

STAYING IN FOCUS

THE FOCUSING INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER

VOLUME X, NUMBER 3

APPLICATIONS OF FOCUSING

SEPTEMBER 2010

SHARING FOCUSING WITH OTHERS: THE COMMUNITY FOCUSING LAB AND COMMUNITY WELLNESS FOCUSING WORKSHOPS

By NINA JOY LAWRENCE, *Certifying Coordinator, Oregon, USA, in collaboration with members of the Community Focusing Lab. Participants in the TFI Retreat, Focusing and Psychosocial Wellness: A Community Resiliency Approach, April 17 – 19, 2010, Stony Point, NY, USA*

Photographs by Diane Couture, Collage created by Robert D. Lawrence



Top row: Rosa Zubizarreta, William Hernandez, Seska Ramberg, Charles Herr, Solange St. Pierre, Suzanne Noel, Patricia Omidian, Mary Jeanne Larrabee. Lower row: Larry Hurst, Jill Drummond, Merry Muraskin, Beatrice Blake, on computers, Catherine Johnson and Annika Froebose attending by Skype, Nina Joy Lawrence, Mary Jennings, DaRa William. Not pictured are Diane Couture & Marine de Fremenville.

HOW DO YOU SHARE FOCUSING WITH PEOPLE IN A COMMUNITY?

Have you ever wanted to encourage the use of Focusing by ordinary people in your community--family, religious group, local school, library or work place--and felt stymied on how to move ahead? Or maybe you are heart-connected to some area of the world far from where you live and have felt the ache of wanting to support the people there in the midst of difficulties.

Seska Ramberg felt just this way in 2008 when she attended The Focusing Institute workshop on Focusing and Psychosocial Wellness, which I co-led with Pat Omidian at Garrison Institute, NY. Seska was a Certified Focusing Professional who had already been to Sri Lanka helping in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, but she felt blocked in her desire to teach Focusing. Looking back at that time she says,

I was hung up in this unexamined assumption that I had to memorize a body of work that was called Teaching Focusing, develop a grand syllabus and somehow attract all these people to it in order to transmit it. And one of the things that stopped me was this word, "Focusing." I would think about going out into the world with Focusing and would imagine people saying, "Well, what's Focusing?" and that would stop me dead in my tracks.

When I was in Sri Lanka I could really feel Focusing moving through me. I met people there in the rubble and the mud and con-

sciously felt Focusing guiding the way I brought myself to anyone or any situation. I just couldn't figure out how to externalize it formally.

Then at the Garrison workshop all these wonderful ideas came, like you don't necessarily have to use the word Focusing when you teach it . . . that was the most liberating thing! I already knew that concept from working with individual therapy clients but hadn't transferred it to the process of bringing Focusing to a group. And the idea that sharing small elements or bits of Focusing, which people can use immediately and pass on, is a valid way to teach Focusing.

WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY FOCUSING LAB AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

After the June 2008 Focusing and Psychosocial Wellness workshop, we formed the Community Focusing Lab. Seska was the one who came up with the name "Lab," which fit the group desire to create a space of mutual experiment, support, and collaboration. We have been meeting monthly in phone conference since July 2008.

On November 23, 2008, Lab members received this e-mail from Seska:

Last week I was asked to be involved with a new community art project working with refugees and asylees. It's called "Heroes in our Midst." Our part will be exploring the life narratives through art. If anyone has ideas on how Focusing can be helpful in the facilitation, I'd love to know.

Seska had lots of ideas and resources, but she still didn't feel confident about how to bring Focusing into this project. Looking back now she says,

As I moved along that thirteen month path from the first to the last stage of the project, I continually drew from our Community Focusing Lab. In our monthly conference calls I would hear a phrase that would grab me, like "Excellent Listening," and think, "Oh wow, that's such a pure and beautiful objective to have." By the end of my project, people from many different countries had listened to each other and been listened to as they never had before. A girl from Bhutan said that to listen to a girl from Baghdad tell of experiences so similar to her own had changed her understanding of the world and her own place in it. Her uncle said, "I have carried alone in me a big story for a long time, but this is the first time I felt that someone WANTED to hear it. All the sufferings got to share each other."

The Lab was like a peer advisory group, helping me clarify and distill, inspiring me, and boosting my confidence. As I brought examples of our work to the calls for feedback, others helped me see where I really was sharing Focusing. At the end of the project, I came out feeling that I am a Focusing Professional after all!

Then a further wonderful thing happened at the Stony Point retreat, when I described this project to Annika Frohböse, who was attending via Skype from Germany. She got inspired that maybe she can do something similar with refugees in Germany.

Seska now sees herself being part of a team that shares questions, uncertainties, and discoveries with each other. She says, "Being in this group, I don't have to be ashamed that I don't know stuff yet." As she was preparing for a trip to assist quake victims in Haiti (see her article in this issue), she felt able to ask for lots of help from her Focusing friends. New Lab member Mary Jeanne Larrabee has also been working in Haiti in recent months, and she and Seska have shared experiences and plans in a creative thinking/felt-sensing way that has felt empowering for both of them.

Lab member Jill Drummond says,

It's been so valuable to me, being in an environment that encourages a shift in thinking from "Do it a certain way" to "Let's experiment!" I have come to appreciate and almost welcome what I used to call "mistakes," because they yield more information. "So that doesn't work! What does that tell us?"

New Lab member, Catherine Johnson, (read about her work in this newsletter) of South Africa says,

My participation in the Community Focusing Lab has challenged some of my original thinking and planning. It's fuller now, and it knows its context. Beatrice Blake drew on a theatre piece I did in my Leratong training, and she is now on this training in El Salvador, drawing on a manual I compiled for Leratong. I love this kind of inspiring cross-pollination. We're building something as a collective, not each trotting around different parts of the world doing our entirely unrelated things.

From reviewing our two years of experience in the Community Lab, Seska and I distilled the following guiding questions and suggestions that help as we sense our way forward in new Community Wellness Focusing situations. We added some sample answers that we might find in particular situations.

Jill Drummond says,

When we go into a Focusing teaching situation, we do the best we can to find what would be helpful beforehand, knowing that a lot of it is going to change, morph, reshape itself. It has to, because until we meet these people that are going to be participants, it just can't be fully formed without their input.

Well, what do we have here? Maybe we have a bunch of people who have just been through floods, war, earthquakes. Maybe we have our family members or friends with difficult life situations.

Again, what do we have here? Well, I'm here.

What are these people wanting? Maybe it is help with the violence in their community. Maybe it is a way to regain a sense of safety as they recover from earthquakes. Maybe they most need to feel their own worth as human beings.

What do we have to offer here? We can offer bits of Focusing that go out like ambassadors or spread around like vitamins in the water--bits like Being With, Pausing, Listening, Felt Sensing.

What do we appreciate here? We look around with incredible appreciation for what people are living through, and we express our gratitude that we get a chance to be with them.

What can we discover here? In some way, the answers are already here. Much of what people of a community need seems to be already with them, including some things that point to Focusing. We can find aspects of resiliency as we collaborate with the community people. They respond with a huge increase of confidence, "Oh yes! We have it! It is ours!"

Whatever we have is enough. We can do something helpful together using what we and community people have.

The Lab community is an instance of what we bring to other communities. By living with these kinds of questions and collaborating on answers in our conference calls and retreats, we feel truly empowered. When we share our questions, our failures, and our successes, suddenly something new, and even elegant in its simplicity, comes "popping out" of what's already there, and we are flowing forward with energy.

Lab member Marine de Freminville, Montreal, Canada, is traveling to Ecuador this summer to collaborate with Lab member William Hernandez (see his article in this newsletter). She says,

Very inspiring last retreat on Focusing and Community Wellness in Stony Point! Savouring still the art of the "Pause" as presented by William. I encourage people who love and practice Focusing to join the Community Focusing Lab to discover more ways of applying and sharing it with others in local, national, international areas and to get inspired by what others are doing too. It could help us all to develop a global vision.

YOU ARE INVITED

The Community Focusing Lab group will be offering several free phone conferences for interested people during the 2010-2011 year. You can watch for dates, which will be widely publicized. Jointly with The Focusing Institute we will also be offering a workshop on Community Wellness Focusing, June 5-7, at the Asilomar Conference Grounds, on the beach in Monterey, California, following the 2011 International Focusing Conference. You can sign up for the workshop on The Focusing Institute website. You are most welcome to join us!



Focusing Within the Management of NGO's

By WILLIAM HERNANDEZ, *Certifying Coordinator, Quito, Ecuador*

From the book *Focusing within the Management of Non-Profit Organizations* by William Hernandez. Quito: Editorial El Conejo, 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Our work with Focusing in Ecuador began almost two years ago. It has two aspects: 1) Focusing within the management of FECD (Fondo Ecuatoriano de Cooperación para el Desarrollo [Ecuadorian Cooperation Fund for Development]) and 2) Focusing within the development projects. We work with human groups that receive the least amount of income in the country, who live in the rural sector, are geographically dispersed, who experience difficulties in accessing their communities and, in the majority of the cases, do not benefit from basic services such as water, electricity, telephone services, health clinics, medical assistance, or basic sanitation like latrines and potable water.

Our main objective in teaching Focusing in the communities and development projects is to have everyone do it for themselves and have this intrinsic human quality at their disposal, without depending on professors or experts all the time. We not only teach Focusing to create good Focusing trainers; we also have the intention to "teach so that each person can learn and do it for themselves."

FOCUSING HELPS THAW POVERTY

We are conscious that the usual social development and education activities are not sufficient. As privileged management working directly with Ecuador's vulnerable groups, we notice that the material "achievements" which better the living conditions of populations are not enough. Social groups may attain significant advances in matters like health and education; their organizations may improve; they may develop a conscientious care for the environment, even improve their income and other important issues such as generational or gender equality and the intercultural harmony of a multi-ethnic Ecuador. However, the problems and issues that existed prior to these achievements continue affecting the lives of the populace: conflicts, violence, confusion. The angst and suffering of a poverty condition do not end with the attainment of certain economic resources. We feel that poverty has its origin in the freezing of the soul; where the innate condition of the human being to give and receive love has become detained. Where only the rational mind and nothing else but the mind works to perfection. Where even our emotions are programmed to a code of sadness, happiness, fear, peace, suffering, relief, emptiness, etc. These emotions offer almost no option for movement, as if only occurring in continual repetition.



You can write to William Hernández at wbernand@fecd.org.ec

For more information on FECD: www.fecd.org.ec

A WATERFALL NETWORK SAVES ON RESOURCES AND TIME

We support the organizing of technical teams consisting of male and female leaders in the localities, in other words, people that, due to their relationships within their communities, could influence other community members. This way, we ensure that they, after living the process for themselves, will communicate and transfer to others what they have perceived in the seminars.

We take advantage of the methodology used by FECD for the transfer of technology (agricultural, health, educa-



William Hernández leading a circle group this year in Ecuador.

tional, environmental, etc). We organize "local promoters," in order to transfer the 'Listening with Focusing' concept to the communities in the least amount of time and with the smallest cost possible. Subsequently of course

this cost, for the process to be sustainable, must be assumed by the communities themselves.

CHECKING WITH THE BODY

We have a methodology that teaches each person to listen first to themselves, in order to be able to listen to others. We teach: 1) pause, 2) presence 3) the felt sense and 4) checking with the body. We have discovered that teaching “checking with the body” throughout the individual Focusing process, as well as during the entire seminar and in “daily life,” is extremely powerful. When we teach “checking with the body,” pausing and presence are implicit and the necessary bodily space is opened to allow for the blossoming of the felt sense with greater depth.

Checking with the body is similar to teaching the Pause. It is learning to wait a while, taking consciousness that that moment is for feeling with the body the answer to the challenge that we are facing. Checking with the body brings a broader action or answer that includes the felt, and also the intellectual or the rational, but brings it in a more precise proportion with respect to what we are “checking” at that moment.

Therefore, checking with the body what is happening to me, or what is occurring with my interaction, turns into the simplest form of accompanying a process of self-listening, and also of accompanying another person who is doing it.

EXAMPLE

Here is a real example with a community leader, at the beginning of his private Listening with Focusing Session. (It is one of the thirty individual sessions that were carried out the day before the one-day group seminar.):

W: How did the community leader invite you? What did he say so that you would come?

M: He told me that it was not obligatory and asked if I wanted to learn to listen to myself, in a Listening with Focusing Session (he pronounces it without knowing Focusing).

W: Do you want to do it?

M: Yes.

W: Check with your body if you want to do it.

M: What is that?!!!

W: We are going to learn together. How does that sound?

M: OK.

W: Ask me what my name is.

M: What is your name?

W: My name is William. (I answer quickly, almost automatically)

Now, ask me what my name is, but ask me to “check with my body” before answering you.

M: What is your name?, but answer me “checking with your body.”

W: (I “pause,” take some time... then answer) ...William.

What is your name?, but please, answer me checking with your body...

M: (He takes a long time... maybe more time than what I took, and then... answers)... Manuel. (When we ask someone to check in the body before saying their name, it creates a natural felt sense about the whole of being “Manuel.”)

W: How many children do you have?... , but answer me “checking with your body” ...

M: (He takes some time, as if turning his eyes inward ... and then responds after 6 or 7 seconds) ...five children... (When we ask Manuel to check in his body before answering, he checks in his body with a long pause and naturally finds a felt sense of each of his children.)

W: So you felt what it is to check with the body? Please answer me checking with your body.

M: (Taking a prolonged period of time)... Yes...

W: Please, check with your body if now, you would like to have a Listening with Focusing Session?

M: (He takes a long time, then responds) Yes... I do.

Everything that follows in the individual Listening with Focusing Session is also done by “checking with the body.” The one who listens always suggests “checking with the body” and he also checks his own body while accompanying. Learning how to check inside in a caring, listening way, enables one to do the same with another person.

WE PRIORITIZE THE EXPANSION OF FOCUSING WITHOUT OVERLOOKING ITS TECHNICAL TRAINING

We encourage the forward changes that occur in people more than the technical training for Trainers, or titles or

diplomas of participation. A key indicator for us is “sharing and expanding” Focusing to the general public, certainly without putting aside the necessary Focusing instruction.

If we applied traditional training models and established the three or four levels of Training conventionally required by the Focusing Institute, we would not be able to reach as many people. We would need maybe two dozen years to reach the 36,000 families that we currently work with on other topics of social development. For this reason, we have had to create a simple process based on the basic principles of its creators, Mentors Eugene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks.

THE FOCUSING INSTITUTE

We concur with Dr. Eugene Gendlin and Dr. Mary Hendrick’s vision for the Focusing Institute, and it seems applicable to any institution working with the topic. We cite from a document written by them and given to us during our last visit to New York in May 2010.

*The Focusing Institute will have achieved its purpose when:
A substantial proportion of the populations in all countries and cultures and social classes know how to focus for themselves and/or in Focusing Partnerships which are free of charge. This is like felt-meaning-making literacy as a goal for the world.
Focusing is woven into the societal fabric world-wide enough so that there is no longer a need for any central international organization, like literacy is becoming today: a basic life skill wanted and taught at all levels in all countries. This will help change the nature of interpersonal relating, social structure and government.*



TRAUMA RELIEF WITH MUSICIANS IN HAITI

By **SESKA RAMBERG**, Focusing Trainer, Maryland, USA

“Every one of us is traumatized. We are filled with fear and anxiety . . . and too much loss. We need help with this, and there isn't any.” David Cesar, director of Haiti's only philharmonic orchestra and its music school, was talking in Maryland after an earthquake benefit concert. As painful as these words were, they landed in a place in me that had been waiting for them.

Since the terrible news of January 12, I had been inquiring inwardly and outwardly into how I might go to Haiti to help. I had been in Haiti briefly two years before and been touched forever. As a social worker with a background in trauma and creative arts, I had volunteered in the tent camps in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and had a sense of post-disaster needs and possibilities.

Because at this time in the world there are so many people hearing a call to serve people and places in dire need but unsure how to proceed, I would like to share some of my story.

Even after I found my placement in Haiti, there was much I felt unsure about. Strengthened by the core values of collaboration and “learning together as we go” that ground our Community Wellness Focusing group, and the loyalty of fellow students in Shirley Turcotte's Focusing-Oriented Trauma Training, I asked outright for advice and support. Deep pockets of expertise and empathy were freely emptied right into that asking. We brainstormed and developed ideas together. Mostly I was reminded that I already have what I need . . . and to stay in my heart with love and compassion.

And that is what I carried with me to Haiti.

At the beginning of each group session I led, I told the people gathered there that I hadn't come alone. I even mentioned names of people I counted as both my allies and theirs, people who had told me they would be there, too, if they could, and who were sending their blessings to them through me. I put my arms out and gestured to where they were figuratively standing, on either side of me.

I said "OK, maybe you can't see how tall they are or what they're wearing or how they do their hair, but you can FEEL them, right here next to me, right?" And I waited until I could see in their eyes that they could.

I have never done that before. It emerged out of all the work we have done together within the Focusing Community. It was a way to anchor and steady myself, and it was a way to invite the group to remember that we have resources we may not be able to see, but which are always available to us. And that we are surrounded by people who love us and believe in who we are.

When I heard the news of the devastating earthquake, I printed out this image that captured me during my previous visit to Haiti, and taped it to my wall, to guide me in my sensing into how I can find a way of "being with" the people of Haiti.

I wait for my vision to clarify. I say to my Focusing partner, "something keeps coming, even before the earthquake, about music. I'm seeing dark faces coming together to sing *their* music. And in their singing out, they are singing into who they really are. Somehow, I'm not sure how, I have something to do with this. And somehow . . . this has to do with Haiti."

Through a neighborhood church I get involved with a project to collect donated musical instruments to replace those lost by the orchestra and music school in Port-au-Prince.

One thing carries forward to the next. I host Haitian musicians in the States for a benefit concert. At a meeting the next evening, the conversation turns to where people were on January 12 and what happened to them. The director, hearing



Painting by unknown Haitian artist: Someone lying on a white sheet in a plain, darkened room. A woman sits close by, still and attending.



Seska Ramburg with students loading instruments to ship to Haiti.



Nine year old Haitian cello student with teacher.

that I want to help with trauma relief and discussing what that might involve, invites me to come work with all levels of their music community, “senior staff, teachers, orchestra, choir, band, youth-at-risk students, parents, janitorial staff, *everyone*.”

Six weeks later I am in Haiti, *in* the music school, which has relocated to a still-standing church across town. While lessons are held in the hallway, I hold my first session with grateful staff in a cramped makeshift office.

We’re waiting for one more person to arrive and I think a song would be a good idea. With Creole accents, the group launches into their current favorite, “The Storm Is Passing Over.” I happen to know the gospel harmony so our first step in working together is singing together. We then sit back in satisfaction, breathe deeply together and settle. We notice how in not much time we can get much more comfortable in how we are feeling. Direct experience of change is actually very available. I learn what they are most distressed and worried about. I work with drawings from a long ago workshop with Ann Weiser Cornell, showing the difference between “I am so...(upset, afraid, depressed, etc.)” and “A part of me is so....”, creating a compassionate observer that has some breathing room. They smile with yes-this-is-true recognition and appreciation.

I set up an improvised treatment area in the sacristy (which I share with a mouse) for private sessions of seated massage and individual counseling. When I ask one man how he feels at the end of a session, compared to when he came in, he says with happy astonishment, “It’s a Glory.”

Meanwhile, orchestra, youth band and choir rehearsals still take place at the site of the destroyed UNESCO World Heritage Site cathedral.

In on-site sessions, I use the Community Wellness principle of teaching from what people already know, relating elements of Focusing to elements of musicianship. By the time I leave, much is already being incorporated into rehearsals, such as pausing to tune oneself, as well as one’s instrument.

Working through the language barrier is a strain but



Cathedrale Sainte Trinite, after the earthquake.



Above, musicians sit to rehearse at the side of a pile of rubble, and to the right, the assembled first movement group.



also a benefit. When the usual words don't work, we find "the gist" through new channels. In movement groups our bodies lead the way. Together we Clear A Space, an obvious post-disaster need (One boy said afterwards, "Now I feel like the sky . . . like I can go anywhere!"), and these quake survivors get a felt sense of how they might assist each other, such as symbolically making the physical action they feel the need to complete, whether it is removing the concrete rubble they haven't had the strength to move on their own, or tenderly lifting a friend "who just died on Tuesday" up to heaven.

At the next rehearsal the conductor says to me, "Look, now they have so much more energy for their music! Before they were just playing blankly."



"And can you stay with that, just breathe gently with that...right there?"

One young man assisting with translation is diligently carrying our words back and forth between English, French and Haitian Creole. When I ask, "Can you sense which worry is especially needing your attention now?" one member of our circle gravely says, "My mother. She has been in much pain since her leg was broken when our house fell, and the operation went bad. Now she has to have another operation, and I'm scared what will happen to her. Since I was born [and for an instant he folds his arms to shape a cradle], she is the one taking care of me . . . my whole life."

My arms instinctively reflect his cradle. I feel it holding something so important. "Your whole life," I say into his sad eyes, and pause to let this moment fill. Then I look around to see who might be resonating with this. Everyone is. We are in Presence, and so are all the mothers.

The tight-knit singing group, which had lost four of its members, asks for several sessions, "because our hearts are broken." Some moments are so intimate, so tender and precious, I dare speak only in a whisper of the extraordinary privilege of sharing this time with these strong, deep-hearted young men.

Witness this. We are pulling our chairs closer, knees almost touching, so that we can hear each other better. On one side of the yard where we sit, a rehearsal for strings and horns is starting up. On the other, hammers and saws are punctuated by the rise and fall of heavy pick axes, and just beyond, outside the gap where the gate once stood, is the relentless lurching and honking of traffic.

But here in our little gathering there is a palpable listening and leaning in.

I turn to the first young man and ask, “How would it feel to hold and support your mother in your arms the way she held you when you were a baby?” Moments later, not one but six young men are leaning over their laps, carefully holding and cradling their mothers . . . just as their mothers had held and rocked them.

We are getting to something at the heart of this earthquake, I think to myself. “If and when it feels right, can you very gently put your mother down in a place where she is completely comfortable?” It seems that everyone knows exactly where that is.

“And see how it would feel to put into your cradle that fear and worry you have had for your mother, and gently rock that?” No one looks up now. They are attending too closely.

As they sit rocking slowly, from side to side, I feel a deep receiving. Until . . . together as one . . . their rocking comes to rest.

Each of us is sitting there simply, like the seated woman in the painting at the beginning of this story. Being with . . . just, very quietly and acceptingly, being with.

On my last day, I watch my other guiding vision materialize. The dark-faced singers, standing tall on their own holy ground, are singing their lives forward.



The choir readies to sing, astride the rubble.



Seska Ramberg welcomes being contacted at seska@the-greatriver.us

Community Wellness Focusing: A Resiliency Approach

June 5 - 7, 2011

*with Patricia Omidian,
Nina Joy Lawrence and*

*The Community Focusing Lab,
Asilomar Conference Grounds,
Pacific Grove, CA, USA*

*Following the
23rd International Focusing Conference.
For more information or to register,
log onto www.focusing.org/FPW*

LERATONG ~ “THE PLACE OF LOVE”

FOCUSING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN HOSPICE

By CATHERINE JOHNSON, Focusing Trainer, Cape Town, South Africa [Abridged--Full version is on the Focusing Institute Website under “Medicine”]



Catherine Johnson is second from the left in the middle row.

Background to the program

The hospice Leratong is located in Atteridgeville, South Africa, where the population of over 500,000 live largely in expanding informal settlements, without running water or electricity. The founder and director of Leratong, Father Kieran Kreagh, a Catholic priest, is someone who “makes things happen.” He obtained funding in 2004 to buy the land and establish the hospice. His request for Focusing training for his staff proved to be an essential support to the program throughout.

The Hospice Leratong provides its patients with wards, medical treatment and psychosocial services, and collaborates with other services in the township such as home-based care teams. Leratong also offers respite care (including counseling) for the patients’ families. Its staff does not receive salaries, but works on a voluntary basis with a small stipend.

Leratong operates from a “patient centered,” “holistic model.” All staff members are trained in counseling, with the understanding that a patient may feel more comfortable confiding in a person not officially a counselor. Our

Focusing training course took place with a diverse group of 12 people: nurses, counselors and caregivers, administration and support staff.

Training Preparation

I designed a two-part program, each part consisting of two days of intensive training with a three week break for practice and integration, finalized by a follow-up day of supervision and trouble-shooting.

Part One, in early July 2010, was the anchor of the training, and its priority was Focusing as a personal practice for self-care and support of the group. With the support of my training assistant, Pat Oliver, I taught the basic skills of Focusing (felt-sensing, the Focusing attitude and listening), and we worked with the group in establishing Focusing Partnerships as a medium for learning and practicing these skills during the three week interim.

Part Two, in early August 2010, aimed to support the participants in difficult counseling situations. Role-playing introduced the basics of bringing a Focusing approach to both counseling and nursing.

Pat and I were mindful that the group had taken part in a 40 hour counseling training some time ago and that they had years of experience working with patients. We wanted to present Focusing as a meta-skill that would support and extend what they already knew and how they worked, rather than as a method which replaced their existing approach and accumulated knowledge.

Below, I describe a few issues with some of the participants' comments. For those who are interested in the complete report, the direct URL is <http://www.focusing.org/medicine/leratong.htm>

Language Issues

From day one, we invited the participants to put felt sense words into their home language as they talked, focused and discussed. We also encouraged them to partner in the language in which they felt most comfortable., which turned out to be a large variety.

Visiting each set of partners as they did their first Focusing exchange, we found ourselves sitting in on SeSotho Focusing (SeSotho is the predominant language of the region), trying to peer beneath a language we didn't speak or understand, in order to sense whether Focusing was taking place. Still, we noticed stories being told, emotion being released, some slowing down, pausing and/or checking inside through gestures being made towards the middle part of the body. We realized we had to trust that the participants would find their own way into Focusing, in their own time, just as in all the other workshops we've done.

Benefits of the first Workshop

On Day One, we asked, "What is the hardest part of your work at Leratong?" and a clear theme emerged. They spoke of the stress of trying to give their best at work when they felt depleted by the expectations from their extended families to sort out problems, such as financial trouble, physical and mental illness, and marital conflicts.



You can reach Catherine Johnson at her email address, mvcass.j@mweb.co.za

The participants also highlighted the strain of caring for the dying and of supporting these patients' families. The group reported a range of intense emotional responses that arose in them as they worked with the patients, including feelings of failure, powerlessness, fear of their own teenage children dying young, and grief when patients do die.

What emerged as we asked for feedback during the first two days was the value of learning how to Clear a Space, the relief of burdens shared, and the remarkable support they felt when Focusing with their partners.

One of the men said, "Usually, I keep all my problems to myself--I don't talk about what bothers me. But I found that I could share what I was feeling, just the felt sense, not the details of the story, and that really helped me to feel relieved."

One of the gogos (respectful term for a woman elder) spoke in her slow, resonant voice about her Clearing a Space; "It was like unpacking a suitcase of problems. Since I got married, things began to happen to me--and I packed them away. I felt the heaviness of all those things; but unpacking let me put them outside of myself, in a container. I had this sense of a kind, compassionate something above me

(she gestures with her hand above her head) like a shower of shining water.”

Referring to her month of Focusing partnership, one commented, “I found peace with several long-standing issues,” and, “Two days ago, the [emotional] storm came back. I know that I can't stop this rough storm--only God can help with that--but Focusing has shown me how I can be kind to myself while I am in the storm.”

Another participant said, with a broad smile, “I realized that this felt sense has always been there with me. My body has been telling me things all these years, but I didn't know they were important.” She used a SeSotho phrase about a wellspring in nature to illustrate her point. She ended with, “I've got a wellspring inside me. It tells me where to go in my life.”

Challenges of the Second Workshop

A comment towards the end of first workshop pointed with a zing towards the second half. “This is a personal development course; what I really need is a way to work with my patients.” This comment framed the second two-day workshop, which covered the basics of bringing Focusing into counseling and nursing.

On the afternoon of the first day, one of the nurses expressed her puzzlement. “Am I supposed to be teaching my clients how to Focus? Because if I am . . . I don't think that I can do that.” As a Focusing Trainer, I was pleased to hear this question. It allowed me to point to something fundamental that I learned from my mentor in the early days of my using Focusing as a therapist. I learned that Focusing is something that the counselor, not the client, needs to do. As a counselor, I can embody the Focusing Attitude towards myself and my client. The client doesn't have to know about it; she will feel it. She will feel how it is inside herself when I bring that attitude to my relationship both with her and with parts of herself to which she herself may not relate well.

We talked over this distinction in the group, and several people expressed relief. Checking with the group the next day, there seemed to have been a leap forward in their understanding of Focusing and its place in counseling. Several people expressed that reading the second manual further clarified things for them. However, one of the senior staff members didn't feel satisfied. “I can't see that Focusing is any different from counseling. It's the same: you don't give advice; you just guide the patient to the outcome.”

I presented this comment to the group, and several people disagreed. They shared what Focusing had brought to their counseling so far. One of the men related an incident that arose with a patient who was in denial of her HIV status. Practicing the Focusing Attitude towards both her and himself “helped me to go the route (of a second test) with her. Even though I felt sure she knew that she was HIV positive. She just wasn't ready to know it yet.” Another counselor highlighted that with Focusing he'd been able to sense underneath his own anger towards a friend and find what was really bothering him about their relationship.

At the end of this session, one person summed up what I had been hoping to convey. “Yes, I'm happy now to be clear that Focusing is not the same as counseling, but counseling is something that you can do in a Focusing way.”

By the end of this second workshop, it was clear that the participants still felt tentative and uncertain in their first steps of bringing a Focusing approach to their work. Several expressed the need for more personal practice before they would feel capable of doing so. I became aware again of the compromises we Focusing trainers make in response to workplace situations where time is short and budgets have been painstakingly adjusted to make the program possible. There is often pressure to move too quickly, to give the staff members “something we can use with our patients,” when what is needed is time for personal practice and integration, for the laying of a firm Focusing foundation before its application to others. I closed the final day with the slightly uncomfortable knowledge that the Leratong group needed further consistent support with Focusing in order to make this program truly successful.

Reflecting on the Leratong training, I'm reminded that as trainers and therapists, we tell our people that the process of change doesn't stop when the training ends. It continues to be lived forward in dreams, the new waking day, our next interaction with someone. Remembering this helps me close this process with Leratong, not knowing whether I will work there again, but feeling privileged to have been able to do so.



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THE FOCUSING INSTITUTE
NEWSLETTER

DIRECTOR: MARY HENDRICKS

EDITOR: DIONIS GRIFFIN

DESIGN EDITOR: RICKI MORSE

A TRI-ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF
THE FOCUSING INSTITUTE

34 EAST LANE, SPRING VALLEY, NY 10977

www.focusing.org