

Western Australian Solution Focused Interest Group (WASFIG) Meeting 18



WASFIG Best Hopes: Share, Connect, Grow, Learn, Develop

1. Share SF knowledge and update our SF knowledge since our original training;
2. Connect and network with like-minded SF practitioners to reduce isolation and enhance a community spirit;
3. Grow interest in the SFBT approach in WA and beyond and do our bit to change the world one SF step at a time;
4. Learn where and with whom SF might be best applied in our practices for greater focus;
5. Develop our clinical effectiveness and efficiency (we may only have a set number of sessions so how do we do the very best with each session as though it may be the only one or the last).

WASFIG Zoom Meeting 18 Review: Saturday 22 June 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time

When: Saturday 22 June 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD/VIC/NSW = 11:30am-1:30pm; SA/NT = 11am-1pm; New Zealand = 1:30pm-3:30pm)

Where: Zoom

Attendees: Adrian Holmes, Theresa Acutt, Michele Thomas, Lisa Jooste, Rebekah Collins, Dion Sing, Susan Colmar, Cathy Martin, Samantha Smith, Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond (Co-Coordinator).

Apologies: Nadia Truong, Fiona Skahill, Roger Lowe, Ruth Leveson, Katti Jisuk Seo, Yvette Strawbridge, Shona Scallan, Matt Cameron, Magdaline Wendot and Bill Grace.

Group Facilitators: Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond

Group Presenter: Adrian Holmes

Topic: Tools for Hard Conversations

In our WASFIG June 2024 meeting we were excited to be joined by Adrian Holmes (Solution Focused Counsellor, Trainer and Supervisor) to share his thoughts on supporting clients through hard conversations. Together with his colleague Jane D'Arcy, Adrian has written a book called *Tools for Hard Conversations* which explores practical steps which enable both the client and practitioner to leave the session feeling stronger (D'Arcy and Holmes, 2020). Have a look at Adrian's website for more information on the transformative work provided by himself and his team: <https://www.toolsforhardconversations.com/> We were also honoured to be joined by Dion Sing, President of ASFA. Although WA is a distance from the east coast, it is wonderful how the power of technology can bring us together to share an energising Solution Focused space!

Adrian opened the presentation by inviting the group to reflect on their Best Hopes for the session with the intriguing thought arising that we as practitioners may inadvertently make hard conversations harder! By following the Solution Focused process, these conversations do not need to be so hard and can actually be more hopeful conversations instead. Adrian led the group on a journey to discover the importance of the Solution Focused

philosophy which removes focus on blaming and shaming a client and shifts to affirming the humanity of our client and ourselves as practitioners. The Solution Focused philosophy encourages us as the practitioner to show up genuinely as a person to engage and be present with our clients to create an empowering space which invites our clients to leave a session with new reflections and possibility for the future.

Adrian explored multiple important beliefs and principles underlying the Solution Focused philosophy some of which included:

- privileging the client as expert in their life, while the practitioner is the expert in the process of having a hopeful conversation;
- knowing the client is actively seeking change even when they may not appear this way;
- allowing space for the client to talk about the problem and shift to possibility as soon as the client is ready for this;
- drawing the client's attention to how they are already working to resolve their own problem and how others in the client's life would notice this happening;
- asking the client what their Best Hopes are to guide the session and come back to when we feel stuck or lost – without the client's Best Hopes we could be wasting their time and missing the opportunity to have a meaningful conversation towards future change;
- and amplifying the client's Best Hopes which invites the client to naturally move towards their preferred future, by looking for opportunities in their life that fits with what they articulated, making the change the client is looking for to be more likely to take place.

Trusting in this Solution Focused process takes pressure off ourselves as the practitioner to solve the client's problem for them, and reminds us to step back to invite the client to do this for themselves.

Relentless Hope: Transforming Hard Conversations into Hopeful Conversations

Adrian left us feeling inspired, energised and with a renewed intention to be mindful of how we think about our client and what we say to our client which ultimately impacts how hard a 'hard conversation' has to be! Listening to Adrian has echoed and validated learnings from the *SFU* and *BRIEF* of the importance of going into a session with what Adrian referred to as '*relentless hope*'. For Kerry this is holding onto the Solution Focused mindset of being a Resilientologist, believing in our clients being motivated to change, knowing that they have already started to change (but may not have noticed), and showing up as a genuine person to connect with our client as a person rather than focusing too much on techniques and strategies.

This is helpful to remember when having what could be a hard conversation with a client as it shifts influence in the conversation to myself as the practitioner. Rather than becoming worried that the client is talking about the problem, I focus more on what my response will be to my client despite their talk about the problem. Anna Francis (Francis, 2024) from the *SFU* has proposed a useful reframe around problem talk and reiterated that 'problem talk' can only come from myself as the practitioner when I choose to join with the client and talk more about the problem. This makes a hard conversation harder. Whereas refocusing on the client's Best Hopes and having a conversation about what the client might be doing that would let them know they are moving in the direction of their Best Hopes despite the problem creates more hope in what could be a hard conversation.

SF practitioners can defuse potentially hard conversation by listening carefully to our client for opportunities to ask hopeful questions with validating curiosity (Mark McKergow) to amplify how a client managed in a difficult situation. This shifts the client's attention from the negative impact of the situation on their wellbeing to what they were able

to do to support and protect themselves which helped them feel better in the moment. SF questions look to highlight the resources the client drew upon, how they thought about themselves differently and how they might have spoken to others differently which influenced more positive support from relationships around them. Asking hopeful questions which invite the client to notice the more resilient version of themselves responding to the challenging situation in a useful way invites the client to choose to notice this version of themselves continuing to show up in future. The client can choose to take opportunities that fit more with this resilient version of self to continue to better protect and care for themselves within the difficult circumstance. As Elliott Connie of the SFU has reminded us 'it is not about removing the struggle, but showing up at your best for the struggle.'

Adam Froerer and Cecil Walker's recent Best Hopes Podcast Season 2, Episode 2 (Froerer and Walker, 2024) suggested that inviting our client to articulate a Best Hopes and description of their preferred future is less about actually achieving their goal or outcome and more about the version of self they transform into while pursuing their goal or outcome. The importance of achieving the original goal may shift for the client along their journey as they learn lessons about themselves and what they want in life. They suggest that in pursuing our Best Hopes we become a stronger version of self that is more aligned with achieving our hoped for outcome whether or not we achieve the exact goal we initially hoped for. This more resilient version is also better able to manage setbacks along the way to move forward in a more useful way. With the experience of setbacks comes knowledge in how to better negotiate these, which we would not have learnt had we not been in pursuit of the goal. The benefit of holding high hopes they reiterate is more about the journey you go on to achieve the goal and the version of self you transform into while on the path to achieving the goal, rather than achieving the goal itself. You become a better version of yourself whether or not you achieve the goal simply by setting out to achieve it.

For example, when a client reports their Best Hopes is to repair their relationship with their partner, a useful SF question Elliott has recommended is 'Suppose you wake up tomorrow whether or not your relationship is back on track with your partner but somehow you are the very best version of yourself and the supportive, loving and present partner you want to be, what is the very first sign that would let you know this had happened?' The description then becomes more about the client noticing signs of themselves showing up at their very best, which is within their control, rather than about repairing the relationship which they can influence the likelihood of this happening by being at their best. Whether or not the client's relationship reconnects they will be a more resilient version of themselves and a better partner moving forward in their relationship, and be more able to cope if their relationship does not rekindle to move forward in a more useful way in their life.

In appreciation for the process Adrian was creating for the group, Steve noted that the way to have a good conversation was to start with a good question and then keep going! Steve also enjoyed the idea of the client moving towards the change they want once they know what this is and reflected that 'the client has an internal homing device' that we as practitioners can activate by asking good questions. As everything within a client's life is systemic and linked, changes in one area can have a ripple effect and positive impact on other areas and relationships within the client's life. This fits with what Elliott has described where we speak to and evoke the client's Desired Transformation, and this version of the client that they would like to be will rise up and respond to their problem in a better way, working to resolve their own problem.

Thank you Adrian Holmes!

Thank you again Adrian for your energy, insightful and thought-provoking Solution Focused teachings and the important reminder that in working from the SFBT approach, both the client and the practitioner can walk away feeling stronger from sessions when the practitioner is mindful to tap into the fluency of SF language to transform hard conversations into more hopeful conversations.

It would be great to hear from attendees and those who have reflections after reading this summary who would like to share about what is something you take away from the meeting that will help you in your client work. Please share your comments on our WASFIG Facebook page so we can all join in on the conversation to keep connecting between meetings!

References:

D'Arcy, J. and Holmes, A. (2020), *Tools for Hard Conversations in the Helping Professions: Practical Tools from Abstract Theories*, Brisbane: Glass House Books

Francis, A (2024), Can We Use Problem Talk in Solution Focused Brief Therapy? *Don't Forget, with Anna Francis, Solution Focused Universe*, Available <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySqGOHFjJNU>; Accessed 23 June 2024

Froerer, A. and Walker, C. (2024), The Best Hopes Podcast: *The Value of Shooting for the Stars*, Season 2, Episode 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahve1Y33bQQ> Accessed 25 June 2024

Information for our Upcoming WASFIG Zoom Meeting 19 in August 2024

WASFIG August 2024 Zoom Meeting 19: Saturday 31 August 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time

When: Saturday 31 August 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD/VIC/NSW = 11:30pm-1:30pm; SA/NT = 11am-1pm; New Zealand = 1:30pm-3:30pm)

Topic: Special Guest Speaker Katti Jisuk Seo on Solution Focused Coaching with Individuals and Groups and using creative writing as a creative tool in session.

Please join us for our August 2024 WASFIG meeting where Special Guest **Katti Jisuk Seo**, Solution Focused coach and writer, will be Zooming in from Sydney to share her thoughts on SFBT Coaching for individuals and groups and how she uses creative writing as a tool with her clients in session.

Please have a look at her website to learn more about Katti and her approach: <https://en.kattijisuk.com/>

In preparing for our August 2024 WASFIG meeting:

Katti has kindly shared her article *The Glint of Light on Broken Glass* which explores her experiences of being a client during a SFBT training program with Evan George of BRIEF and her reflections on this: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/journalsfp/vol5/iss2/6/>

ASFA members may wish to watch (or re-watch) the September 2023 ASFA Members meeting where Katti presented her thoughts on self coaching, SF walk and talk sessions and training ChatGPT for Solution Focused questions.

WASFIG News:

July 2024: Solution Focused Skills Practice and Supervision Groups via Zoom

“When we struggle in session we may feel we have done a bad job, but when we are struggling is when we are most creative but we tend to focus on the struggle instead of the creativity. It is easier to see the brilliance in our colleagues that we struggle to see within ourselves.” – Chris Iveson, June 2024

There is something special that happens when connecting with a group of Solution Focused practitioners. Being able to share SF ways of working and thinking about clients inspires and energises me, and I leave feeling stronger within

myself to make a positive change in my clients' lives. I find conversations with a group of SF practitioners, whether in group supervision or training, have a sense of 'healing' and renewing of my confidence and drive to make a difference for clients. SF group supervision is an opportunity to share in the same inspiring and hopeful conversations that we have with our clients with each other as practitioners. It is so helpful to be able to leave with a range of useful SF ideas to use with my clients, rather than having suggestions that don't always fit with my way of weaving hope into hard conversations. SF colleagues are focusing on what we did well with our client and what is working to build on to move more intentionally down this more useful path with our client. SF colleagues are intentionally noticing our brilliance that we may have not noticed as Chris has pointed out, as we are too busy criticising ourselves for what we did wrong or feeling stuck! Although I do engage with other more traditional supervision approaches, there is nothing like walking away from a SF conversation with a colleague or SF supervision group feeling more confident and stronger in myself and ready to create positive change for my clients 'one question at a time' as Matt Cameron SF practitioner from New Zealand shared!

You are warmly invited to join Solution Focused Skills Practice and Supervision Groups with Kerry Drummond. Experience the Solution Focused 'difference that makes a difference' and leave group supervision feeling energised, stronger and with a sense of renewed confidence as a practitioner. These are open groups trusting that you know when group supervision would be most useful to engage in for yourself. With changing life circumstances, what was once a suitable time locked in at the beginning of the year might not be useful later in the year. SF Skills Practice and Supervision Groups are a safe and empowering space where practitioners can feel a sense of connection, appreciation and encouragement during their first group or after a few groups in! Groups are held during the year on the alternate month to WASFIG (March, May, July, September, November) either on a Friday or Saturday for 2 hours via Zoom with 4 practitioners to receive support on client cases and to practice SF skills together. Next groups will be held on **Friday 12 July 2024 at 9:30am-11:30am WA time** and **Saturday 27 July 2024 9:30am-11:30am**. Please contact Kerry via email on invictuscounsellingservice@gmail.com if you would like more information or to sign up for a group during the year. There is 10% discount for the first group for WASFIG members who have attended a meeting and for ASFA members.

September 2024: ASFA Conference 2024 in Sydney

The **ASFA Conference 2024** which will be held **in Sydney on 12-15 September 2024** is fast approaching with Mark McKergow as key note speaker. Mark will also provide a pre-conference workshop. Please contact Kerry if you are attending and would like to join Kerry and Steve in the **Shuttle Bus to the Conference!** For more information see the ASFA website below.

Join the **Australasian Solution Focused Association** to access free workshops with special guest presenters during the year (which is recorded to access at a later time if you cannot attend), articles from the Journal of Solution Focused Practices, monthly online peer group supervision on Monday afternoons, and the members only Facebook group. <https://www.solutionfocused.org.au/>

Please join our **WASFIG Facebook Group** to keep connecting between meetings, see up to date news, share great SFBT resources and get support in working with clients: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3103428583276551>

Thank you all for attending our June 2024 WASFIG meeting and learning how to have hopeful conversations the enable our clients and ourselves as practitioners to leave sessions feeling stronger. Looking forward to seeing all who can attend at our August 2024 WASFIG meeting.

Warmly,

Kerry and Steve

WA SFBT Interest Group Co-Coordinator