Weiser Cornell

There are three key qualities or aspects which set Focusing apart from any other method of inner awareness and personal growth. The first is something called the “felt sense.” The second is a special quality of engaged, accepting inner attention. And the third is a radical philosophy of what facilitates change. Let’s take these one by one.

1) The Felt Sense

The Focusing process involves coming into the body and finding there a special kind of body sensation called a “felt sense.” Eugene Gendlin was the first person to name and point to a felt sense, even though human beings have been having felt senses as long as they’ve been human. A felt sense, to put it simply, is a body sensation that has meaning. You’ve certainly been aware of a felt sense at some time in your life, and possibly you feel them often.

Imagine being on the phone with someone you love who is far away, and you really miss that person, and you just found out in this phone call that you’re not going to be seeing them soon. You get off the phone, and you feel a heaviness in your chest, perhaps around the heart area. Or let’s say you’re sitting in a room full of people and each person is going to take a turn to speak, and as the turn comes closer and closer to you, you feel a tightness in your stomach, like a spring winding tighter and tighter. Or let’s say you’re taking a walk on a beautiful fresh morning, just after a rain, and you come over a hill, and there in the air in front of you is a perfect rainbow, both sides touching the ground, and as you stand there and gaze at it you feel your chest welling up with an expansive, flowing, warm feeling. These are all felt senses.

If you’re operating purely with emotions, then fear is fear. It’s just fear, no more. But if you’re operating on the felt sense level, you can sense that *this* fear, the one you’re feeling right now, is different from the fear you felt yesterday. Maybe yesterday’s fear was like a cold rock in the stomach, and today’s fear is like a pulling back, withdrawing. As you stay with today’s fear, you start to sense something like a shy creature pulled back into a cave. You get the feeling that if you sit with it long enough, you might even find out the real reason that it is so scared. A felt sense is often subtle, and as you pay attention to it you discover that it is intricate. It has more to it. We have a vocabulary of emotions that we feel over and over again, but every felt sense is different. You can, however, start with an emotion, and then feel the felt sense of it, as you are feeling it in your body right now.

Felt sensing is not something that other methods teach. There is no one else, outside of Focusing, who is talking about this dimension of experience which is not emotion and not thought, which is subtle yet concretely felt, absolutely physically real. Felt sensing is one of the things that makes it Focusing.

2) A Special Quality of Inner Attention

The second key aspect of Focusing is a *special quality of engaged accepting inner attention*.

In the Focusing process, after you are aware of the felt sense, you then bring to it a special quality of attention. One way I like to say this is, you *sit down to get to know it better*. I like to call this quality “interested curiosity.” By bringing this interested curiosity into a relationship with the felt sense, you are open to sensing that which is there but not yet in words. This process of sensing takes time – it is not instant. So ideally there is a willingness to take that time, to wait, at the edge of not-yet-knowing what this is, patient, accepting, curious, and open. Slowly, you sense more. This can be a bit like coming into a darkened room and sitting, and as your eyes get used to the lower light, you sense more there than you had before. You could also have come into that room and then rushed away again, not caring to sense anything there. It is the caring to, the interest, the wanting to get to know it, that brings the further knowing. There is not a trying to change anything. There is no doing something to anything. In this sense, this process is very *accepting*. We accept that this felt sense is here, just as it is, right now. We are inter-

ested in *how* it is. We want to know it, just as it is. Yet there is something more than just accepting. In this *interested curious* inner attention, there is also a confident expectation that this felt sense will change in its own way, that it will do something that Gene Gendlin calls "making steps."

What is "making steps"? The inner world is never static. When you bring awareness to it, it unfolds, moves, becomes its next step.

A woman is Focusing, let's say, on a heavy feeling in her chest which she feels is connected with a relationship with a friend. The Focuser recently left her job, and she has just discovered that the friend is applying for the position. She has been telling herself that this is not important, but the feeling of something wrong has persisted.

Now she sits down to Focus. She brings awareness into the throat-chest-stomach area of her body and she soon discovers this heavy feeling which has been around all week. She says hello to it. She describes it freshly: "heavy... also tight... especially in the stomach and chest." Then she sits with it to get to know it better. She is interested and curious. Notice how this interested and curious is the opposite of the telling herself that this is not important which she had been doing before. She waits, with this engaged accepting attention.

She can feel that this part of her is angry. "How could she? How could she do that?" it says about her friend. Ordinarily she would be tempted to tell herself that being angry is inappropriate, but this is Focusing, so she just says to this place, "I hear you," and keeps waiting. Interested and curious for the "more" that is there.

In a minute she begins to sense that this part of her is also sad. "Sad" surprises her; she didn't expect sad. She asks, "Oh, what gets you sad?" In response, she senses that it is something about being invalidated. She waits, there is more. Oh, something about not being believed! When she gets that, *something about not being believed*, a rush of memories comes, all the times she told her friend how difficult her boss was to work for. "It's as if she didn't believe me!" is the feeling.

Now our Focuser is feeling relief in her body. This has been a *step*. The emergence of sad after the anger was also a step. The Focusing process is a series of steps of change, in which each one brings fresh insight, and a fresh body relief, an *aha!* Is this the end? She could certainly stop here. But if she wanted to continue, she would go back to the "something about not being believed" feeling and again bring to it interested curiosity. It might be that there's something special for her about not being believed, something linked to her own history, which again brings relief when it is heard and understood.

Focusing brings insight and relief, but that's not all it brings. It also brings new behaviour. In the case of this woman, we can easily imagine that her way of being with her friend will now be more open, more appropriately trusting. It may also be that other areas of her life were bound up with this "not being believed" feeling, and they too will shift after this process. This new behavior happens naturally, easily, without having to be done by will power or effort. And this brings us to the third special quality of Focusing.

3) A Radical Philosophy of What Facilitates Change

The third key quality or aspect which sets Focusing apart from any other method of inner awareness and personal growth is *a radical philosophy of what facilitates change*. How do we change?

How do we *not* change? If you are like many of the people who are drawn to Focusing, you probably feel *stuck* or *blocked* in one or more areas of your life. There is *something* about you, or your circumstances, or your feelings and reactions to things, that you would like to change. That is very natural. But let us now contrast two ways of approaching this wish to change.

One way assumes that to have something change, you must make it change. You must do something to it. We can call this the Doing/Fixing way.

The other way, which we can call the Being/Allowing way, assumes that change and flow is the natural course of things, and when something seems not to change, what it needs is attention and awareness, with an attitude of allowing it to be as it is, yet open to its next steps.

Our everyday lives are deeply permeated with the Doing/Fixing assumption. When you tell a friend about a problem, how often is her response to give you advice on fixing the problem? Many of our modern therapy methods carry this assumption as well. Cognitive therapy, for example, asks you to change your self-talk. Hypnotherapy often brings in new images and beliefs to replace the old. So the Being/Allowing philosophy, embodied in Focusing, is a radical philosophy. It *turns around* our usual expectations and ways of viewing the world. It's as if I were to say to you that this chair you are sitting on would like to become an elephant, and if you will just give it interested attention it will begin to transform. What a wild idea! Yet that is how wild it sounds, to some deeply ingrained part of ourselves, when we are told that a fear that we have might transform into something which is not at all fear, if it is given interested attention.

When people who are involved in Focusing talk about the "wisdom of the body," this is what they mean: that the felt sense "knows" what it needs to become next, as surely as a baby knows it needs warmth and comfort and food. As surely as a radish seed knows it will grow into a radish. We never have to tell the felt sense what to become; we never have to make it change. We just need to provide the conditions which allow it to change, like a good gardener providing light and soil and water, but not telling the radish to become a cucumber.

This article first appeared in March 1998 issue of 'The Focusing Connection'. It is also included in Ann's book 'The Radical Acceptance of Everything: Living a Focusing Life' (2005) and is reprinted here with Ann's permission.

Ann Weiser Cornell is an internationally known author and psychology educator who has been working with the Focusing process since she learned it in 1972 from its originator, Eugene Gendlin. As the CEO of Focusing Resources, she has taught in twenty countries around the world for more than thirty-five years, as well as online. She is the co-creator (with Barbara McGavin) of Inner Relationship Focusing and Untangling™. Her books include: 'The Radical Acceptance of Everything' and 'Presence: A Guide to Transforming Your Most Challenging Emotions'.

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A Vision for Focusing Community Living

By Vicki Thomas

Dear Fellow Focusers,

"Isn't there something more to life than this? Are you fed up with living in a little box and being a docile consumer – like everyone else?"^[1]

Have you ever thought at the end of a particularly nourishing and inspiring workshop or retreat where you have felt really seen, heard and touched 'Gosh I wish I had more of this in my everyday life?'

Do you feel a desire to belong – to be part of something bigger where you are growing and sharing together and where the need to share brings about a deeper way of learning to connect, to understand others and resolve differences?

Do you feel a desire to create something where you are also contributing to the whole, to the planet – by creating a shared and sustainable life and place together? "Are you a Digger or a Dreamer?"^[1]

I'm definitely a Dreamer not a Digger – but there's room for both in a community.

These are all questions I really resonate with and which really speak to me and stir a longing – a dream – one that I've had for many years. This article is my personal exploration of my vision for community and is here to plant a seed

I am 71 now and in the third stage of my life – I can't quite believe that number as I type it! But I have never felt more alive or more passionate and insightful about who I am and I feel a huge potential still for growth and learning. At the same time I realise more and more that I can't do this on my own, and that I don't want to live by myself for the rest of my life – or in a 'retirement village!' I am finding that I am more interested than ever in everything and in the mystery of life in spite of my age and I have a real sense of wanting to live life to the full.

Since my early thirties when I started on my spiritual journey through coming across Osho Rajneesh when living in Russia (I know – a strange place to find him!), I have had a sense of wanting to be part of something – a community, a shared vision, a group of like-minded people. As a disciple of Osho for twelve years, I felt I belonged to the worldwide community of 'followers'. For ten months I lived in the commune/town that we built in the middle of the Oregon wilderness – called Rajneeshpuram. This 'experiment' of creating a kind of awakening, meditative, celebrating and self-sufficient 'utopia' lasted for four years, and seemed like a real possibility and not just a dream. It felt great to be working together towards this, sharing the vision and using work as a kind of 'worship', eating wonderful home grown food and dancing and meditating together. As with many spiritual movements, some of the people in charge became power hungry and inflamed local residents and politicians – eventually leading to arrests and the collapse of the whole 'dream'.

I have lived on my own now for eighteen years – gosh I can't believe that! – and through becoming part of the Bristol Focusing 'community' over the last three years, and having made new relationships that are deeper and more authentic than ever before, I have an increasing sense of wanting something different. Participating in three Focusing retreats at Bala Brook on Dartmoor, two of the BFA Summer Focusing Camps and a 'Treasure Maps' retreat in Ireland, has given me a real sense of what it feels like to live together, to share honestly with a sense of presence and empathy, and to have the opportunity to Focus on a daily basis.

There is also a huge sense in this critical time for humanity, that creating centres of community – where we can find support in sustainable living as well as having a tribe that heals and supports each other emotionally and psychologically – is more important than ever. As Joanna Macy – the creator of 'The

'Work that Reconnects' says in her article 'Community in the Great Turning'^[2] "The fostering of community is essential. A group working together creates a field of synergy, where intersecting relationships reinforce the intentions of our hearts and minds. Groups build courage to face the facts. They also help you see the Great Turning that is happening."

Browsing through 'Diggers and Dreamers'^[1] – the website that lists communities in different parts of the UK – one that caught my attention was Ty Brethren near Llangollen, North Wales. They have nine adults and four children living in a converted mill and outbuildings with five acres of land and their own woodland, valley and stream. In their blurb they say that they are open-minded and take action by placing their own and each other's needs at the heart of what they do. Their ethos is to help each other to grow and live with a spirit of generosity and compassion. This sounds lovely! It feels important to me to have an 'intentional' community where there are shared intentions about how to live. And there *are* places out there in rural areas where large properties and farms can be bought for reasonable prices.

Community living can be a real challenge – let's not be idealistic and pretend it's all easy. A friend of mine who leads 'The Way of Council'^[3] groups and Vision Quests all over the country, told me that she very often has to go into communities to sort out conflicts – using the Circle process to do this. I think resolving conflicts and challenges is a big part of living together – which is why I would like to live with people who have self-awareness and are willing to continually learn about how to relate in a way that enhances relationships and the whole.

To be clear, at this point I am just putting out feelers to see if others share this vision and to plant some seeds. In putting forward some of my views or longings about it, I invite you the reader to share any experiences or feelings/wishes that you have about this type of living.

Those who are interested are very welcome to email me with your responses and any feedback and ideas... I'm really interested to know how much interest there is out there on this theme of community living! At some point, perhaps those who are more than just theoretically interested could meet up on Zoom to 'shoot the breeze' about it. We could brainstorm and see if something concrete and practical could come out of this. I am honestly tired of living alone and am longing for more 'juice' and richness – connection, creativity, sharing and hugs!

Get in touch! (*Contact details below*)

References

- 1] <https://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/> Intentional Communities in Britain
 - 2] <https://workthatreconnects.org/community-in-the-great-turning-by-joanna-macy/>
 - 3] <https://waysofcouncil.net/places/united-kingdom/gwynedd/harlech/council-trainers/pippa-bondy/>
- Recommended reading 'Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Eco-Villages and Intentional Communities' by Diana Leafe Christian
https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/232438.Creating_a_Life_Together

Vicki Thomas

I came across Focusing three years ago and it has made a huge difference to my life – it is deepening my healing, has brought me a whole new group of conscious and sensitive friends and a new way of working with people. I'm now training to be a Focusing Practitioner with Peter Gill. A current 'Untangling' course with Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin is enabling me to go deeper into the body's wisdom to heal a lot of old patterns held in the body. More recently I have been exploring 'embodied' parts work like Voice Dialogue and Fool Expression which I find exciting! I feel blessed to be part of an ever growing community of Focusing folk in Bristol. vickithomas@blueyonder.co.uk



Two Poems by Mark Nepo

Thinking Like A Butterfly

Monday I was told I was good.
I felt relieved.
Tuesday I was ignored.
I felt invisible.
Wednesday I was snapped at.
I began to doubt myself.
On Thursday I was rejected.
Now I was afraid.
On Saturday I was thanked
for being me. My soul relaxed.
On Sunday I was left alone
till the part of me that can't
be influenced grew tired of
submitting and resisting.
Monday I was told I was good.
By Tuesday I got off the wheel.

Mark Nepo

The Appointment

What if, on the first sunny day,
on your way to work, a colorful bird
sweeps in front of you down a
street you've never heard of.

You might pause and smile,
a sweet beginning to your day.

Or you might step into that street
and realize there are many ways to work.

You might sense the bird knows some-
thing you don't and wander after.

You might hesitate when the bird
turns down an alley. For now
there is a tension: Is what the
bird knows worth being late?

You might go another block or two,
thinking you can have it both ways.
But soon you arrive at the edge
of all your plans.

The bird circles back for you
and you must decide which
appointment you were
born to keep.

Mark Nepo



Practitioner Profile: Rob Foxcroft

How did Focusing come into your life?

In one sense, Focusing was always in my life: in the space where a poem is born or a song begins to write itself; in the perplexity of not knowing what to say or how best to be helpful.

But of course, there's another sense. In the summer of 1987, at a conference, I went to a workshop about Focusing. After the workshop, one of the participants assaulted another. This was startling and very unsettling, but it was clear that a quiet inward sensing

could set powerful forces loose. In March 1988 I went to Chicago to learn Focusing from Gene Gendlin and his people and have been deeply involved ever since.

What effect did Focusing have in your life?

I came into a community where I felt welcome. I can't say this too strongly. There were some people in the Focusing world who offered a big, warm space of understanding and acceptance. I needed that.

How has Focusing informed your journey?

Slowly, slowly, certain strings of knots have come undone, tangle by tangle, first one knot, then another. Although there have been dramatic moments, most of the journey has not been dramatic. Over many years, I wrote my book '*Feeling Heard, Hearing Others*'. The writing was at the heart of the journey: trying to think clearly and to feel truly.

How is Focusing alive for you now?

I find great happiness in listening to people, hearing about their lives and states of being – in being a companion and a friend. I have my own Focusing life, of course, which is like walking in a wilderness where I slowly come to know some of the plants and animals who live there.

I have an overwhelming need for simplicity – and much of the theory behind Focusing is extraordinarily complex and hard to make sense of. Much of the practice, as well, is too complicated for me. A search for simplicity has gone on all these years – it is still at the heart of my relationship with Focusing.

Nine years ago I wrote some words which still represent my feelings rather accurately:

"Our practice, then, must be quite simple – as simple as possible. All we have to do is sit down quietly and listen to our feelings. There is no practice more certain, more elevated or more human than this."

Which seems a good note to end on.

Rob Foxcroft

Many years ago, when I first began to teach the piano, I tried hard to find ways for human beings to learn and grow and relate to one another that would not be essentially authoritarian, but respectful, benevolent and free. In 1988 I went to Chicago to study with Gene Gendlin and became a Focusing Coordinator. I studied the person-centred way of being with Brian Thorne and his colleagues. Now I teach piano-playing, offer spiritual accompaniment, and teach people the principles of meditative listening. Recently I published a book about listening: 'Feeling Heard, Hearing Others'. I live and work in Glasgow, Scotland.

rob@robfoxcroft.com

Forthcoming Workshops & Events

Full details of workshops by BFA members can be viewed [here](#) on the BFA website

September & October 2021

Reminding Suggestions Four week course (BFA Skills Certificate Level 4) with Fiona Parr
Online. 2nd—23rd Sept. Thursdays 2-5pm. fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

Focusing Skills Foundation Course (BFA Skills Certificate) with Marta Fabregat
Online. 6th Sept 2021—23rd May 2022. Mondays 10am—12am. marta@green-spiral.com

Focusing Skills Course (BFA Skills Certificate) with Simon McKibbin
Online. 8th September 2021—11th May 2022. Weds 10am—12am.
www.living-presence.co.uk info@mindfulnesswithcompassion.com

Wild Belonging: A Three Day Focusing Retreat in Nature with Peter Gill
Cornwall (Polperro). 9th—12th September. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Introduction to Focusing Two day workshops (BFA Skills Cert. Level One) with Suzi Mackenzie
Online. 11th & 25th Sept. 10am—5pm www.suzimackenzie.com/focusing-training

Introduction to Focusing Five week course (BFA Skills Certificate Level 1) with Luke Farren
Online. 13th Sept—11th October. 2 hours on Mondays. www.thesomaticself.com 1lukefarren@gmail.com

Beginning the Journey Five week course (BFA Focusing Skills Certificate: Module 1) with Peter Gill
Online. From 21st Sept. Tues 7—9.15pm www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Healing and Transformation Five week course (BFA Skills Certificate: Module 5) with Peter Gill
Online. From 22nd Sept. Weds 10am—12.15 www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Focusing Professional Training One Year Course with Marta Fabregat
Online. Sept 2021—Sept 2022. <https://www.focusing.ie/professionals/13-marta-fabregat>

Untangling the Knots: Deep Dive Focusing Twelve week course for Focusers with Peter Gill
Online. From 23rd Sept. Thurs 10—12.15pm. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Blocks and the Inner Relationship Two Day workshops. (BFA Skills Cert. Level 2) with Suzi Mackenzie
Online. 16th Oct & 20th Nov. 10am—5pm. www.suzimackenzie.com/focusing-training

Your Body Knows the Way Weekend workshop (BFA Skills Certificate: Module 1) with Peter Gill
Bristol. 16th & 17th October. 10am—5pm www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

November & December 2021

The Landscapes of Grief Six week course exploring grief with Peter Gill
Online. From 2nd Nov. Tuesdays 7—9.15pm. www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

Applied Focusing Four week course (BFA Skills Certificate Level 5) with Fiona Parr
Online. 4th Nov—2nd Dec. Thursdays 2-5pm fionaparr-focusing.co.uk fiona@fionaparr-focusing.co.uk

Focusing in Client Work Day workshop for therapists with Suzi Mackenzie
Online. 6th November. <http://www.suzimackenzie.com/> suzimac55@hotmail.com

The Path of the Companion Weekend workshop (BFA Skills Certificate: Module 2) with Peter Gill
Bristol. 13th & 14th November. 10am—5pm www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

The Art of Guiding Weekend workshop (BFA Skills Certificate: Module 3) with Peter Gill
Bristol. 11th & 12th December. 10am—5pm www.livingfocusing.co.uk livingfocusing@fastmail.com

New Year Focusing Retreat Five day residential retreat for Focusers with Gordon Adam
Dartmoor (South West). 29th December 2021—3rd January 2022. gordonadam@blueyonder.co.uk

Local and Online 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 fortnightly, alternating between in-person and Zoom meetings, on Sunday mornings. Open to anyone interested in Focusing, regardless of experience. Contact: Gordon gordonadam@blueyonder.co.uk

Focusing with Poetry Group. Meets online every 6 weeks on a Saturday or Sunday morning. 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>

Online Focusing Group. Open to those who have done the Focusing Skills Certificate training. Meets once a month on Wednesday evenings. Contact Paula paulanewman930@hotmail.com

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 a list of practitioners, articles, events, training, resources, etc.

To see past issues of the newsletter click on 'Menu' on the home page, then 'Useful Resources' or click www.focusing.org.uk/useful-resources

You can sign up to receive this newsletter regularly and freely by using the link above, entering your name and email address, then hitting the 'Subscribe' button .

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 over one hundred (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

The Irish Focusing Network <https://www.focusing.ie/>

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—1500 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 anyone who would like to be involved is invited 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:

The newsletter is published 3 times a year. Submissions for the next issue in November 2021 are welcome anytime.

The deadline for receiving contributions for this issue is **31st September 2021**.