

RESILIENCE INITIATIVES

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HANGING OUT WITH WELLNESS DURING COVID-19

Welcome to the third edition of our Resilience Initiatives Journal, which comes at a time when the world is reeling from the Coronavirus outbreak. This pandemic is a unique event in modern human history, and FII is passionately working to address the problems it presents. The lead article describes a busy addition to Focusing Initiatives International: CoronaPlaza.LIFE. This online platform allows our international colleagues to offer workshops and trainings which empower people to connect with each other, problem solve together, and recognize commonalities in the face of differences.

Subsequent articles describe creative ways to apply the practice and wisdom of Focusing to a community's needs. Since Focusing is a powerful healing tool, we are delighted to find its power enhanced when combined with other healing practices. We also recognize the value of using bits and pieces of Focusing when they can be helpful, such as when the full Focusing training is inappropriate or simply too involved for a short workshop or community program.

Each article describes an activity, and we hope you will try some in your own work, making adjustments where needed to fit into your culture and the needs of your community. We'd love to hear from you as to how you have adapted one into your community programs.

FROM FOCUSING INITIATIVES' DIRECTORS

We find ourselves in a unique moment of time as the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now more than ever we need each other. Thanks to your encouragement and support - plus the genius of our friend and webmaster, Martin Vremec - we have created CoronaPlaza.LIFE, an online platform to provide tools for you and your community's well-being. In addition, our other initiatives are in great demand, and they continue and grow.

The articles in this journal reflect these approaches and values of Community Wellness programs. They cover a wide range of topics, and were written by individuals from all over the world, including Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Pakistan, Spain and the United States.

With your support we will continue to bring Community Wellness to individuals and communities facing challenges. Many participants who have benefited from our programs could not have afforded to do so without outside donations.

Thank you again for your trust in our work which allows us to expand and reach more communities.

Wishing you good health and safety,

Melinda and Pat

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THE CREATION OF CORONAPLAZA.LIFE

Martin Vremec



Martin is the webmaster for Focusing Initiatives, including CoronaPlaza.LIFE. He is 43 years old, and besides creating websites, he is also a trained classical pianist, choir conductor, and composer. He loves to read about history, philosophy, astrology, symbology, etc.

Martin is Italian and lives in the northeastern part of Italy, at the border with Slovenia. He speaks Italian, Slovenian, and English. Martin is also a trained Focuser.

It all started on March 11, 2020, when Pat Omidian (USA), Ali Ghauri (Pakistan), and I (Italy) were talking. Italy was the first country in the Western part of the World that went in a complete lockdown. The coronavirus was at its peak, and it was evident that the rest of the World would shortly follow. Since every challenge is also an opportunity, what if we launch in a couple of weeks a virtual platform where we will provide both technical tools (the website, Zoom, etc.) and the skills (Pat's Psychosocial Support trainings) to let people build their own healthy communities? After all, in a lockdown, the "virtual world" is the only World available to have social interaction, isn't it?

We worked long hours together, at all times of the day, across time zones twelve hours apart. We were able to create CoronaPlaza.LIFE in only three weeks, not the six months or more it would typically take. We launched on April Fool's Day (April 1) to underline the foolishness of going live so soon, but also to remind ourselves that we don't have to be perfect, we just need to be good. And the pressure went up right away along with the "I need help" messages coming through that required immediate patches and fixes.

Now it's August, four months later, we've hosted almost 200 webinars, with more than 1600 people participating. Google

Analytics says that we had 3500 visitors on the website from 80 countries. And we didn't promote the website with ads of any kind. It's all organic.

As I always say, in the computer world, it's hard to achieve what seems easy for humans - and the opposite is also true! The process behind creating software - and a website such as CoronaPlaza it is, by all means, software - is mostly about making explicit the implicit. For those of you who know Focusing, the "making explicit the implicit" should sound very familiar. And this is precisely why I always use Focusing on my work.

Let's imagine CoronaPlaza as a conference center. We need the reception area, and several rooms where the workshops take place. We would hire somebody as a receptionist, and we would give her/him a bunch of instructions, like when people come, take their names, ask if they want to offer a donation, and then send them to the workshop they have chosen to attend. Anybody can do this job because it's easy, right?

But there are tons of implicit actions in these set of instructions. For example, I said to the receptionist, "send them to the workshop." I did not specify "check if there is any seat available first." And I also didn't specify to check if there are available seats for that workshop BEFORE you

ask if they want to make a donation. These are all "implicit instructions." And if there is something a computer cannot handle, it's an implicit instruction of any kind. To make a digital version of the conference center, we need to make explicit every single bit of implicitness.

If you create software you have to put yourself in the user's shoes. I will give you an example that's not related to the process of the creation of CoronaPlaza, but it will provide you with a sense of what I am talking about.

Almost 20 years ago a dear friend of mine asked me to help her get a new computer. She is a singer, so she wanted a computer fully equipped to make music and to record her singing. A couple of weeks after I delivered and installed her brand new computer, she called me: "Help! The computer no longer works."

"What happened?" I asked.

"When I turn it on, it says 'keyboard not present' and it doesn't turn on".

"That's easy. The keyboard must be unplugged."

"No, no, I checked, and everything is plugged correctly." She said with a tone, "I'm not dumb, you know!"

"If the computer says that, it means that the connection between the keyboard and the computer is missing. There is only one wire going from the keyboard to the computer. Please try to check it out."

"That's not true." She said with an annoyed/frustrated voice. "I have three wires coming out from the keyboard!!!"

"Look. The keyboards have always had only one plug and as such one wire." I was also starting to lose my patience at this point.

"No! There are three!"

"Ok, then. Please, check those three wires one by one and tell me where do they go".

"The first one goes into the computer."

"Good. Then?"

"The second is also going into the computer."

It didn't make any sense to me.

"The third is plugged into the electricity."

When she said that, I realized what was going on, so I asked: "what keyboard are you looking at?"

And her answer was "The Yamaha." (Yamaha keyboards = "musical keyboard" she had connected with her computer to make music.)

...She and I are laughing around this up to this day...

This little funny experience made me learn a fundamental lesson: in the computer world, we should never use the word "obvious." We all have different mindsets and mind frames. When she saw "keyboard" on her screen, she did not consider the computer's keyboard, because as a musician - you know - keyboards are meant to play music.

How many times do we not understand each other because we get a different sense of a concept?

As human beings, we often (but not always) overcome these kinds of issues with empathy. But computers don't have empathy. They know only their own version of the truths. For the computer, what's considered by the software is the absolute truth. And they are very clear about that. When a computer doesn't work as expected, it's never personal, is it? So while creating the software, or a website, I have to anticipate the "variety of what people consider obvious."

Let me give you another example directly from CoronaPlaza.

When we launched it, we considered, obviously, that some people will need assistance. So I put a nice red button "I need help" that opens a simple form with just three fields: your name, your email address and your message. Then I started to receive several "I need help" messages

with just "I need help" in the message (implicit message). The solution to this was to write a specific section of "software" so that the "I need help" button also collects information about what the user was trying to do. Then in the event of a very implicit message, it will be easier for me to understand what could be the issue and save everybody from frustrations. (ok, there is no such thing as "everybody" in terms of "users of software.")

As I stated earlier, I use a lot of Focusing in my work. But I don't really use it to code better. I use it to keep every person involved in a project on the same page, especially those who are not tech people. They are the ones who need clarity and no implicit steps in the process the most. A pleasant side effect of this method is the real freedom of speech. I can be deadly blunt (just ask around), but I always aim at being clear about myself and about the tech stuff. Sometimes, a felt sense tells me others in the room are not entirely following what I'm saying. So I use jokes to give others a sense of the "tech gibberish" I'm talking about. While we all laugh, we also make a step forward towards the clarity and to the explicit. And we no longer have boring meetings.

But to create a website the coding part is probably only 40% of the job. The rest of the job is to make the team working on the website perfectly in tune with the mission of the website itself and by doing so as a programmer I have to catch every bit of how they feel about it along with their questions. It's all about empathy. The more I can detect, the more I can anticipate the requirements of the software and then design it accordingly, all by turning the implicit to explicit. And by doing so, we always pursue clarity. The more explicit every step gets, the more clarity we have. In this way, we will have a very good relationship within the team itself, because clarity removes the false necessity to be right.

Good relationships within the team mean a pleasant and friendly space, which is an important step towards a healthy community.

INDIGENOUS FOCUSING-ORIENTED THERAPY (IFOT)

Beatrice Hyacinthe



Beatrice Hyacinthe is a bilingual Clinical mental health Social Worker with over 13 years of experience in the mental health field. She has worked in various settings, providing services to adults, adolescents, couples and families. She maintains a private practice in Manhattan and Brooklyn and is the co-founder of Love & Kindness Wellness Services, LLC, a holistic wellness center that provides access to culturally sensitive and quality mental health services.

Her website is:

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What's the history of IFOT?

Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy (formerly called Aboriginal Focusing-Oriented Therapy) is the brain-child of Shirley Turcotte, a Metis Canadian. It incorporates Indigenous worldview and Focusing-oriented therapy towards healing complex trauma. Focusing-oriented therapy is a client and body centered approach to healing developed by Eugene Gendlin.

IFOT was developed over three decades ago to address the trauma of colonization, the Indian Residential school experiences and the child welfare system. IFOT came to NYC more than a decade ago, where it resonated with marginalized people navigating intergenerational oppression.

What is your history?

When I was 12, my family moved from Haiti to the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. We didn't know the language, we didn't understand immigration law, we didn't know how to navigate the system. At that time, in 1997, there was little help with these things and we did not feel comfortable seeking it. I found the acculturation process traumatic, particularly attending school as one of the few Haitians; there was an anti-immigrant sentiment against Haitians at that time. This experience inspired me to one day help my people and others who were undergoing similar struggles.

I trained at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College and was part of

the Social Work Diversity program at the Ackerman Institute for Learning, where I studied family therapy. After graduation, I started working at a local hospital where I had the pleasure of running the Haitian Creole clinic, working with only Creole-speaking clients, many of whom were elderly. Later, I went into private practice and eventually opened a private Wellness Center in Flatbush. Flatbush is often called "little Haiti" because of its large Haitian population.

How did you get to know IFOT?

While in grad school, I attended a workshop in Focusing. I was intrigued. It was taught by one of the IFOT trainers, who invited me, a few months later, to attend an introductory IFOT weekend workshop with Shirley Turcotte. In January 2012, I signed up for the year-long, seven module course. At the end of the first module, I was hooked. The honest way that trauma was addressed, the interventions suggested, and the practice we received, both at being a client and therapist, taught me how I could really help my people. The therapy was gentle and made us feel safe, connected to the past, to family, to the social fabric and to the land.

Is there any particular story from those classes you could share?

A pivotal moment came for me in that first session. In 20 minutes I resolved an issue I had struggled with all my life. I had even been in therapy about it. But Focusing on my internal bodily-felt sense of it, took me straight to the wound.

When I was 4, my mother took me to live with my grandmother, so I could get a head start at school in Port-Au-Prince. She left me there. My grandmother was very strict, and all I wanted was to go back home. "Going back home" shaped all my desires. In the IFOT course, when I focused on my feeling about it, I discovered that it hadn't been all bad. I had been happy there. My mother had had my best interests at heart; she did not abandon me. I also saw that I didn't have to go home in order to reach my dream. I could help the Haitian people right here in NYC. The painful feelings were healed and I was sold!

Do you have some pictures of IFOT?

The photo at the top of this article shows us at graduation receiving our Native American blankets. The two photos below were taken from the grief module. I lost my Dad last year, and when I had to teach about grief, I used my experience with that loss in my teaching, which helped me work through it. That loss has been my greatest teacher.

On the circle, or "grief pie," we check in with our felt sense around each grief spot, and we use color to identify those spots. We also use our felt sense to guide which medicine will support each spot. I placed items from the land that I felt supported me. Some dried herbs were available for us -- some lavender, yarrow, also corn and sea-shells. Everyone had their own circle and they worked quietly listening to their body wisdom. At the end we did a group share, then put our items into a pouch to take home with us. Our "grief pouch" was available to us at all times; we could smell it or touch it whenever we felt sad.

The philosophy is to find support in "all our relations," that is, the sky, the trees, the earth, our ancestors and our family. IFOT connected me to my culture and to the land. A lot of participants say the same, that these dormant connections are invigorated.

How often do you use the IFOT practice with your clients?

Now I use IFOT every day all the day long. Because I'm in private practice, I have more flexibility in deciding which

tools to use. If my client is overwhelmed, I might start with clearing a space. We might use some stones and place them at certain distances to represent different issues they carry inside.

In a way, my partner and I bring the indigenous philosophy into our office decor. Our chairs and couches are set up in ways that minimize burnout. Nature is available.

Not only do we have a collection of stones in every office, but we have plants and a small tree. There's a decorative fountain. If the client needs support, we might invite the tree or the water to hold the issue for them. I might say, "If nature were to help you, what elements of nature might come in here?" They might say, "Oh, I like to go in the ocean. When I'm stressed, maybe I can put this issue there." Or "There's a particular tree I like. I'll bury it nearby." We invite all types of support. But we might suggest they check with that tree. "Does the tree want to hold

that issue?" We invite them to sense inside, check with their felt sense to see if the tree is in agreement!

I know you also invite ancestors to help with the therapy.

Yes, here's a story about that. During one of my sessions, a client was faced with a difficult situation where she had to confront someone and set some boundaries. We had been working on it, but it remained a challenge. She still felt inadequate to confront. Now in our IFOT training, we learn to recognize regression and when



a presence from the past presents itself: the client's posture, tone, where the eyes gaze, etc. I asked her what would support her. She suddenly threw her head back so far that it hit the wall. I said, "What just happened?" She paused and said, "A Chinese Empress from the 16th century just showed up." I said, "Wonderful! What does the Chinese empress have to say about all of this? How would the Empress handle this situation?" She replied, "Well, I know I can't do it alone." So we talked about how she could use the energy of the Empress to confront this person and say what she needed to say. We practiced allowing the Empress to speak.

A few days later, she told me it had worked. "The Empress showed up," she said. "I spoke clearly and said exactly what I wanted to say."

The other way ancestors can show up, is if I'm talking and the client appears distant and far away. "Where are you right now?" I might ask. Or the client might say, "What I said just now doesn't sound like me". Have you ever heard someone say this? So I say, "Can we invite that other person in? Can we get curious about that? Maybe they're trying to communicate something."

As a clinician, inviting something or someone in, is not something I suggest to the client during the session. But if the client brings it up or it comes up through their body language, I acknowledge it. I approach whatever comes up without judgment but with curiosity. I'm curious about a new body feeling. I'm curious about where it might take my client. I'm curious about what shows up regardless of how ugly or gruesome it may be. Even in mud, there is good medicine.

But I don't come to a session with an agenda, I don't know where we're going to go. The client guides where they want to go, and how far they want to go. That's the definition of a person centered therapy.

Do you find it difficult to work with so much trauma?

In IFOT we learn to take ourselves out of the work. This gives us the strength to do it. In one day I may see 8 clients back to back, yet not feel completely depleted. Our training teaches us the tools to take care of ourselves. We practice these tools during the training. Of course, everything we learn to use with our clients, we can use with ourselves. When we're finished with the class, we can deal with anything a client brings in, whether it's dreams, spiritual issues, past trauma, etc.

I've heard IFOT can be personally transformative.

Personal transformation happens because you are doing real work during your IFOT training. Throughout the training Shirley reminds us to be comfortable in the uncomfortable and be able to have tea in hell. We learn to keep ourselves and others company in their worst ordeal.

What about diagnosis?

I'm not a big fan of pathologizing. I diagnose for the purpose of insurance reimbursement but I prefer to see the whole person. If it's severe depression, then the diagnosis can lead to a dialogue on companion forms of treatment. But otherwise, I'm not a big fan. The symptoms they're showing may have saved their life; they may have formed a necessary protection. Now those symptoms may not be so helpful. So we might discuss, is it safer now? Can they put down those tools? It's not about dissing anything. Most people, once they're able to make the connection, drop the problem symptoms.

When I worked at the hospital with elderly Haitian patients, I found many were over-diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. They might talk about voodoo and an American doctor might say, "They're paranoid." Me, I would say, "If your symptoms are related to a Voodoo spell, have you seen a Voodoo priestess? What did she suggest? If you did what she suggested and still have symptoms, then let's work on your taking your medication." So I had clients who practiced Voodoo, did not believe they had a psychological ailment, yet took

their medication, and came to me for individual therapy. I don't impose any culture or beliefs on them. What they're doing might be helpful.

Do you feel you've been able to help?

I do see changes. Many of my referrals come from word of mouth. I have one client who tells everyone I've changed her life and to come see me. Of course IFOT is not for everyone. I have some clients who say, "I don't like it when you ask me to go into my body." Sometime later, they might tell me they sensed their body while out of therapy. They were able to track their felt sense; they felt a shift. So I say, "Let's see how you feel about this now. Take a few minutes to check in your body." They might say, "I'm at peace with it." If they're not, then that's their decision. But I would like to teach everyone how to use their body wisdom to guide them in their everyday life.

Anything else you'd like to tell us about?

The new outreach for me is teaching Indigenous Tools for Living (ITFL). It takes the experiential parts of IFOT and teaches people to be around trauma without burn-out. It doesn't teach you to do therapy. But then, it's not a year-long course; it's offered in six two-and-a-half hour sessions, such as a three-day workshop or six evening classes. It's excellent for humanitarian aides or health aides.

You also help teach IFOT. Do you have a specialty, like grief or dreams?

I help teach some of every module. I'm also one of the few IFOT trainers who has the flexibility to travel, because of my private practice. I travel to Toronto, Minneapolis, Duluth, and Leech Lake Reservation in MN, teaching this approach wherever I'm invited. These courses are taught for specific communities. The NYC course is the only one that's open to the public at large, and we get people coming from far away like California or Canada. They fly into NYC seven times a year for the seven weekend modules.

ANIMAL TRANSFORMATION

Time: One hour

Materials: Large paper for each participant and drawing implements with color if possible.

This exercise can be done with individuals or groups. Children love it.

It takes about a half hour.

Ask participants to pick a person or situation they have struggles with, someone or something that causes difficulty. It could be someone at home, a colleague at work, a difficult client — anyone who really throws them off.

Allow participants time to decide on a person; go around and make sure everyone has one person, or one situation in mind. Don't continue until everyone has one. This helps to minimize overwhelming feelings or flooding.

Now send them out to the middle of the room, allowing some space between you and them. Ask them to imagine: if the other person were animal, what kind of animal would they be, when they were at their worst? For example: is this person like a lion? a badger? a mouse? Just observe them without fixing or changing anything; notice them and allow them be this person's worst self.

Say: "Next I want you to bring your attention to your body. What kind of animal are YOU when this other person is being their worst? Are you like a mouse? Or a roaring bear? Don't try to change or fix anything, just notice how it feels inside."

Say: "Now check in a little deeper in your body, What animal would you like to transform into? What animal would you need to be, in order to be neutral, or at peace with that situation. (A horse? an elephant? an eagle?) You can try on different animals."

After allowing some time, say: "Notice when you transform, what happens to that first animal? Does the relationship change?"

Group sharing: What animal was your problem person? What animal were you? What animal did you transform into?

This exercise helps to minimize triggers so one can be present with the difficult situation, it decreases reactivity.

This activity is useful for various situations in meetings, also difficult conversations, triggers, conflict, courtrooms, classrooms, public speaking.

MY INSIDE VOICE

B. Anderson



B. Anderson is a somatic music therapy practitioner, plant medicine steward/herbalist, mediation teacher, mediator, ritual leader and community organizer. She calls upon the traditions, legacies and medicine of their southern Black American, Jamaican Maroon and Choctaw ancestry as her healing arts praxis. Her background in sound healing began as a classical musician, and later, she explored traditional and African American folk songs, improvisation and various country's musical styles. B. is the founder and steward of Song of the Spirit, a community based institute in service of keeping alive the wisdom traditions of the African and Indigenous Diaspora

“I’ve come to learn there is a voice within us that holds the truth of who we really are and which knows what we need to be whole. To hear it we must be willing to listen from the core of our being; the heart.”

-- B.

As a young girl, singing and music appeared to be a large part of my life path. But I learned through the pursuit of an opera career that my journey would take me anywhere but.

I started my professional training at the New England Conservatory in 2005. Less than a year after arriving I was diagnosed with systemic lupus and told that my vocal chords had developed polyps which would need to be surgically removed if I wanted to sing again. I was 19 years old.

My teacher, Helen Hodam, whom I had chosen specifically to study under, urged me to forgo the surgery and instead undertake a course of voice and speech therapy that predated the proposed surgical procedure. After a year of a strict healing regimen, my voice was back. So in 2005, I made provisions to further my opera career in New York City. Eight months after my arrival, the pace and energetic demands of the city took a toll on my body and I was hospitalized with life threatening symptoms.

This experience was the beginning of my

future. I began to consider that singing professionally might not be for me. I shifted my plans and became a voice teacher in NYC for the next 13 years. I also invested myself thoroughly in my physical, emotional and spiritual health. I studied a variety of holistic health practices, some of which I became certified in.

Meanwhile my therapist and various friends recommended that I take the series of six weekend classes known as IFOT – Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy. “Your life will be transformed,” they said, and I did in fact discover a whole new level of healing. Western Psychology omits the concept of complex trauma which can go back generations. Shirley Turcotte, founder and director of IFOT, refers to “genocidal trauma” – a term originally describing those who survived the Holocaust. But something similar happened to Native Americans and to black and brown folks who were stripped of their homes and their people. This trauma continues at many levels. And the beauty of IFOT is it doesn’t negate this reality, due in large part to the teachers,

all of whom were black or indigenous. We were taught not only about diversity but also about how we can collectively hold the difference and still all heal.

The 15 students were mostly black, but one was a white Zen Buddhist, another an Asian Taiwanese, and a third an indigenous Canadian. We all held similar trauma. The most challenging session for me was when my teacher described the roots of our systemic condition as blacks in this country. She showed us the impact of the “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome” as first described by Dr. Joy DeGruy; it was gut wrenching because I could see the impacts it had on my family. The wool was pulled off my eyes.

As we sensed inside ourselves, we found space both for trauma and for healing. For once in my life, I felt completely heard. I had recently experienced the breakdown of a relationship, which provided my immediate motivation for taking this course, and IFOT provided a straight path into my own stuff.

IFOT also changed my relationship with my family. It’s true what they say; in indigenous healing, you heal five generations forward and backward. I understood my family’s struggles in a new way. I had real conversations with my mother and my family; I got to see my siblings in a different light. For the first time, I could tolerate difficult people through understanding that the root of their problem lay in their complex past. I could finally be with my family and others without making deep judgments.

In an IFOT session, often one person played the therapist, and one played the client, while one or two others observed. Each got equal time to sense inside and express how they were feeling. It was easier for me than for some participants, because I had practiced sensing into my body through voice lessons and ill health.

During a particularly memorable Focusing session, I talked to my “therapist” about

being stuck in my recent relationship failure. I had actually caused harm to others, and I felt immobilized – literally. My feet were glued to the floor. My legs weren’t going anywhere. The paralysis went through my shoulders. My head was the only thing that moved.

My “therapist” suggested I ask an ancestor to be with me to give me emotional support. I did, and sensed the safe presence of my father standing behind me. IFOT supports the practice of many indigenous people, which is to include your ancestors in your quest for personal growth. You may feel alone but there are actually ancestors around you all the time to help and support you.

Then my colleague asked me if there was anything my body needed. Sensing into the support of my father, I started wiggling my toes. Then I moved one leg, but it was hard and super painful. Gradually I progressed. Before I knew it, my arms lifted and I wanted to fly. I was encouraged to stand and the next thing, I started to run. With arms flapping I ran around the room. I went from crying to laughing – not from judgment of myself, but out of joy and possibility, with tears streaming down my cheeks. I had moved through the stuck feeling, which had arisen from my own self-judgment. Now I had the opportunity to expand. A levity swept through for me. I did lots of other sessions but that was, hands down, the most remarkable.

So IFOT challenged my view of myself and caused me to see myself differently. My biggest realization was that, when I was teaching Voice, I had actually been doing Therapy. Sound, we know, affects the whole body. Like a meditation bell, it reverberates – the whole body becomes the ear. The sound finds places that are stuck, places of dis-ease where the flow is trapped. As we pay attention to what’s uncomfortable, where there’s tension and as we allow sound to move through these places, we can initiate healing. (I moved

a few sentences around)

Although it was traumatic for me to have my singing career halted by lymph nodes and ill health, I now call Lupus “my angel” because of the healing it taught me. My vocal nodes taught me to slow down my talking and to listen to my voice more deeply. I had to slowly rebuild my ability to speak, and it caused a listening which is deeper than the ear. I learned to make a sound that was not only healing for me, but also for those around me. Prior to IFOT, my singing classes had often turned unexpectedly into therapy classes. IFOT caused me to acknowledge the work I had been doing and to honor it. This was huge for me.

When IFOT ended last year, I began a new chapter in my life. I closed my vocal instruction and opened my Somatic Music Therapy studio. I acknowledged the work I had already been doing and started doing healing full time. I now see, virtually and in person, individuals looking for alternative methods to traditional talk therapy. Combining the skills, training and study employed in my own healing, and adding the practice of IFOT, I have developed a pathway to personal freedom.

Recently I have started singing again, this time doing it not for me but for others! It seems needed right now. I can get out of the way and become a vehicle for healing for others. I will also be hosting Singing Circles online, where anyone can join from the comfort of their home. I hope the singing will remind everyone to be kind and good to themselves and others at this time

I am filled with an abundance of gratitude for the ups and downs of my journey and the many ways it continues to transform and change my life. Through my urgent necessity and a continued commitment to healing, I can now say I’ve found my true calling and have heard the sound of ‘my inside voice.’

MY INSIDE VOICE

Time: 30 minutes

Setup: This activity can be done privately or in a group, and you don't need any special materials to join in.

This activity is not about what you hear, but what you feel, when you tune into your own innate voice. It's best done in a space where your body has the ability to settle, in a space that is safe, quiet, and familiar. Then you can sense what is subtle or what is coming inside you.

Begin by experiencing your breath. You can do this lying down on your bed or floor, laying on the grass, sitting on a park bench, wherever you want. Become aware of the air passing through your vocal cords. Your intimate relationship to your breath can be a revolutionary act. Become aware of the sense of space your breathing creates in the body -- an opportunity to be compassionate with yourself, to allow yourself to take up more room when you inhale, and to release what is no longer serving you when you exhale.

Identify three inhales and exhales, one after the other. . . . (Pause)

When you breathe in, where do you feel it most? Notice what it feels like when you breathe out... Maybe you may feel it in your shoulders, or easing down your back. Maybe your legs are becoming more at rest. If you're sitting, maybe you feel the weight of your seat. You may identify this as surrender, letting go, relaxation. This is a rich opportunity to lean into what it feels like to interact with the air around you.

Now we'll do something a little unorthodox, but which you probably did many times as a child. Place your finger or two fingers in your ears. Remember how the sound of your voice becomes resonant and internal? This is your safe cocoon, where you can shut out external noise and any judgment of your voice. If you feel safe enough, close your eyes if you haven't already.

The first thing you'll do is actually speak an affirming phrase. Singing is nothing more than speaking, just more air and more sound. Even speaking can create fear and anxiety, so what does it feel like to speak in this safe place? Find one word or a phrase for your support. I'll choose mine, and maybe this resonates with you. (Speaking) "You're enough, you're enough. You're enough."

Speak covering your ears. (Pause)

You'll notice the sound of your voice may not be loud, but the feeling can be sensed in various parts of the body. Offer again this phrase three times, and notice where in your body you feel its sound. Is it in the chest? Is it in the belly? The throat? The heart? . . .

Speak again. (Pause)

Keeping a close watch on this feeling, try singing that same affirmation. Remember, singing is just speaking with more sound and more air. Any pitch will do. The sound you make is perfect and your own. Consider that the sound of your voice is your own unique medicine, offering care to your body, the cells, the muscles, the feelings. So with your fingers in your ears, creating this safer space, repeat your word or phrase with more pitch, sound and air, like this: (Singing all on the same note) "I am enough, I am enough, I am enough."

I don't know about you all, but for me the feeling was like pure water over my heart and even over my head. My head often tells me I'm not enough. The sound is reverberating through the bones of my body, offering medicine to the parts of myself which feel like they're not enough.

Sing covering your ears. (Pause)

Be with the feeling of your own voice. Lean into the juicy, pleasurable sensation of what it's like to sense your own sound. The sound and the affirmation you can share with your loved ones when they too may be moving through periods of lack, doubt or anxiety.

Sing again. (Pause)

Now take your fingers away from your ears, and place your hands on the parts of your body that felt some resonance, either with the words or the pitch. Remember the safety and care of your own embrace. Now notice what it feels like as you offer this sound into space, not abandoning the feeling in your body, believing the truth that your offering is of great value, like this: (Singing with a few changes in pitch) "I am enough. I am enough. I am enough."

Sing without covering your ears. (Pause)

Some of you may notice an urge to keep singing, to repeat this phrase over and over again, to share it throughout space to all who need it. This is your birthright. We need your healing voice. You deserve to feel the beauty and brilliance of your own sound.

Sing again. (Pause)

WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF THE CARETAKERS?

Wajid Syed



Wajid Syed is a Focusing trainer and has been active in teaching psychosocial wellness and Focusing in refugee and IDP camps and with aid agencies in Pakistan for more than 10 years. He adapts what he learns to local cultures and looks for ways to expand programming. Over the last 30 years he has worked with UNDP, UN Women, INGOs, NNGOs and Government to implement humanitarian and development programmes and train community workers and staff.

My eyes were opened to some of the problems in Humanitarian Aid when I was training Pakistani women in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps to run the “woman-friendly spaces.” On the first day, I met a young woman recently hired to run one such space. She seemed to be no more than a child herself, and she was holding a tiny baby. “How old is your baby?” I asked. “One day,” was the reply. I was shocked. “So what are you doing here?” I asked. “I need the job,” she shrugged. I was surprised that the so-called humanitarian agency which hired her had no concept of maternal leave. It breaks my heart when I see something like this. I think, “Who is taking care of the caretakers?”

Many women who live in Khyber Province travel across the border every day to work for non-profit agencies in a special area that was called FATA. These women speak the language and understand the local culture, so they can help with the psychosocial health of this beleaguered population. But the women themselves have usually suffered from trauma. Who is going to take care of their psychosocial needs? They have no insurance or job security.

FATA (Federally Administrated Tribal Areas), located on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, was once described as “the most dangerous place

in the world.” It only became an official part of Pakistan in 2018. But for most of its history, it has been a place of tribal rule. For centuries it has remained aloof from other civilizations. Back in the 1800’s, the British avoided its 14 or so tribes, all valuing honor, hospitality, and revenge. The British didn’t try to rule them; the tribes were allowed to retain their own leaders and their own laws, promising in return to remain loyal to the British – and they were, for a fee. Thus this area provided a buffer between India and Afghanistan during the fighting between the British and the Russian Czars, and later between the Soviet Union and the West during the cold war. When Pakistan was created in 1947, it continued to form this buffer.

Although the completion of the FATA merger in Pakistan was under discussion since 1947, FATA remained mostly forgotten and elusive until it came to the limelight after 9/11. Since then it has become the center of many discussions, seminars and symposiums in luxury hotels far removed from reality. A few months ago, I was sitting with a group of officials in a five-star hotel in Peshawar. They were talking about the problems of this neglected and impoverished area, now part of Pakistan’s mainland. These officials were asking me what to do about the Gender-Based Violence in FATA.

Gender-Based Violence? I smiled tolerantly. How could they understand? They hadn’t worked there for 30 years as I had. How could GBV be a problem when most tribal elders had been killed by US drones and the rest of the able-bodied men had left to work elsewhere? The women were running the farms by themselves, caring for the cattle, the children and the elderly. They had more important problems to think about than GBV, such as: were their children ever going to learn to read? would their village ever get electricity; if it did, would it work? and what about water for their land and cattle? There had been a drought since 2015. I saw FATA, not as the most dangerous, but as the most misunderstood place in the world.

FATA first came to world attention in 1979 when the Soviets invaded neighboring Afghanistan and Afghan refugees began pouring through the mountains into the wild area. Reportedly, with help from the US, special camps were set up to train “Freedom Fighters” who could successfully resist the Soviets. Osama bin Laden was believed to have fled there after the Al Qaeda attack on the USA. So this area was targeted by the American media as a hiding place for terrorists. Pakistan began a long series of military operations to uproot terrorist elements there. In addition, the US targeted the area with drones, causing much collateral damage. A million people were relocated into government-run IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps, and lived in them for several years, during which much of their homeland’s infrastructure (schools, hospitals, mosques, houses, shops) was demolished and their leaders killed. Then they were encouraged to return. But to what?

I decided to change my audience’s viewpoint. “FATA is not the only area where women suffer from gender-based abuse. Take a look at our prosperous city of Peshawar,” I told the officials.

Then I did the activity you will find on the next page with them.

At the end of this exercise, several men had tears in their eyes. The women did not expect this reaction. Some of those present were officials responsible for traffic control and for enforcing the safety of the passengers, and they dealt with issues such as how many women should sit in the front seat (only 2).

This exercise opened their eyes and expanded their awareness, which was all possible due to my understanding of Focusing that I had learned in my association with Dr. Patricia Omidian and Focusing Initiatives International. During this period we conducted a number of trainings; the most memorable were those conducted for humanitarian aides working in the Swat district. Dr. Pat Omidian conducted this training over the internet through a cell phone! One good thing about the IDP camps is that they have connectivity through cell phones. IDP’s have Internet access they never had before. Luckily many of the participants understood English; if they didn’t, I was there to translate.

UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), which partners with local Pakistani organizations to implement their projects, knew of Pat’s work and wanted us to teach empathic listening to their partners and newly recruited staff. However, they lacked the funds to undertake this vital activity. So Focusing Initiatives International delivered a three-day Psychosocial Support (PSS) training for free, including lunch. Of course, they cannot do that too often.

International agencies are looking at physical needs: tents, food, water, medical supplies, etc. People will donate money for these things. They are also looking for pictures: a child crying, a sad woman wearing an ethnic headdress. Pictures of pathos bring in donations. As for stress – well, the agencies know

that everyone, staff and refugees alike, have problems with stress, but they ignore it because it seems too big to handle. There’s nothing they can do about it, they think.

As a humanitarian worker, that’s exactly the way I was. I was running from my anxieties because I thought there was nothing I could do about them. When I paused long enough to have my first experience with Focusing, I got an image of sitting with a rock, bigger than the Himalayas. Of course I couldn’t do anything about it. There was no point even to try to move it. As I stayed with the image and the feeling inside me, I noticed it wasn’t one rock; it was a mountain of many rocks all piled up onto each other. With successive Focusing sessions, the rocks became smaller. Some became so small they didn’t matter. Many were of a size I could deal with. Others were not actually problems, but fears.

So many “rocks” get resolved just by listening to them, either on your own or with the help of others. Of course, you must learn to listen to yourself in order to listen well to others. I discovered that most workers respond to Focusing in the same way that I did. Their stress seems insurmountable at first, but little by little it dissolves.

I will train anyone. I’ve trained aid drivers and chauffeurs on how to listen empathetically. What better place for an aid worker to talk about their problems than on a long drive from one place to another? Then there’s the story of a janitor – no, not a janitor, an office helper who ran small errands, such as providing coffee, but had a reputation for helping the aid workers feel better. What did he do? “I don’t do anything,” he explained, “I make them a cup of coffee, I ask a few questions; I listen. I reflect what they say . . .”

It’s not hard; it just takes a little thought, a little training.

IMAGINING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Goal:** To create a supportive community
- Time:** 15-20 minutes at the beginning of the meeting, depending on the size of the group
- Materials:** None

Sit in your chair, close your eyes, relax, imagine the feeling of your body in the chair, imagine your feet and legs, your torso, your arms and hands (continue relaxation exercise as long as you want)

Now imagine you are in a place where you feel safe. How does it look around you? What sounds do you feel? Imagine the ground or floor underneath you (continue visualization).

Now imagine that you are a woman nurse and are going to work. You get into the front seat of the van (women can only sit in the front) with four other women. The driver has his hand on the shift stick. You notice that the shaft has been bent so that his hand is directly in front of you and every time he shifts, you try to shift, but you are too squished to avoid his hand which is going where it shouldn't go.

You change to a bus. It's crowded also, and now the conductor won't let you pass until he has pressed up uncomfortably close and his hand – but I will leave it to your imagination.

Finally you arrive at the hospital. And now take a deep breath, return to the room, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

DYNAMIC FACILITATION IN KENYA

Five students were taking my webinar on Psychosocial Support. We had just studied the section on Dynamic Facilitation, when one of them – whom I shall call Manar (not her real name)-- was assigned to travel to Nairobi to work with a team of Humanitarian Workers. They were having internal miscommunication issues and asked her, as the newcomer (and as project officer) for advice. She jumped at the chance to try out her new tool, Dynamic Facilitation. So she asked them if they would like to sit down with her and discuss their communication problems in a new kind of way – a way which would generate possible solutions.

So how does Dynamic Facilitation work? It's a way of facilitating a discussion in a manner that requires everyone to listen to all sides. The facilitator ensures that each participant is heard, one at a time, even to the point that if someone wants to argue, the facilitator stops them by saying, 'OK, you can be next, but we have to listen to this person first.'

In a room full of people, I might physically step between two participants who begin to talk to each other. I say, 'Talk to me, not to the other person.' The implication is that I, as facilitator, am the one who holds a safe place in the room, who will listen with open acceptance. Then I record everything that's said in a big, visible way by filling out charts placed on the walls around the room. I put it out there for everyone to see.

I once did this type of facilitation with

some Pakistan social workers and community members who were displaced because of fighting in their area. The women were angry, because it was an accepted practice for men in the village to take additional wives, usually selecting to marry young girls, making life harder for their other wives and children. In the community, widows and their families were impoverished and resorted to giving their daughters in marriage so that other children in the family could survive.

There were 25 men and women together in the group, and the women wanted this issue discussed. They stated the problem as follows: men are marrying young girls while widows are starving. The men didn't want to discuss it. They said, 'But this is our right.' I had to step between them several times to prevent heated arguments, but everyone finally took their turn and we built up the charts.

An hour into it, there was a shift. A religious leader in the group found a passage from the Koran that said the community was required to take care of widows and orphans. Surprisingly, the part about taking multiple wives was found in the same passage. The community sat back; there was a felt shift in their bodies, as the men realized they did have an obligation. From that point on, they concentrated on solutions.

I also used Dynamic Facilitation in Liberia for communities suffering from Ebola. The government wanted to cremate the bodies, but the local communities were

Patricia Omidian



Dr. Pat Omidian holds a PhD in Medical Anthropology and has thirty years' experience as an applied medical anthropologist with twenty years in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, she is a Focusing trainer and Coordinator for The International Focusing Institute. In 2014, she and her partner Melinda Darer opened Focusing Initiatives International, a not-for-profit organization that promotes positive emotional and social resilience. She loves facilitating group learning, and teaching and mentoring local community workers around the world. She can be reached at

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FOCUSING AS RADICAL INCLUSION

Lynn Preston



Lynn Preston, MA, MS, LP is a Focusing-oriented relational psychotherapist, teacher and supervisor. She is the Director of the Experiential Psychotherapy Project in New York City and has written and presented internationally on the integration of Focusing and relational psychoanalysis. She has an abiding interest in the exploration of the relationship between philosophy, theory and practice. In addition, Lynn is developing a cutting-edge community empowerment program which introduces Focusing as a way of relating for community organizers, therapists of all kinds, religious leaders and everyone else.

My sister described a professional conference she attended. A diversity training was required, as it is in many conferences. She was glad to see the organizational recognition these days of the urgent need to deal with issues of racism and other 'isms. Unfortunately, she was very disappointed in her experience of the training. It felt to her like a waste of time. And for me, from a Focusing point of view, the training seemed to be missing the most vital elements. From what she described, the training seemed merely cognitive, a panel of "experts" who showed charts. It didn't offer people an EXPERIENCE that would touch them and help them to want to make a more inclusive community. It struck me that Focusing gives us something special to contribute at this particular crossroads of time. It is a moment by moment experience of the precious uniqueness of each person. Its emphasis is on enabling people to come into their present felt experience, to connect with their alive thinking/feeling/sensing. A Focusing approach starts with where people are, then helps them to sense what is just under the surface of their thoughts and carry it further.

This profound insight that Focusing provides just what we need to genuinely address the "isms" that are tearing our world apart gave birth to F.O.R.C.E. (Focusing-Oriented Relational Community Empowerment Project). Our community empowerment team is currently developing a workshop entitled "Embracing Human Diversity Through Focusing," which puts these ideas into action.

But first, before telling you about this new workshop we are developing, let me give you a bit of the perspectives it is based on. It is instinctual for people to seek comfort in sameness — others who think like them, look like them, have the same values as them. In a recent Focusing conversation we held,

one of the participants said, "I'm so glad we can gather in a like-minded community," and everyone agreed. Then one person said, "What if we aren't all like-minded? What about people with different kinds of minds?" A rich discussion followed about this desire for like-mindedness which pushes away the different, the Other—someone who doesn't look like me, doesn't have my point of view, who isn't part of what I think of as "Us." The more threatened and insecure we feel, the stronger is our longing for sameness.

What a huge challenge we face now with the world becoming smaller and smaller, more and more vulnerable, tenser and tenser, faster and faster. Change, difference, radical diversity is inevitable. If we are to survive, we need to deal more creatively with our aversion to otherness. It can seem like communal life is going in the wrong direction, but I believe we have a powerful antidote to the separating out—the "Us against Them" mentality, that is so destructive.

Focusing is a practice of receptivity and inclusion. It is also a practice of "courting surprise" (Donnell Stern). The "Focusing attitude," entails receptivity and friendly curiosity to the edge of your awareness, the edge of your vulnerability, the edge of your comfort zone. The bad news is that we can't do Focusing without this attitude. The good news is that Focusing inspires and engenders this attitude, and the attitude facilitates Focusing.

Many people feel they don't have time for receptivity and getting to know the Other. The magical thing about Focusing is that the "Pause," the coming down into our bodies, being present for ourselves (that we cultivate for Focusing) can take us a long way. It can take us to the place where diversity becomes interesting rather than threatening.

MINI-ACTIVITY: THE ALIEN

We might begin with Focusing on a group or a thing that feels alien to us. One woman focused on a snake because she's terrified of them. I did a demonstration with this woman. I asked her to settle into her body, then to picture the snake, see its image. I then asked her to find inside herself a curiosity about the snake. What it is like for it to be a snake? She gently unfolded each facet that came to her. At the end, it was wonderful to see her experience the snake in a new and different way, to see its beauty.

In this way, we can develop a desire to see a person we find a pain in the butt, a person we can't stand, as part of this Great Diversity that the world is. It is deep-rooted in the United States. Think about it. The smoothness of like-mindedness makes for a lack of imagination. It's like a spice. Alone we might find it indigestible, but mixed in with everything else, it brings out a new flavor. Perhaps it is a yeast that makes the bread rise.

Our FORCE group as well as others (like Cynthia Callsen and the Metro Focusing folk) are helping to develop a new form of Focusing having to do with the group process and conversation. (I often talked to Gene Gendlin about this. For years we hashed out the relational workings of Focusing practice.) The same process or steps that happen in an individual can happen in a group. You can get a felt sense of the group as well as of an individual. You can get a felt sense of the whole conversation and how the process carried forward, what the contributions were that brought shifts, where the energy of the group was moving at each stage of the process.

MINI-ACTIVITY: THE I, THE YOU AND THE US

Even when I have a short workshop, I ask everyone at the very beginning to get a felt sense. I explain what the felt sense is. Then I say, "Get a felt sense first of yourself, then of the person next to you, then of the group." Finally, I talk about the three dimensions of experience: the "I," the "You" and the "Us" and how we can get a felt sense of each of them: yourself, the other person who is speaking, and the group as a whole. I ask how these three dimensions felt in the body and what came for them with each focus.

In the Community Empowerment workshop, we do a few group exercises about differences and sameness, and how we can create an even bigger sense of "Us." Then we have a Focusing conversation about how each of us deals with feeling that someone or something is "beyond the pale." We see if we can be curious about each other, about how the other person might disagree with us in fundamental ways. We gently and daringly invite those edges of difference, instead of covering them over. We invite the group to consider what is different about each of us, what's the same about all of us, what we can be open and curious about: (i.e. Differences between men and women; old and young; black and white; gay and straight. Differences in class, personality, between extroverts and introverts.) Just under the surface there is stretching to be done. For instance, there's always a difference between "quiet" people and

"noisy" people. The "quiet" ones often resent the people that "hog all the space." And the "vocal" ones can resent the job of making space for the silent people. What if we make that more explicit? How can quiet people be open to the noisy people, and vice versa?

Here's an example from our bi-monthly F.O.R.C.E conversation. One person said he had once shared a quote with Gene Gendlin, about being grateful for life, and Gene had commented that the most fundamental thing for him was to feel connected rather than grateful. Another person in our group said, "I'm not grateful, I hate my life!" "That's so negative," another member said. The first person clarified, "It's not that it's terrible, it's just that I never chose it, and I don't want it." To which the second person said, "If your life isn't terrible, can't you just be grateful for it?" We as a group tried to

make room for these very different experiences. From a Focusing perspective, someone commented, it's not that he should or should not be grateful, but it's about what it means to that person, to not feel grateful for his life. As we listened more deeply to his experience, we learned how he could never say when he was in pain or when life was lousy. "There was no one to hear that," he said. It felt liberating for him to say now, "I hate my life." He needed to have a space for that feeling, to have been received.

This exchange is an example of how we can cultivate curiosity about someone who is not like-minded and who comes from a different direction. It's an example of how we can make space for that, and see how it broadens us, gives to us and enriches us.

In Focusing we talk about the edge of our knowing, but it's also the edge of our tolerance, courage and curiosity. We need to be able to go right up to the edge without going over it. A Focusing attitude is an atmosphere that can be created immediately in the group by the facilitator and by the intention of the group members. The stage can be set at the beginning for receptivity and "embodied introspection," but then it is often through struggle and stretching that it must be returned to again and again.

It's important to note that no one wants to go to a seminar that takes you out of your comfort zone. Focusing conversation doesn't take us out of our "comfort zone." It takes us to the edge. At the edge, there can be excitement, but one can say at any point, "I don't feel comfortable with this. I can't talk about it right now."

Suppose someone says they have to leave the group because they don't feel safe with so-and-so present. Take the situation with the support dog in Rommell's article. Rather than trying to solve the problem, the two people tolerated it. The one person that was terrified continued to be terrified but was held enough so her terror could be visible. She didn't have to pretend to be otherwise. The other person was still upset about her dog but could feel the group was supportive even though her dog wasn't welcome. It wasn't this or that. Focusing is finding a way to be "Us," to be with the conflict rather than choosing sides. Focusing can transcend the need to choose sides.

MAY THE F.O.R.C.E. BE WITH YOU

(FOCUSING-ORIENTED RELATIONAL
COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT)

Rommell Washington



Rommell Washington is a social worker, clinician, health and human rights advocate, and practitioner of healing-centered experiences. His work has spanned many movements and causes, such as addiction treatment through acupuncture, comprehensive housing for persons with HIV/AIDS, and wide-ranging work with youth, adolescents, the mentally disabled, sexual assault survivors, and people with substance disorders. Currently, Rommell is partnering with Alliance of Families for Justice, developing Songa Mbele (focusing on Young Men of Color and trauma/violence), and collaborating with Reciprocity, dedicated to providing wellness programs to LGBTQ youth.

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On the first night of our new Community Empowerment training program—the night we had all been waiting and preparing for—one of our participants unexpectedly came in with her small dog. She came from a distance and it was too hot to leave her elderly pooch in the car. It was immediately evident that another participant had a dog phobia. She began trembling and staring at the creature across the room as if it were a bear about to attack! The dog owner began to weep. What a challenging moment! What to do? “Let’s take a moment and pause and hear from each person,” said Lynn Preston, our teacher. We listened empathically to both sides. The dog owner said she felt ashamed that she had brought the dog without asking first, but also heartbroken about her dog being so frail and vulnerable. The terrified one could only show us how she felt. As each person was listened to and supported, I could sense the tension in the room diminish. The team worked to create an atmosphere of openness and support where all the members could be heard. We suggested that we could hold the conflict without needing to resolve it; to just be with our feelings. We talked about falling into and pulling back from the need to “take sides.” In the end, the dog stayed and we lived one of the important messages of the program: learning a more inclusive way to deal with diversity.

Forty-one years ago, I earned a master’s degree in Social Work[3] from a small university in Florida. My intention at that time was community organizing around

grass-roots issues such as prisons and prison construction in the South. In the late ‘70s, prison building was crazy in Florida. In search of something more fulfilling and less discouraging, (and even considering leaving the country), I moved to New York City, where I got involved and stayed.

I always choose to be involved with therapies that make sense to me. I—a heterosexual Black man—have worked in a lot of areas of social care, from “harm reduction” with HIV positives to “risk reduction,” i.e. trying to lower the amount of heroin an addict takes. Since substance abuse is a symptom of other issues, we social workers tried to discover where addicts were “at” in their lives. And when the mentally ill were being discharged in Harlem, I tried to organize something specifically for them, since some clinical models didn’t cut it in Harlem. I wanted to find people’s humanity and bring it out. I was drawn to relational therapy, attachment therapy, Hakomi (a somatic model) and ADDP (Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy), a NYC area therapy. There’s a linchpin in this, I realized. The common thread seemed to be the Felt Sense, a concept developed by philosopher and psychologist Dr. Eugene Gendlin. Credit would be given to Gendlin, then the whole concept glossed over.

Fast forward to 2016, when I was invited to a local introduction to IFOT (Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy). Something was devoted to Indigenous care? My ears were open. I went to find out what it was about. There are not many Black

male therapists in the world, even including Africa. When I did community organizing, there were people who looked like me, but among psychotherapists, nobody looked like me. In IFOT, I found people who were speaking my language. And that felt good.

It was through IFOT that I met Lynn Preston, a protégé of Gendlin. Lynn invited a group of like-minded individuals to gather at her NYC loft to discuss how Focusing could be used in community empowerment. After a few meetings with Lynn, we decided we wanted more Focusing training, so Lynn put together a “continuation” class. A question was hatching. Could we bring this to the wider communities we were involved in? That’s how F.O.R.C.E. (Focusing-Oriented Relational Community Empowerment) was born.

The ten-month F.O.R.C.E. Training started September 2019. We meet every other week for 3 hours to practice Focusing and explore how to use it to build our communities. We want to find better ways to communicate the hard stuff. Everyone in the class is working in some community, but not everyone is a trained therapist. They don’t have to be. That’s the wonderful thing about diversity.

Sometimes we therapists can get our heads stuck up in the therapist’s black hole. We think, “I gotta fix it.” Focusing, I believe, is different. It liberates me. I don’t have to have an agenda when I listen to someone. In Focusing I think, “Let me just listen and receive this. Let me be with you. If it’s anger you’re bringing, that’s OK.”

This “casualness” of Focusing has the feel of the Zimbabwe Friendship Bench, which is a national program supporting the psychosocial health of a country that contains very few trained psychotherapists.

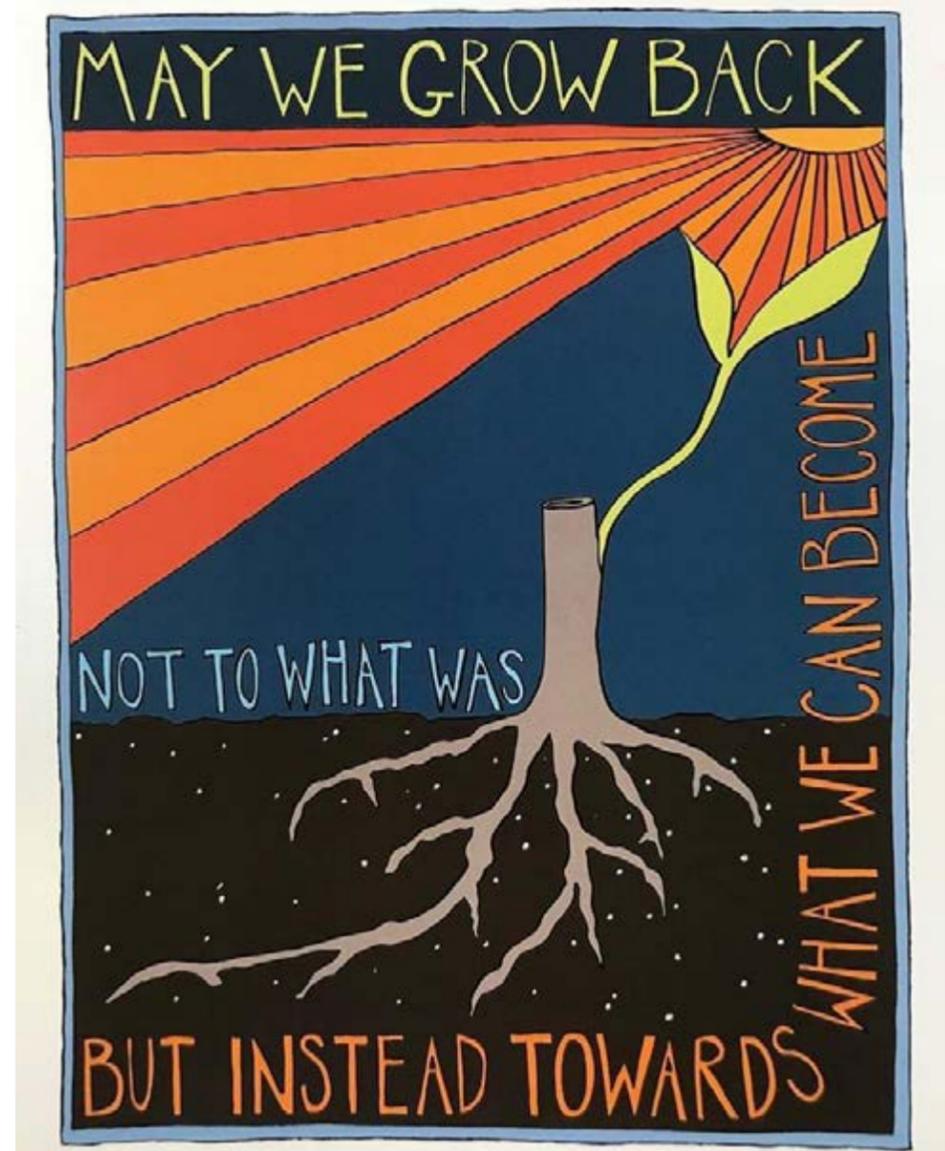
In this practice the therapy rooms are outdoors under trees and the therapists are elderly women, city lay health workers, who have become known as community grandmothers. They treat common disorders such as anxiety and depression, known locally as “thinking too much.”

(From their website,
www.friendshipbenchzimbabwe.org)

So here I am, a social worker for 41 years, in my 60’s, still learning new things. And it feels wonderful. With all our different degrees, we are challenged daily as we move along in our humanness. The times today are trying, but probably no more trying than any other. I know many of us feel strait-jacketed. But the real strait-jacket is when no one hears us. We don’t even know how to be heard. Folks need the know-how to distill the sediment that arises through society’s varied opinions. It’s like a jar with mud in it, all shaken up. We cannot see through that jar. We need to be patient and let it settle so that we can see clearly, so we can address the muck.

We are now in the second module of the F.O.R.C.E. training (mostly online). It’s already been decided that our third module will be about using Focusing for leadership and creative projects. A typical class starts with an attunement, and checking in. Many times a poem is read. Lynn then addresses the topic for the day, for example “embodied listening”. We split up into Focusing groups of 2 or 3 to practice the new topic. Coming back into the larger group, we harvest what came up and close out.

During the two weeks between classes, we have articles to read. We partner with someone and get together on the phone at least once to do Focusing. With our partners we also discuss the last class, the last exercise and the last handout given.



When we reconvene and check in, we have a chance to comment on our mid-week experience.

Focusing for community empowerment is a conduit for better and more effective communication, connectedness and creative thinking. We want our training to be a powerful, life-enhancing experience, not just a theoretical or academic one. In the group conversations, we use the essential Gendlin's six steps, as we do in partnerships.

People new to Focusing often ask if they need a certification to use Focusing in their work and lives. I'm joyous to say, "No way! Come if you're willing. You can open up the place where your heart resides." Anyone can learn to use Focusing just for themselves, then with a partner, then with a group. They can learn the tools for all three types of communication.

Another thing I like is the idea of "Carrying

Forward," Gendlin's belief that if we listen closely, whatever is there in us will want to open up and become more alive. We can find the best in ourselves and take it further. That's how we survive as human beings. This idea of Gendlin's, to carry it forward, is simple, yet radical and revolutionary.

In F.O.R.C.E. classes, we particularly learn to deal with diversity. Diversity around class and ethnicity is a big third rail. Take privilege—I'm privileged. I'm a third generation college graduate. I don't know what it's like to live in a project. I don't know what it's like to go hungry, unless I'm fasting. One measure of poverty is: if an emergency comes up and you need \$400, can you get it in a few weeks? Do you have resources? A lot of people can't.

This is one kind of diversity that comes up in F.O.R.C.E. classes. But there are many kinds of diversity. People have different sensitivities and vulnerabilities. Some might be allergic to perfume. Some

people want to dab their chakras, others might not be able to tolerate that. Many people have issues around food. Some have past trauma and some in our group are living in oppressive situations.

The third rail, by the way, is a subway thing. It carries the electricity—you can get killed touching it. Some problems are like the third rail; they set off a lot of sparks. What about Trump? He sets off sparks. Political conflicts are also part of diversity.

We want to take community Focusing skills to people who aren't necessarily interested in therapy. This is the most important aspect of our F.O.R.C.E. program. There are folks completely new to Focusing and old timers who have worked with Gendlin and have been practitioners for a long time. We are becoming the Third Generation of Focusing, as we all learn to be together. Everyone has a tool belt around their waist. Focusing is a tool to tuck into that belt.

The day was sunny. There was a positive and happy atmosphere in the group of refugees who gathered at the Sindos Community Center. They represented many different cultures, but all spoke French and were frequent participants in our center activities.

As the discussion got underway, one man asked the group what "integration" meant. He had heard this word over and over and wondered what we understood it to be. The group began to share examples and stories about how they had arrived in a new country for the first time without knowing the language and eventually learned to "fly".

What does "fly" mean, I wanted to ask. The word was used more and more often. Everyone's eyes looked like they were on fire. There were some disagreements on the definition of "integration", but everyone was eager to describe it.

- To have friends and communicate with them in my daily life.
- To have rights, but also obligations. To have equality and to feel free.
- To vote and be able to decide on my future.
- To know the national anthem, habits and customs of the country I live in.

Then a member, with courage and emotion in his eyes, almost whispered: "Not to forget the homeland."

The participants agreed. They shook their heads affirmatively, and several faces dropped thinking and remembering. They spoke of how important it was not to change who you were just to be liked, and how developing new skills helped them stay strong and believe in themselves even when others tried to belittle them.

"I can exist without bothering," one person says, and somehow a pause follows.

I invited the participants to bring their attention to their bodies, with "integration" as the subject-theme.

The participants were used to Focusing, as we had practiced regularly. They closed their eyes and sat quietly sensing how they carried their sense of "integration" in their bodies. They begin to share:

- It's a relief.
- It's the feeling of a full stomach, as if you've eaten and feel like you're not missing something.
- I'm breathing better, as I remember my work.

During this process words come thick and fast. Still, words sometimes cannot do justice to the intensity or complexity of the emotions or experiences of the speakers. And in a multilingual, multicultural context such as ours, the nuances of terms that refer to a specific feeling or body sense often cannot be accurately translated into a person's second language.

I asked them to stay with their body feeling, and invited them to draw on a paper the whole of their experience in the meeting that day. These drawings are an example of how the facilitators find inventive ways of communicating during our center activities to help participants' share complex ideas and feelings across their many cultural divides.

As they pay attention inside and share through words or drawings, participants gain access to their feelings, and learn to process the psychosomatic symptoms, worries, thoughts, and memories that disturb them. They find that they can become bigger than their feelings and control them, and can adjust to them as being part of their own selves. They discover elements of their character they were not aware of. They uncover dreams of the future.

We often spend time on clearing a space, which is the first step of Focusing. By spending a few moments with each feeling or issue they find inside and then setting it gently aside, the participants have the opportunity to acknowledge and understand more about themselves in a safe way. As memories and traumas unfold, the group's moderator becomes an observer of an inner process that is unique to each person.

A SPACE FOR INTEGRATION

Georgia Kaltsidou



Georgia Kaltsidou (Γεωργία Καλτσιδου) is a psychologist with a Master's Degree in Clinical & Social Psychology of Addictions & Psychosocial Problems. She is also a Person-Centered & Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapist. For the last 4 years, Georgia has been working as psychosocial support worker in a community centre for refugees in the suburbs of Thessaloniki.

Well over a million refugees have arrived in Greece since 2015. Most of the refugees have been in Greece for a few years, and many of them speak the Greek language and are eager to improve the quality of their life, to move from surviving to thriving. Our goal at the Sindos Community Center is the integration of these refugees into the existing socio-political fabric of Greece.

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USING HANDS TO COMMUNICATE

Time: 10 - 15 minutes

There's a Focuser and a Listener, but no talking. The Focuser extends a hand. The Listener responds with a hand. For seven minutes they communicate with only one hand. At the end of that time they share how they felt. How much can be communicated non-verbally? It's mind-blowing.

ACTIVITY

LET'S CULTURE TOGETHER

- Goal:** To bring together and increase mutual understanding between community members speaking different languages, coming from different countries, and practicing different religions. The need for this activity arose because participants had been working together for some time and were familiar with each other, but did not always communicate well or resolve problems that arose among them.
- Time:** A weekly session, length depending on the size of the group
- Materials:** Each session will require a participant to bring items representing his or her culture to present to the group.

First meeting:

We ask members why they joined the group. Many say they are taking initiative and setting an example for their community.

We begin a discussion about the concept of "culture".

We schedule future meetings and make assignments among group members who will make presentations.

Each week:

One member of the group shares an anecdote, story or experience from the culture of his or her country. Using photographs, videos and personal descriptions, the presenter describes the history, arts, daily life, customs and practices in everyday life as well as on important events.

Some members say it is the first time in their lives where they have taken the floor and spoken in public. Some find it difficult and hesitate. Through this process we learn to listen, to reflect, and to express our opinions.

In addition to refugees' presentations, some weeks we invite members of the local community to participate or schedule visits to local cultural sites and festivals to connect the refugees with the culture and heritage of Greece.

During the weekly meetings, different interpretations of what is considered 'normal' emerge:

- the impression of Sierra Leone on a wedding day
- a mayoral proclamation ceremony in Cameroon
- the experiences of Pontic Greek refugees (the wholesale transfer of Christians from Anatolia to Greece early in the 20th Century)

The facilitator will help the group understand that all of these cultural events and practices are 'normal' to some, but different, new, and sometimes challenging to others. Discussion is encouraged.

The facilitator listens, reflects, and encourages members to share how they are feeling and responding to the content of the presentations.

We strive to encourage critical thinking, nonviolent communication, active listening skills, empathy, and participatory decision-making. If we succeed in creating a general sense of safety and mutual respect, sometimes this can happen quite naturally.

One particular meeting always stays with me. Describing the history of his own country, a member referred to a historical event that created great political unrest in his country. Another group member turned to him and asked, firmly but respectfully: "Why do you hate us in your country?"

He responded: "Being from my country does not mean that the policies of my government are my own. For me, you are the same as everyone else in here."

I observed this exchange without speaking. Allowing this connection, this dialogue, was more important than anything I could say as the facilitator. Now that I think about it, maybe this interaction could have gone a different way. But at the time I felt only trust. Trust in the process, in the dialogue and in the value of the relationships developing through talking and listening across cultures.

HOW TO GROW AND COOPERATE THROUGH ADMIRING OF OTHERS

by
Ciriaco Uriarte Ayo



Ciriaco worked as a Maths teacher for twenty years (his first degree was Engineering) and worked another twenty years as a secondary-school counsellor. After his second degree (in Psychology, 1991), he practiced psychotherapy. He is a certified integrative psychotherapist (member of the IIPA), and in 2014 received TIFI certification as a Focusing Trainer and Focusing Oriented Psychotherapist.

Retired now (he is 68), Ciriaco leads two weekly Focusing groups in Seville, where he lives: a Changes group, and another one on the Psychology of Self Realization as described in this article. He took the original Self Realization course from Antonio Blay whom he first met in 1983 and who became his mentor. Ciriaco is committed to the integration of both.

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The Activity in this article is a part of a wider project called FOCUSING AND SELF-REALIZATION, which refers to the two approaches we are integrating: the Focusing of Gene Gendlin and The Psychology of Self-Realization of Antonio Blay. If Focusing is an invitation to sense our body from the inside and get in contact with our inner source of life-direction, then Self-Realization is an invitation to find our place in the world, a place which allows us both to unfold our capacities to the maximum and also to inhabit that profound identity in a stable way.

This course has run for six years already. We meet for an hour's session every week for 10 months. For some of the course, we listen to the audios of the workshop led by Antonio Blay, created at the end of his life and called "Curso de Psicología de la Autorrealización." (An accompanying book is used by the group individually between sessions.)

Participation at the Civic Centre is free and open to the community. The people of the neighborhood sign up for our "Psicología de la Autorrealización" after a first phone contact or personal contact to clarify needs, intentions and objectives. The group contains both those who know Focusing and those who don't.

It is touching to see how every year new people begin the course, responding to an inner impulse that emerges from inside and mainly attracted by the word "self-realization." Focusing is implicit and enriches and strengthens the class.

We are interaction. This is a celebrated assertion of Gene Gendlin that we can actualize in a real life experience through the feeling of admiration. It is always our interior that responds to what we receive from the outside. Admiration is an example of interaction on the affective level.

Everything that happens 'outside' is a permanent invitation to discover new aspects of ourselves, and there is no more complete stimulus than another human being. In fact, another human being is the only stimulus that can mobilize all the aspects of our potential.

The concept of admiration. Admiration is a social emotion that occurs when we recognize a positive quality in another person which also makes us happy. Admiration is a positive relationship where all is blissful: the happy quality that we recognize in the other and the happiness that takes place inside me.

From the neurobiology of feelings and emotions it has been shown that the emotionally competent stimuli (ECS) of admiration is the recognition of a contribution to cooperation. Therefore admiration is especially relevant to groups that cooperate in seeking a common objective: teams of people that sustain an institution, activities of cooperative economy, community health groups, spaces of interpersonal listening, and so on.

It is necessary to make a distinction between two social emotions that frequently get confused: admiration and envy. In western societies we might unfortunately

say that envy has a greater presence than admiration, maybe due to the competitive environment that prevails. We may even get confused and name a feeling "envy" when experientially we are feeling admiration, for example when we call the feeling a "healthy envy."

Both envy and admiration are social feelings but there is an essential difference between them. When we feel envy, we lose inner strength. We compare ourselves to another and we lose, we suffer. However, admiration doesn't take anything away from us; quite the opposite, we gain. We feel better, safer, more confident. The physiological basis of admiration is happiness while that of envy is suffering.

The act of admiring has a further consequence: the reinforcement of the inclination to cooperate. Therefore both the stimulus (the ECS) and the consequence have to do with cooperation. The goal of our seminar is to exile the tendency toward comparison, competitiveness and apathy, and reinforce the positive qualities we all possess.

We are talking about positive basic qualities. Certain qualities can be achieved through training. For example, the skill of a violinist or the ability of a football player. Here we are talking about something different - natural qualities which don't require any special training and which emanate from the three great potentials of human nature, recognized in all cultures. These are LOVE, ENERGY and INTELLIGENCE. We can identify joy, friendliness, kindness, enthusiasm, and optimism as directly related to LOVE; others like safety, inner strength, determination, and willpower as related to ENERGY; while cleverness, understanding, lucidity, and insight are undoubtedly different aspects of INTELLIGENCE.

These three basic qualities constitute our essence as human beings. They can be grown or not, but they are our basic capacities that are only waiting to find expression. They don't need any specific training to get going. They may need the right stimulus, perhaps an external model,

but they can unfold instantly and will grow when put into practice.

Two simultaneous experiences. As in many situations, admiration contains two simultaneous experiences. On one hand there is something that happens outside me - I see another person unfolding in some capacity. On the other hand, something happens inside me - my perception of that unfolding produces a response which I call admiration. Something happening outside me forms the stimulus for what is happening inside me.

Usually, for some reason, my attention stays on the outside. The other person catches almost all my attention. I am sensing more what is happening outside than what is happening inside. However, I could pause and pay attention to the phenomenon inside me and even explore that experience

In the Activity, I am asked to name the quality which is bringing admiration. Perhaps it is determination, lucidity, enthusiasm, or a calm quality. I have to perceive it in order to name it. I recognize it because I know it in some way. Now it's possible that the other is actually unfolding that very quality, but this is only possible, not sure; what is totally sure is that the one who is perceiving and feeling, without any doubt, is me.

The Activity tries to revert the direction of our attention back to what is happening inside. We know that wherever we put our attention, that space gets energized. It's a pity to scatter to the outside all the value of our inner experience. By sensing inside, I can integrate in me the quality I perceive outside.

This quality is not "something in me." It's important to note that the quality I am experiencing is basic. It's me, all me, who is perceiving this quality: "I feel calm," "I feel enthusiasm," or "I perceive determination," "I perceive courage" etc. The inner experiencing of these basic qualities, are NOT states that come and go. They refer directly to the potential that we human beings are made of. These qualities don't need any type of initial training to

activate them; they are internal states that we perceive directly and can put into action directly. Although in the Activity they are stimulated by admiration, they can be activated without any kind of external stimulus. But by integrating and acting on these qualities, we feel more ourselves. This is the first aspect of the exercise.

So the appropriation of the positive experience of admiration inside us drives us to begin an attitude of basic positivity towards life in general. It's not necessary to underline the importance of this consequence. An attitude of basic positivity is an indispensable requirement for coping with all that life can bring.

The goal of this Activity is not to change our idea about ourselves, our so-called "self-concept," from negative to positive. It's about living experientially what we feel when stimulated by perceiving the unfolding of another person. We don't want to be trapped in any idea; we want to be open to the experience itself because we are not an idea; we are not a concept.

If we manage to direct our attention to what we are experiencing, we will be able to take possession of that pleasant feeling. This will be the first action step.

The second step of the exercise becomes an invitation to action. The Activity may be over but it does not stop here. We recognized many basic positive qualities in ourselves and in the group thanks to the magic of the interaction. We feel reconnected to our potential; our impulse to cooperate is reinforced.

All that positive energy, which has awakened in us thanks to the stimuli of the group, needs now to turn outward to the environment. Then the interactive cycle will be complete. To feel inside is indispensable to becoming aware of our qualities, but to feel by itself is not sufficient. What response will we give to the situations in our lives? Personal growth only happens when our feeling develops into action. Then the world benefits from all the positivity we have created, and the world changes.

GROWING THROUGH ADMIRING OTHERS

PART 1

- Time:** Approximately one hour
- Preparation:** To integrate in ourselves the positive qualities we recognize and attribute to others.
- Goal:** To integrate in ourselves the positive qualities we recognize and attribute to others.
- Start:** The facilitator explains the exercise using the ideas below.

"We belong to this group because we have done things together and we share some objectives." (Or if the group is a spontaneous group --) "We will be doing something together now, namely, this exercise."

Choose a Quality to Admire: "I invite you now to think about the amount of positive capacities which are present in this group. Each one of us can recognize certain qualities in individuals here that awaken in us an admiring feeling of pleasure and joy. Notice that on one hand there is the feeling of admiration, on the other hand the quality that awakens that feeling."

The facilitator then invites the group to become aware, silently, of some qualities they recognize in other members. Each person reflects on their own, maybe taking some notes but without any relational dynamic.

Next, each member of the group is invited to choose freely any one of those qualities they admire, but only one. It can be any quality, even one they think lies far from are their own. This last idea is the most challenging: to choose a quality that is farthest away from their own. The facilitator can encourage trying it; the result can be surprising.

The facilitator explains: "As a group, don't let it be known to whom you are attributing that quality. We are interested in the quality itself and how it can affect us personally."

Once each one has chosen a quality that seems to them to be incarnated by someone in the group, then invite the group to close their eyes and be guided by the following:

Guided Visualization (The pace of the exercise is crucial; pausing is essential to encourage the group to sense and stay inside):

The facilitator says:

"I invite everyone to get comfortable, to find a position where they can stay for 15 minutes or longer. Take a few deep breaths. . . ."

"Now I would like to invite you to use your imagination to visualize, with all kinds of details, the admired person who shows this chosen quality. Recreate the picture, making it as alive and concrete as possible. View it actually happening in front of you. I invite you all to enjoy the unfolding of that quality, to delight in it, to revive intensely the feeling of admiration".

"As you continue to recreate and visualize the unfolding of that person's quality, you will notice that you can move between the admiring feeling and recognizing the embodied quality. Do this until the quality is clearly perceived. And don't give up doing the visualization of the quality in your mind. Once the recognition of both takes place, I invite you to express it, either inside yourself, or in a low voice without disturbing anyone:

**I am the one who is admiring ...
(this quality)**

**I am admiring ...
(this quality)**

(Pause to allow time for this)

"Now that you have identified the quality, I invite you to be open to the felt experience of that quality inside your body. Put your attention on your felt experience, on how you are experiencing your body inside. Direct your attention to your chest and stomach area, your whole body, in order to perceive how you are sensing that quality. Do this slowly; you want this quality to have an intense resonance.

"As you hold your attention on the inner feeling of this quality, let go of the visualization little by little until you are paying attention solely to your inner experience. In other words,

The admired person has been only the stimulus, while you are the one who is perceiving and feeling the quality, even embodying the quality. Keep directing your attention to the felt experience inside, letting go of the external motivation.

"At this stage, I invite you to symbolize this process with words.

- I am feeling the quality of ... (name the chosen quality)
- I feel this quality
- This quality is in me
- This quality is mine
- I am the quality

"Your body holds the felt experience of the quality. You hold the experience. As you speak these words, you slowly bring these two concepts together – you and your felt quality – and end with one simple sentence in which you and this quality are one. I invite you to

express these sentences in a low voice but audibly, in order to increase the reality of what you are saying. This way you incorporate the quality and accept it as your own.

"I want to invite you to remain for a while with the felt experience of this quality, focusing on setting the experience in your mind. This will help you remember it another time.

Invitation to action through visualization:

"Finally, from the felt experience of the quality and without losing contact with it, I invite you to visualize something new. I invite you to put yourself in a real situation where the unfolding of this quality might be useful to you, or beneficial to the group.

"With the experience set in your body, I suggest only that you be very aware, in silence but very aware. That you be open for something new to emerge, not knowing what it can be. Open to an intuition about what direction to take. Open to come up with how that quality might unfold in a real life situation.

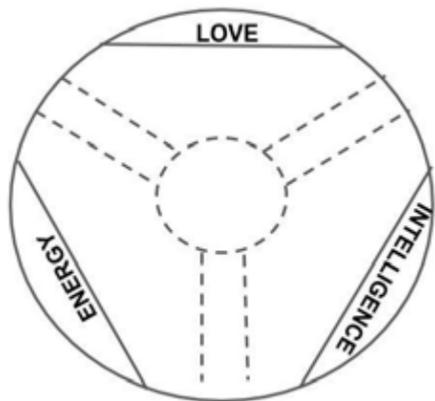
"Whatever comes, welcome it and give thanks for it. We want to thank the process, thank our body which connects us with wisdom and direction for our life."

Share in pairs: 10 minutes. People form pairs and share for 10 minutes; each person will have 5 minutes to talk. Once they decide who goes first, each one may express what s/he wants while the other person listens in silence without interruption. Each person is also free to keep to him or herself what s/he doesn't want to share.

Share in a group: 15 to 20 minutes. Following this, reconstruct the whole group and invite everyone to share as they wish in the big group, in no particular order and with no obligation to take part. This is the time for comments and questions.

PART 2

- Time:** Approximately one hour.
- Preparation:**
- Pencils and pens
 - sticky notes, which will be placed on the following diagram, which will be posted eye level.
- Start** The facilitator shows the diagram and explains that they are going to create a Map of the Qualities which are present in the group.



The facilitator explains the seven parts in the diagram: The 3 words correspond to the basic qualities that define our universal potential: LOVE, ENERGY and INTELLIGENCE. The three rectangular bands which lie between these qualities represent qualities combining two of the main aspects. In the central circle will be placed the notes listing qualities which combine all three aspects: LOVE, ENERGY and INTELLIGENCE. Each person must decide in which of the 7 areas each quality resides.

The facilitator invites each person to identify three different qualities present in the group, and to write them, one quality to each small paper. Suggest that these qualities be as different from each other as possible. The qualities can refer to oneself or to anyone in the group. Do not list a quality belonging to someone outside the group.

We never name or point at anyone. The choosing of qualities is done internally, each one to himself/

herself, and afterwards each one writes the name of the qualities on the small notes, one quality to each small paper.

When the majority of the group has followed these instructions, the facilitator calls for round one. Each person will choose one note, stand, read the quality out loud, and then paste the note in the zone of the diagram which s/he considers is its essence.

There follows a second and third round and in this way the Map of Qualities is completed.

Finally, discuss what has been relevant in this process: The facilitator might ask these questions:

- What is your impression of the Map?
- Were there doubts about where to put any of your qualities?
- For those who did the first exercise, how do the two exercises relate?
- Are there possible consequences for the identity of the group?
- Sometimes there appears a group impulse towards some action even if it is small. Any forward movement like that?
- Possible personal consequences?
- Surprises ... ?

It all started for me when I held a paint brush just for fun. I was 21 years old; the year was 2011. I was living in Saudi Arabia and I had nothing to do. From the moment I applied the first colors to the canvas, I knew Art was a path for healing. Painting helped me distance myself from the emotional confusion in my environment, and focus on how I felt inside. I was doing something which nobody taught me to do, so I started from scratch and taught myself. I didn't understand the details, or why I put on certain colors, but by the end, the painting made sense, and the path became smoother and more joyful. I let my organic feelings show, leaving the marks of my shaking hands. My painting reflected myself at the moment, whatever the feelings: fear, peace, happiness or sadness.



I work for an NGO as a Psychosocial Support trainer for Syrian refugees and some Lebanese who live in tents or rented houses and have left home and livelihood behind. Yet before I could help others, I had to focus on myself; we can't give from an empty cup. I learned that I am enough, I'm whole, I can face everything around me – and help others do so too.

I tell my participants, things happen in life, but we need to know we're not victims, we are not our past -- it simply provides us with lessons. We need to put previous pictures aside and start painting our own present moment. When we sense the present moment, we see that everything in and around us is moving. We don't have to take our lives seriously; we can give our inner child freedom by keeping the joy. What I'm really giving is a sense of self, that we all have possibilities.

Last year I took a Webinar with Pat Omidian. What I remember most was her leading us in Focusing, and how sensing our inner feelings led to compassion for self and others. It helped us be calm.

Let me take you now through my four sessions of Art Healing. The participants are all women. Most are married; others are divorced or have lost their husbands.

Fatima Ismail



Fatima started transforming her emotions and heartbeats into professional paintings in 2011. She also studied English literature and wrote a novel in Arabic: "الرحيل مرآيا" Mirror of Departure (published in 2018). Between art, writing and searching for the real meaning of life, she became a Psychosocial Support trainer for an NGO and started to use art to help people pass

"Spreading art and happiness can heal the whole world."

Fatima can be reached at fatimaismailart@gmail.com

ART HEALING

- Time:** Four sessions of one to two hours
- Materials:** paper and canvasses, pencils, charcoal, paint brushes, acrylic paints in primary colors
- Goal:** To help participants find their inner strength and creativity through painting from their inner child, to connect more with themselves and have their own time away from their responsibilities and routine.

1st Session:

I introduce myself and ask to know a little about each participant's background.

I introduce Art History, giving them some examples of famous artists. I tell them we all can be artists, just by focusing on the creative part inside us.

They learn about the basic colors, the materials we have, and how can we be free by using those little things to paint a masterpiece to reflect our inner self.

We deal in this session with the fear of trying something new. I encourage them to give themselves specific private time, to understand and recharge their lives. We call it self-care.

We build a trust so we can interact without fear or judgments.

2nd Session:

I lead the participants in a five-minute meditation – short because this practice is new to most of them. I ask them to close their eyes and imagine walking here from their home, seeing the environment, and focusing on good things – a tree, a pleasant doorway, the sky. Often when they open their eyes at the end of the meditation, they feel they have just arrived from home, fresh and ready to participate.

After the meditation, the participants are invited to do a drawing with pencil and charcoals.

I teach them about the shadow and light. They draw a ball and apply what they learned using pencil on paper, then by using charcoal. They practice “no judgment” when they see that nobody is allowed to give

an opinion or judge; I don't either! They start to see that drawing and painting are easy and fun.

After practicing the shadow and light, I give them the freedom to draw whatever they want.

I ask them to imagine they are teaching themselves. I am just a background. They start laughing, some of them cry, they start to show their emotions, they deal with it and enjoy themselves.

3rd Session:

Everyone is given a blank canvas and a brush. I ask them to stand in front of their canvas. Then I lead them in a meditation on that white space. I say, “A white canvas is like a mirror in which you face yourself. You need to accept yourself and accept everything you put on the canvas.” I tell them they have to stop thinking. They are not going to create the perfect painting. They are not there to be a good person. They are there to think like a child, to do random things, to just be themselves. They might even discover things they never imagined.

At first, people don't know where to start. So I have my own blank canvas, and I show them how I do it. I tell them to watch the colors as I randomly apply them with a brush, then I put down the brush and use my hands to move the paint. The hands can feel more. They are more connected to our sense of self.

Some mothers have adopted the perfect mother concept that everything should be clean. They say, “Now I understand why my children mess with the colors.” I say, “Maybe it's time to give the kids more freedom.” So they go ahead and put colors on the canvas.

Some have dark colors; that is what is in their minds. (I only give them the basic colors, red, blue, and yellow, plus white but I skip the black. If they wish, they can mix colors to get a dark hue.)

4th session:

They ask for a new canvas but I don't give them one. I tell them to work on the same canvas as before. I tell them they can always remove what they don't want by adding a new layer of acrylic paint. It's the same with our life experiences, we just go on from where we are.

But first we have a brief meditation in front of our paintings. “This painting is you,” I say. “What you can do now is to accept it as it is, and do your best to make it as you want. Even if you don't like it, at least make sure that while you are doing it, you are enjoying its color and enjoying your time.” I promise them their painting will be beautiful, because every person

is unique and every person has layers of feeling and beauty inside them.

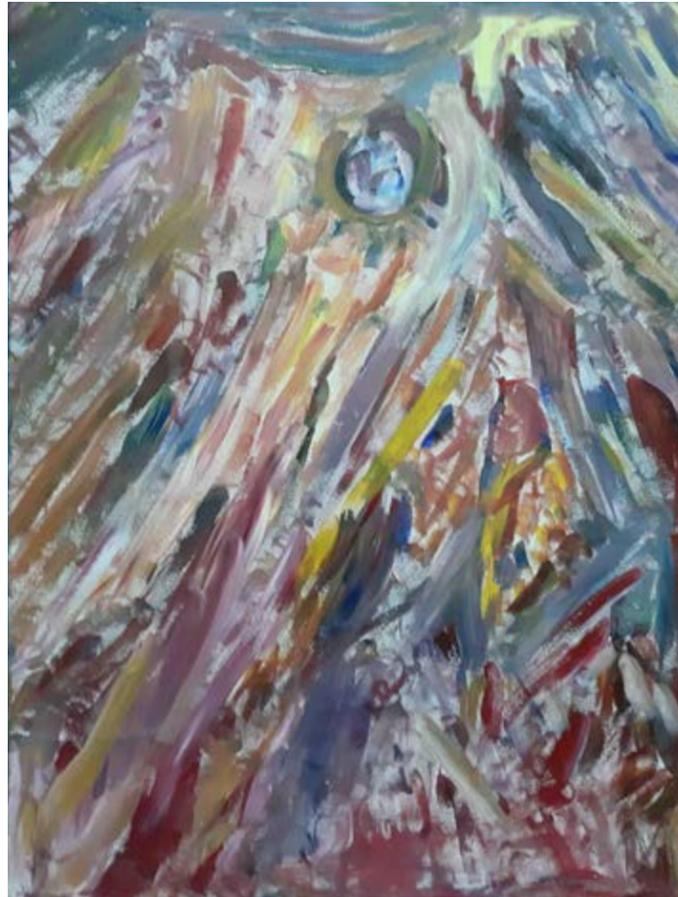
So they add new layers, and paint whatever they want. Sometimes we cry in the class, sometimes we dance. If I see someone thinking, I say, “Look at me” and I dance, I laugh; I become a clown to distract them from thinking. “Let's just enjoy our time,” I say, “the painting isn't serious.”

I give them between 1 to 2 hours each session. Some end quickly, while others draw or paint for longer. Although we don't focus on problems or talk about them, sometimes I can see problems from the paintings, which I pass on to other members of the NGO team, suggesting this person may need help. At the end, they are always proud of their paintings and happy with what they did. It's like magic, I can't explain it. They come out of their cocoon and bypass their limitations. They surprise themselves.



Example 1:
ORANGE ABSTRACT

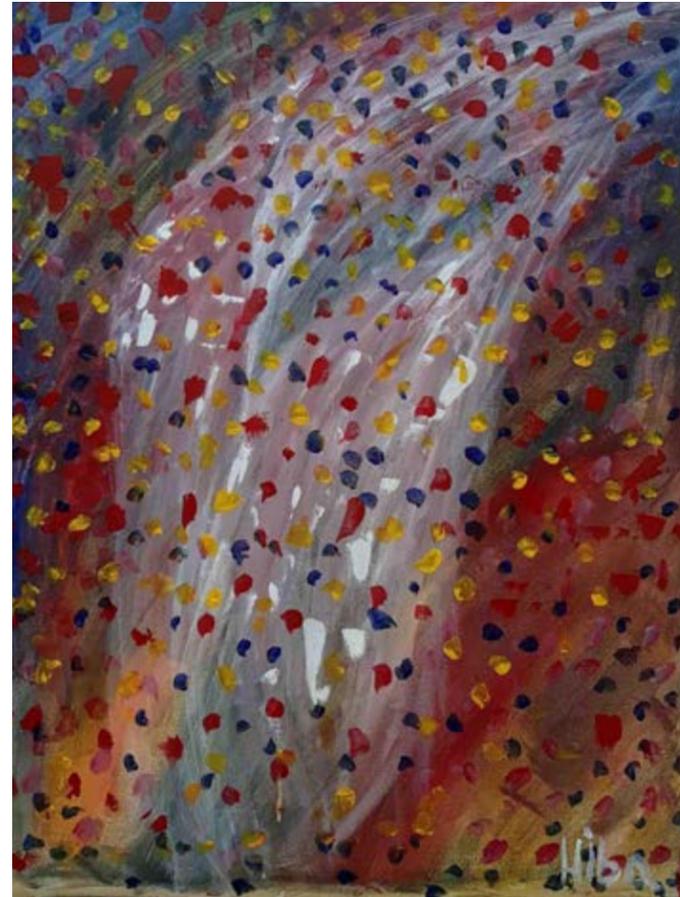
ACTIVITY



Example 2:
THE LIGHT

A 67 year-old lady as she painted this picture

"You made me feel young again. This is the center of life, with everything going toward the light."



Example 3:
THE WATERFALL

This painting had this comment:

"I was putting on the colors without thinking, I felt the water coming from a river or from a very high place maybe from the sky. Everything around was blossoming. I thought about my problems while putting on the red color but it looks good here, and I love it."

The first year of my program, they sold all their paintings to the NGO staff, who happily hung them in their homes. The second year, the participants kept them displayed in the center. We don't know what will happen this year.

There was an important message behind the workshop. Every woman who participated was able to prove she has something to offer, that she can confront and be strong, that everything around her can be colored.

I would love to do this with everybody. The whole session is like a meditation of going inside and expressing what's there. Even people without problems should do it.

There's quite a contrast between thinking and feeling. Through their struggles. But with lines and colors, there's nothing to think or talk about. They don't make logical sense. We stand before the painting and we're speechless. That's the goal. Yet we are choosing how we express ourselves; just as when we talk, we choose how to express ourselves. And with both painting, and talking, we can reach the point where we can express ourselves without thinking. That's a happy place which we can reach only when we stop wondering how others see us, and express our inner selves without self-judgment or criticism.

FOCUSING INITIATIVES INTERNATIONAL



Our mission is to provide a resource for communities suffering from the stresses of war, natural disasters, endemic poverty, epidemics, and all forms of violence or social injustice. Focusing Initiatives International recognizes that it is essential to adapt and infuse the life-forward practice of Focusing and other approaches into the local culture.

We work to ensure cultural relevance and to support local leadership through a process of deep listening and learning from members of the community. Then we develop trainings, mentoring, and follow-up measures based on local needs and conditions.

Focusing Initiatives International bases its work on the following:

- An individual's health is directly connected to and impacted by the health of the community
- Solutions to local problems already exist locally
- People can be creative when their culture is honored
- When Focusing is introduced in a culturally appropriate context, it not only helps traumatized people find their way forward, but also promotes resiliency in the community as a whole.

Please visit our website and/or contact us for more information:

- www.focusinginternational.org
- Melinda Darer: melinda@focusinginternational.org
- Patricia Omidian: pat@focusinginternational.org



YOU HOLD THE KEY TO CHANGE!

Reaching Resilience offers an easy-to-use-and-adapt psychosocial health approach called Community Wellness Focusing, based on Dr Pat Omidian's 30 years of engagement with community activists and healers. Each chapter explains a basic principle and gives examples of activities that support inner sensing, group learning, and deep empathic listening.

The book is utterly terrific. Interesting, informative, and very practical. Thank you for the care which you put into this wonderful book. It is a gem!

JOAN KLAGSBRUN

I'm so grateful this book exists. It gives me optimism to read how much people can do on their own, when they are shown how to tap into the resources they already have within themselves.

MARCELLA

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