



# British Focusing Association NEWSLETTER

*Issue 22: November 2021*



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# From the Editor

Gordon Adam



This is by far the shortest issue I've produced in the last 6 years since I've been editor. This is partly due to a lack of contributions this time and also due to personal health reasons which has meant I haven't been able to give the newsletter the quality of time and attention it needs to make it its usual full-blooded self. However, I do hope the four articles and poem will be of interest to readers and that you enjoy reading them. I'm sorry to have omitted the BFA members events listings this time, but these can all be viewed on the BFA website by clicking the 'here' link at the top of page 12.

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# 'Being Seriously Playful'– A Children Focusing Training in The Netherlands (July 2021)– with Rene Veugelers and Harriet Teeuw

## By Ruth Hirsch

After participating in Rene Veugelers' workshop on Children Focusing at the 2015 International Focusing Conference in Seattle, I knew I wanted to join the five day summer training that he and Harriet Teeuw lead in a small rural village in the Netherlands each summer. The training, 'Being Seriously Playful', is half of a 60 hour training that results in certification for those who complete both part one and part two, offered in alternating years.

It took me four years to get there, but in 2019 I joined a group of about 20 participants, two Children Focusing Trainers in Training, and Rene and Harriet for the five day training. I loved it so much that I knew I wanted to participate the following summer as well to be able to experience the other part of the training.

Of course, the next year was 2020 when Covid-19 was running rampant and a vaccine wasn't yet available, so the training was postponed to 2021. Even with the many unknowns inherent in international travel this year, I knew that if the workshop were to be held this year, I very much wanted to be there.

It was only on the last day of May that I heard that the training would be taking place – live! Still, with changing regulations in The Netherlands and Israel where I live, plus the threat of airport closure in Israel, it was not clear that I'd be able to travel until less than a week before I actually left for Holland. This was my first trip out of the country (and my first trip anywhere really) in over two years, and I definitely had some nervousness about traveling– especially since at that time The Netherlands had the grim distinction of being the only "red" country in the EU. However, since Israel hadn't banned travel there, I was on my way, armed with masks and optimism.

'Being Seriously Playful' is described as a training in experiential listening and Children Focusing. Rene and Harriet call their approach 'Dynamic Focusing' and write that the training is "designed for anyone working in a professional capacity with children or young people, for parents, grandparents ~ and just for yourself too!"

The training was held at a lovely retreat and conference center with beautiful surroundings, great meals and friendly and hospitable hosts in Nijholtepede, in the north of The Netherlands. We felt warmly welcomed as soon as we arrived. It seemed to be the perfect environment for a training that included learning about Children Focusing, and for those participants who wished, the opportunity to also do some deep healing work. Given that the training was held while Covid was still a reality outside of our nurturing space, it feels important to mention that besides having plenty of room to spread out on the grounds as well as in our large main meeting room, we decided to keep the meeting room door open to the outside to allow additional ventilation.



Both of the trainers are certified Children Focusing Trainers and Art Therapists, with many years experience teaching and working with children of all ages. The workshop included a wide variety of exercises in which to taste various ways one might work with children as well as the child parts within each of us. These ranged from work with imagination, clay, drawing, painting, collage – from small to full body-sized

pieces of art on an array of different subjects. It also included individual and group work – all of it grounded in Focusing.

Participants came from Romania, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Israel. In addition to the two trainers, there were eight participants and one Children Focusing Trainer-in-Training to help to support us. I also enjoyed the wide range of ages in those present – from mid-20s to mid-60s.



*Rene, Luiza and Harriet being seriously playful*

A lovely advantage to having a small group was that we were able to sit together at the same large table for meals, so we were able to extend the conversation to outside of the training. The schedule was extremely user-friendly, not starting too early in the morning, so allowing for a relaxed breakfast, plus having a long break at noon for those who wanted to take walks, nap, go to town, or work on a project from the training during that time. While evenings were free, participants were offered a special activity each evening ranging from a movie the night it was raining too hard to be out and about, a visit to a local attraction combined with a hike through the woods, and a final bonfire. In Focusing style, we were encouraged to listen inside and know that nothing was required. Nevertheless, everyone was present for nearly every lecture and exercise.

Next year's BSP training will be held from 15<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022. Here is a link for the 2021 training:  
<https://www.childrenfocusing.org/being-seriously-playful-symposium/>

**Ruth Hirsch, MSW, MPH, CMT** has been teaching Focusing internationally for 28 years. Based in Jerusalem, Ruth is a Focusing Oriented Therapist, Trainer, and Certifying Coordinator who shares Focusing with therapists, coaches and others as a life-enhancing practice as well as to enhance and deepen work with clients. Besides teaching all levels of Focusing and a specialized workshop on Healing the Inner Critic, she offers Guided Focusing Sessions and Focusing Oriented Therapy world-wide in-person and online.

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# Coming back to Focusing

By Susan Jordan

At the end of December 2021, after 26 years, I shall cease to be a psychotherapist, apart from three student supervisees (in Focusing terms, people coming to me for consultative support) who will stay with me until they graduate next year. It's the end of an era, a long period of time when I've needed to be there week in, week out (apart from planned breaks) for the clients and supervisees I've been 'holding', as the jargon has it. Recently it's felt more and more like carrying a load I'm now ready to put down.

Since 2003 I've also been a Focusing practitioner and teacher, and at different times either Focusing work or psychotherapy work has predominated. Not that the two are completely separate, by any means. I'm trained in Core Process psychotherapy, a Buddhist-based approach in which sensing into the body and bringing awareness to experience are central. Nevertheless, there's a great difference between being with someone in a psychotherapy session, where the inner sensing is part of a wider context and a more faceted relationship, and being a companion to someone in a 'pure' Focusing session. Ann Weiser Cornell's article *What's the difference between Focusing and therapy?* puts it well: in psychotherapy, the relationship between client and therapist is very much part of the work, whereas in Focusing the main emphasis is on the Focuser's relationship with their own process. In one way this puts less onus on the Focusing practitioner. It's not that in a Focusing session the practitioner has no responsibility for holding the Focuser, but to me it's a different and lighter kind of holding. Right now that lightness seems to be what I want.

When I sense into 'all of this' around giving up my psychotherapy practice, what comes first of all is sadness. A big part of me feels sad to be losing this important aspect of my life and to some extent my contact with the Core Process sangha, which has been a 'home' as much as the Focusing world is a 'home'. Each has a different flavour, but both, in their own ways, share a commitment to exploring the depth and truth of experience, which for me brings about a sense of community and heartfelt connection. As I become aware of those different flavours, again what comes is a sense of lightness around BFA and the freedom we have to do things as we want, both individually and as an association. Unlike psychotherapy, BFA isn't accountable to an external body; Focusing isn't a therapy but, as I see it, a practice, and there's a freedom and creativity about being a Focusing professional that isn't curtailed by any restrictions 'the profession' may impose. Not, of course, that psychotherapy isn't creative – it often feels profoundly so, and for me it's been deeply rewarding. But I've done enough of it now, whereas coming back to Focusing feels new and fresh.

As I write this, I'm aware that sadness has come again. It feels autumnal, in keeping with the season, and it touches on loss: the loss of an identity I've had for many years and that's become woven into the way I am in the world. People have said, 'You'll always be a therapist', and while part of me recognises it – certain ways of being with myself and others have become ingrained in me – there is another part that thinks, 'Oh no, will I never be free of it?' But beyond the loss of external identity there is a deeper knowing of loss. I'm getting older and seeing more clearly, in myself and others, the losses that accompany ageing, and retiring from a profession is a reminder that death is coming closer. I recently took part in a workshop with Peter Gill where we looked, gently and openly, at what death means for us, but as I think of it now I'm aware how much fear of it there is in me. Fear and regret – things not done, not achieved, things I wish I'd done differently or hadn't done – alongside a deep gratitude for all the goodness in my life and the many blessings I've had.

And, for the moment, I'm still alive and eager to engage with life as creatively as I can. I've just advertised a Focusing workshop entitled 'What do I want?' which feels full of meaning and life-forward energy for me. The workshop will be about finding our heart's deepest desires, drawing on Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell's work with not-wanting and wanting and to some extent the understanding of de-

sire in Rob Burbea's Soulmaking Dharma. I'm looking forward to being more involved with Focusing again, though I don't think I'd want to do another stint on the BFA sofa, and I'm hoping I'll have more time for writing and perhaps other creative projects. I know there's more to be sensed into here, and I'm very glad that all I've learnt of Focusing over the years can help me to explore it.

### **Reference**

1] <https://focusingresources.com/what-is-the-difference-between-focusing-therapy/>

**Susan Jordan** has been a Focusing practitioner and teacher since 2003 and is also 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 for more than twenty years and enjoys being a member of her local Focusing community. Her first poetry collection, 'A House of Empty Rooms', was published by Indigo Dreams in 2017. Her second collection, 'I never think dark will come', was published by Oversteps Books in February 2021 and a pamphlet collection, 'Last of the Line', will be published by Maytree Press in November 2021.

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# Focusing with Dementia

By Sonya Steller

Alongside my work towards the completion of my Focusing Practitioner training in 2017, I accompanied my 96 year old mother on her journey towards her death. She received the diagnosis of vascular dementia a year before and by Christmas last year it became apparent that she could no longer manage in the home where she had been happy for 52 years. I had to make the excruciatingly painful decision to find her somewhere she would be cared for in such a way that she would settle and be comfortable. This proved to be no easy task but eventually I did find a suitable dementia nursing home in the area where she had lived almost all her adult life. I always had a sense that even though she couldn't cognitively grasp where she was, her organismic being would feel 'at home' in some subliminal way. This proved to be the case and she settled and bonded with those who cared for her.

Those months of uncertainty and searching for a solution to an intractable 'problem' were very painful and difficult but through it all Focusing sustained me and really helped me to see what was going on implicitly in me. I came to recognise the resistance that felt so powerful, my feelings of inadequacy, guilt, doubt and shame. During this time I found it really difficult to live with myself and Focusing sessions provided an oasis where I could 'welcome the guests'. Gradually my mother's dementia worsened and she mostly lived in the world of her childhood. However, this was combined with her lifelong most persistent character trait – that of worrying about the family; her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Now that she had forgotten the existence of those who had been in her consciousness for a shorter time, she had transferred her worrying to her parents and her siblings, all of whom are long dead.

Because I lived a three hour journey away from my mother I could only manage to visit once a week and even this was challenging for me. It meant that each time I arrived and said 'Hello' I met an unknown version of my mother and I was never sure whether she recognised me or not. Maybe a couple of times in the few hours I was there we made eye contact and connection and her familiar smile would touch my heart. At least I knew her history and could offer her memories which she sometimes engaged with but mostly didn't. I discovered that all I could do for her now was to try to meet her where she was and to listen and reflect back. I Focused with her – it was all I had left. Every week a new reality and listening to her and to my own body, to the 'somethings' in me that helped me to adjust and sense where she was, deep down in a place that had become inaccessible. I remembered Gendlin's capacity for *being with* and tried to emulate it. It was all I could offer her now.

One wonderful result of spending time Focusing with my mother was that my feelings towards her and attitude to her death really shifted. I was able to open my heart and access my compassion and patience and express my love for her as never before. To quote Gendlin:

"The body is an interactional system. We can do more with somebody than we can do alone. Being with a given person is an utterly different physical living process from being alone or with a different person. That's what therapy is based on. Living things *are* interactions. You might be sad alone, but if somebody is there who can hear you, then you cry, Your situation is carried by your body. When the situation changes, your body changes, and vice versa."

We had a unique relationship, mother and daughter and I wanted to be alongside her in her process of leaving this world. Focusing enabled me to do that in challenging circumstances and I was so grateful that I knew it. Thank you Gene and all my teachers.

*See next page for bio and photo of Sonya*

**Sonya Steller**

*I have been practicing as a person-centred therapist for over 20 years and first learned Focusing in 2009. Since then it has informed by practice but most of all, enabled me to be aware of my own process when in relationship with another. I have a particular interest in difference of all kinds and the individual search for creative living. My background in the arts, having trained as a textile artist, has built my belief in the power of the creative process in enabling each and every one of us to achieve our potential.*

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## Could it be

Looking out on autumn sea,  
shades of light floating free.  
Sunset fire shimmering,  
on this cool Brighton evening.

Given the opportunity,  
who wouldn't want to be,  
a ripple on life's ocean.

Eyes soften to take it in,  
the beauty of this calming scene.  
Streams of thoughts give way,  
to experience this delightful play.

Could it be, could it be...  
Somewhere within,  
we are both -  
the ripple and the ocean.

*Russell Kendall*



*Photo by Russ Kendall*

# Practitioner Profile:

## Alison Thorpe



I'm not quite sure how I found Focusing, back in 2002. I was on a camping holiday with a new friend, having conversations about self-healing and therapy. I followed up on some things she'd shared and somehow found 'Focusing' on the internet. One thing that particularly struck me was Gendlin's paper: 'A Theory of Personality Change' (written in 1964). Reading his words, something in me said: 'If that really exists, I want it'. There was something in Gendlin's words about a process of making sense, of being understood and of understanding, of things deeply changing within oneself and feeling better – and this was a known, actual process – nothing vague or unsure about it.

Something in the way he wrote about these unsure, stumbling, hesitant clients, who needed support, reassurance, encouragement to continue speaking from their experience, also spoke to me. I still have a few handwritten notes from early solo Focusing sessions using Gendlin's little Focusing book. They contain really important things even if it seemed to me that I couldn't do Focusing at that time.

Fast forward to the end of 2010 and depression (I had gone in and out of depression my whole adult life). I decided that this was no longer a tolerable way of living. Whatever the personal change process was going to be, I was going to do it. And there was Focusing in my back pocket, not entirely forgotten...

I signed up for a Focusing weekend in February 2011 with Peter Gill (then Manju) at a Buddhist centre in North London. I discovered that I had actually been Focusing back in 2002, but hadn't got as far as a felt shift. On the Sunday afternoon during a Focusing session, I recall there was something around my heart, and in relation to my whole life tangle about 'work', and the job I was stressfully doing, the words came, from my body, *'there is no love here'*. And those words changed everything. Oh my gosh, this was Focusing, this was something so, so important and precious and **true**. I was amazed – and maybe for people who don't know Focusing, this doesn't really come across – why was that so profound an experience?? But from that point on, I knew I had to leave that job, it was bad for me, but it was also a pure moment of a deep knowing in myself – I had something inside me that was trustworthy and amazing and life was now different. I signed up for the rest of the Focusing Certificate course (4 more weekends through the year).

***It is a profound discovery for most people when they find it possible to continue direct reference. It comes to be deeply valued as "I am in touch with myself."***

*Gendlin: A Theory of Personality Change, 1964.*

At the first UK Focusing School in October 2011 (I threw myself into all things Focusing that year), a key Focusing session brought the guidance that I needed to *'do a job with heart'*.

In January 2012, I tentatively signed up for an Introduction to Counselling course, putting into action something I'd not been able to do in 20+ years of thinking about becoming a counsellor.

My person-centred Diploma didn't include Focusing, yet everything for me became informed and supported by my Focusing practice and Gene Gendlin's work. The training was interpersonally difficult. I loved the work of Carl Rogers and the deep roots of Focusing but didn't understand why Focusing was left out and I felt alone as the only Focuser on the course.

Towards the end of 2012, my Focusing practice brought the realisation that I had deep trauma which

had made me feel very stuck in life, and depressed and just not knowing why. I didn't know what psychological trauma even was until I began discovering this through Focusing and the new ideas that I followed up on. The realisation brought a lot of anxiety and it became clear that beyond Focusing partnerships, I needed a Focusing-oriented therapist to help me. The journey has been life-changing.

After gaining my counselling qualification I followed up with a Focusing Practitioner training with Kay Hoffmann. I wanted to offer Focusing to people and bring more Focusing into the world.

Looking back, I needed permission to go to my own experiencing. That's why Gene's words back in 2002 spoke to me so much, and has led me to give permission to people I work with to go to their own experience, however that is for them. I now know that as a child I was not allowed to trust my own personal experience, so no wonder Focusing was so necessary for me with its wide and deep permission to trust and follow your own truth with the loving accompaniment of another person to reassure you that this is okay.

I've recently made a big change in my life, including moving out of London and buying a house at the edge of Brighton and I'm happy here.

***Alison Thorpe***

*I live in Brighton and work as a Focusing-oriented counsellor and Focusing Practitioner. I currently work over Zoom, but I look forward to being in the same room as people again as well. Focusing is at the heart of all my work. I'm currently exploring Internal Family Systems and the differences and similarities with Focusing.*  
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# Forthcoming Workshops & Events

Full details of workshops by BFA members can be viewed [here](#) on the BFA website  
*Apologies for the absence of an itemised listing in this issue.*

*From Fiona Parr:*

I am very happy to be a part of and invite you to attend the upcoming

**Self as Presence Conference - A Way of `Being' in the World** from December 3rd-5th.

This online Conference is an invitation to touch into our essential Self through the practice of mindfulness, compassion and wisdom. There are specific sessions & in-depth exploration for mental health professionals, organisational leaders, educators, parents. [www.justbeingcenter.com/conference](http://www.justbeingcenter.com/conference).

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.solar-active.com/focusing_group) Contact: [david@solar-active.com](mailto:david@solar-active.com)

**South Yorkshire Focusing Group.** Open group which meets monthly.  
Contact: Hugh [hughknopf@rocketmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:livingfocusing@fastmail.com)

# Resources & Further Information

## **British Focusing Association (BFA)** [www.focusing.org.uk](http://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](http://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/](https://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](http://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](http://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 March 2022 are welcome anytime.

The deadline for receiving contributions for this issue is **31st January 2022**.