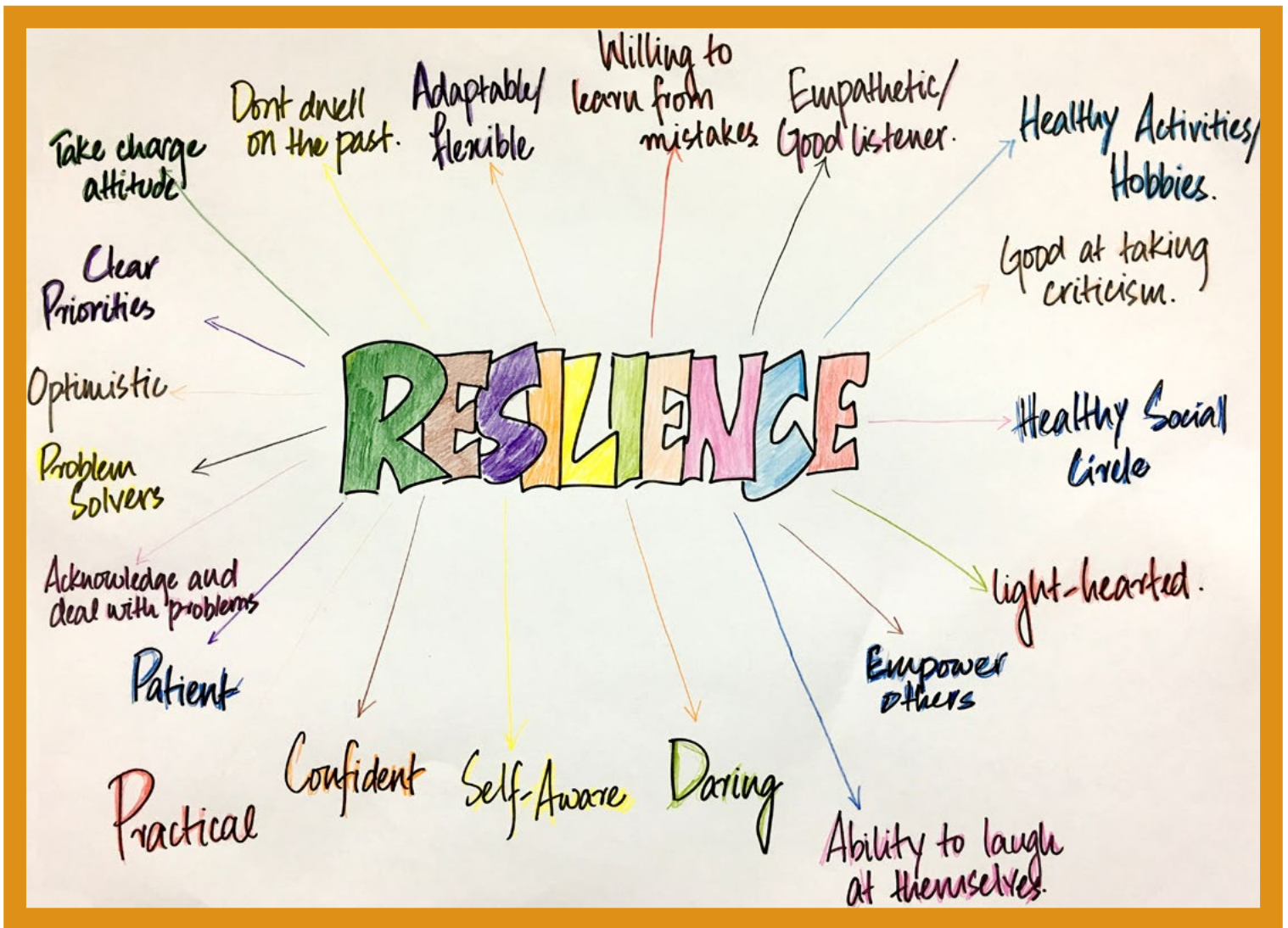


# RESILIENCE INITIATIVES

A JOURNAL OF FOCUSING INITIATIVES INTERNATIONAL



**FOCUSING  
INITIATIVES**  
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**Resilience Initiatives Journal**

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## **ABOUT THIS JOURNAL**

Welcome to our second annual journal, Resilience Initiatives, covering community wellness, resilience and Focusing. The idea for this project emerged as a result of producing our workbook *Reaching Resilience: A Training Manual for Community Wellness Focusing*. When it was published, we realized how many people are doing wonderful, healing work in communities around the world, developing practical, life-transforming activities. We created this journal to provide a forum for them to share those experiences and activities for others to use in their own communities and life situations.

# FROM FOCUSING INITIATIVES' DIRECTORS

Dear Friends,

Many communities and individuals around the world have participated in Focusing Initiatives programs. It's been five years since we started this amazing journey, and it's all been possible because of your support and encouragement.

This last year we have been very busy. Pat started on-line training programs to support the wellness of humanitarian workers in less accessible regions, with more planned. At the first international Wholebody Focusing retreat, dozens of participants co-created the program and built heartfelt connections. And the latest IFOT - Indigenous Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy - training program provided land-based, non-Western approaches to dealing with trauma.

We are excited that the articles in this journal reflect the approaches and values of these and other Community Wellness programs.

With your support we will continue to bring Community Wellness to individuals and communities facing challenges. Many of those that have benefited from this work could not have afforded to participate without outside donations.

Thank you again for your support; this allows us to expand our work.

Warm regards,

***Melinda and Pat***

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# I DON'T SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE, NEVERTHELESS I UNDERSTAND YOU

by

Heidrun Essler



*Heidrun Essler has given trainings since 1989 in various companies for all kinds of employees and management personnel. She also gives consultations at institutions for children. She is a lecturer at the University of Karlsruhe in Nonverbal Communication and Body Language and works as a conflict consultant and coach on a one-on-one basis. She is a Focusing Coordinator, Alba Emoting™ instructor and on the board of the German Focusing Association (DFG). She is a practitioner of Modern Dance and Vocal Art and blends these practices with her work.*

*To learn more about Focusing with children, attend my training "Playful Sensing and Listening for Us and for Kids" in Corvallis, Oregon, August 2-5, 2019.*

*For further information, go to [www.focusinginternational.org/trainings/playful-sensing](http://www.focusinginternational.org/trainings/playful-sensing), or contact Melinda Darer at [melinda@focusinginternational.org](mailto:melinda@focusinginternational.org)*

**L**ife has offered me several opportunities to connect with people without a shared language – and these were not only children. For instance, the other day my friend had a bad accident in which she tumbled down her stairs. She sustained a serious head injury, which put her into a coma for days. When she regained consciousness, she couldn't move or talk; we didn't know whether she could communicate or whether her mind was gone. The hospital staff treated her like an object; they didn't talk to her or tell her what they were going to do with her.

Earlier, I had taken a workshop with Marta Stapert on Focusing with Children. (See her book by the same name.) Now I recalled her strategy, which was

first to get a felt sense to match the child's felt sense. So, as I talked to my friend, I tried to imagine what I would be feeling if I were her. How terrible it would feel not to be able to communicate! Marta taught us to watch closely for any physical response. I noticed that as I talked to her, the fingers of her right hand moved slightly. What could that mean? I sensed into her felt sense and my felt sense gave me the idea, perhaps

she wanted to communicate, maybe she wanted to write something. I asked the hospital staff if anyone had thought to give her paper and pencil. Nobody had, so I rushed around the hospital looking for writing materials.

I tested the hypothesis which I had formed and asked my friend, did she want to write? She took the pencil and, with some difficulty, wrote a whole sentence! It had her brother's name in it; the other words didn't make much sense to us. Even so, it was a major "coming out of the box" for her. We now knew her mind was working, she had language, she could communicate. It opened a door for specialists to work with her so she could regain her speaking. My efforts to have her reach us had been successful.



*my felt sense gave me the idea, perhaps she wanted to communicate, maybe she wanted to write something"*

Another friend who couldn't talk or move due to a stroke had much the same experience. The hospital staff thought he was nuts; they didn't talk to him. His wife hung a large banner over his bed. It said, "Hi, I'm Matthew (name changed), please tell me your name and what you're going to do

with me." This helped the staff become aware that he is a normal human being and it also helped Mathew to connect and communicate.



Here's the protocol for connecting in a bodily way: you make a felt sense to meet the other person's felt sense. You try to feel in your body how s/he feels in the body. You form a hypothesis about it. Then you speak your hypothesis. When you are right, it takes the process further. A mother does this naturally. When her baby cries, a mother speaks her hypothesis: "you are hungry" or "you are tired." It takes only subtle movements to convey a "yes" or a "no."

Of course the responses are usually quite complex. All living creatures have the ability to approach or withdraw, respond or not respond, to accept or reject in a variety of ways, but it is difficult to describe these clues, which are often small reactions of the muscles. We have a clear YES if the child goes to his/her mother because he wants to be in contact. People have a strong body reaction if they smell something they don't like – the body jerks backward. A reaction might last only for a moment. It is possible to observe smaller, more subtle reactions when they are shown on a video in slow motion or when you have become accustomed to seeing them, but they are difficult to describe.

I had an insight-producing experience while attending the 5th international conference Focusing with Children in Romania. During this time we visited a local children's hospital devoted to babies who refused to eat. They just lay there and didn't react to anything or anyone; most of them died. Our hypothesis was that these babies did not want to live because they didn't sense a world out there – at least, not one that responded.

We taught the staff some Focusing. We demonstrated how to look for a baby's small response. For instance, one could apply gentle pressure to the ball of a baby's foot. If the baby presses back, that means s/he reacted to something and connected with the outer world. Most

of the babies did respond. The staff had not known to look for these small responses. We also taught the staff to talk to the babies, telling them the story of their life, as much as they knew. By "feeding" the baby their story they could give the baby a meaningful contact with the outside world.

A year later, one of the Romanian psychologists gave a lecture about Focusing in the hospital and included the story about a baby she was specially looking after who started to eat again and survived.

One time, in an airplane, when a baby was crying, I was pleased to observe the mother explaining the noises and people to the baby, and that it was normal to feel uncomfortable. This soothed the baby.

You can explain the world to a baby, and can actually explain what is happening. They get the message without having to understand the words.

If someone doesn't speak your language, you usually stop explaining and interacting, because you think neither is possible. I have learned it's possible to communicate with adults with little or no language. Some years ago, I had a Focus-

ing partner who understood no German and my English at the time was limited, so we had almost no shared language. I paid very close attention to my felt sense. I might symbolize with the wrong word, but I had to get the right meaning. Then my inside place could shift and move forward. I had been taught all my life how important it was to find the right sentence and the right word, but I learned it wasn't true. In this situation the word was not d

It happens that sometimes I give trainings to people who don't know any German or much English. For example, when teaching Children Focusing in Greece, Chile, or Israel, I pay close attention to my felt sense of their felt sense. I take special notice of those who are not talking, so that in subtle ways, I can engage with them also. Those who are not speaking still need to feel a connection and the wonderful thing is that, because of our capacity to feel felt senses and be aware of our body sensations, we can relate to the other person.

I use the Children Focusing approach in my work with children and adults. It makes Focusing appealing to children, and also to teenagers, business managers, and people with special needs. I make them aware of



*the word was not important. Getting a clear felt sense was the key.*

body language and nonverbal communication plus the wide variety of symbolization in drawing, writing, collage, moving, and making and listening to music.

Some adults have had negative experiences with Focusing. Either they can't express themselves verbally or the verbalization distracts them from their body feelings. The Children Focusing approach helps them sense their inner place without needing words. One Greek lady – a kindergarten teacher and also a musician - was not good at speaking. After my workshop, she sent me a picture and a letter; she told me that now she was feeling differently about Focusing. She had learned she could express her felt sense without speaking. This opened up the whole Focusing field to her. But perhaps this topic awaits another article.

The following activity goes to the heart of what is not language but a bodily-felt sensed connection. The exercise wakes up one's ability to use one's body in relating to others, showing that connecting to others goes well beyond language.

## SENSING A BOUNDARY

**Goal:** To realize in your body a NATURAL REACTION to the other person.

**Time:** 30 minutes or longer

- 1) Participants stand in two rows: row "A" facing row "B"  
 "A" advances toward the opposite person in row "B." This is her/his partner.  
 "A" stops when s/he senses the boundary or energy field of the other person, i.e. when the other person's body says "stop." "B" will react more strongly when her/his partner comes too close, but the reactions are subtle. They will become clearer with a little practice.  
 If you have sensed the boundary, you are already in the space of the other person. Just take a step back so that both bodies can relax and feel safe again.  
 Repeat this exercise at least twice. Invite the participants not to think too much or make rules about the proper distance. Let their body-sense be their guide.
- 2) Row "A" takes a step sideways and faces a different partner, repeating the above exercise two or three times.
- 3) Next, Row "B" has a turn. Person "B" walks towards person "A", and stops when s/he senses the boundary. Repeat at least twice.
- 4) Row "B" then takes a step sideways in order to face a different partner, and the exercise is repeated at least twice more. Be sure each participant experiences that distances and boundaries vary from partner to partner, and with each encounter even with the same person.

### **Activity notes:**

- Experienced Focusers take longer with this exercise because they are used to pausing and differentiating subtle body messages.
- Those who share the same language may use it to check with each other. "Is this right? Did I stop at the right point?" Others can try this "checking conversation" without language.
- Some people will not be able to sense a boundary, either while standing or advancing. This is good to know about oneself. One can help them look for bodily clues, like tension or holding one's breath, or noticing the tension or breath of their partner. Another clue is looking down to demonstrate a line for the partner to stop. Or even a smile when the person gets too close. If someone doesn't sense her/his own boundary, you can – with her/his permission – override it, finally touching her/him, so at least s/he senses the physical boundary of skin.
- Be sure everyone understands that her/his body sense of another person influences all communication, with or without language.
- Those whose job requires them to enter the energy fields of other people – such as nurses or other health professionals – particularly profit from this exercise. Practicing this body-sensing can enhance their respect for the client.
- This awareness is very helpful when dealing with difficult issues or conflicts. If your partner's body leans back when you say something, it's better for you also to lean back and give more space (and air) between your bodies. This is implicitly showing, "I accept you. I accept your boundaries even if I have another opinion and our issue is difficult to approach."



# “I DON’T WAIT FOR DEATH; I SEEK LIFE”

**T**he Palestine Trauma Centre (PTC) recently made a video which features a sixty-year-old mother with cancer (Mrs. T) who lives with her family in the Refugee Beach Camp in western Gaza. This is a camp where hope springs from pain and flowers are born from rock. The video shows how she went from being a broken cancer victim to a woman of strength and hope.

sions, which I facilitated through the Palestine Trauma Centre in 2018. Her progress helped everyone in our group, as she worked through her experiences and became closer to her family. Our great poet, Mahmoud Darwish said, “The beautiful women are the strongest, they lighten the darkness and they don’t burn out.” Here are some excerpts from Mrs. T’s interview as recorded in the PTC video:

Mrs. T attended weekly Focusing Ses-

The most difficult part of my journey was the chemotherapy, when I was forbidden to see anyone for fear of infection. I needed to see my children to tell them how death had entered my mind and how I had lost hope. During that difficult time, I remembered the green branch I used to hold during my Focusing session, which symbolized being flexible and sustainable. I sat with the chemotherapy and imagined being like that green stick. It helped me feel better and stronger. I had coped with war, shelling, fear and siege, how could I let the cancer defeat me?

In the Focusing sessions, the Distancing exercises taught me not to drown myself in sadness. Relaxation exercises made me feel the healing quality of silence. The Drawing Emotions exercise was strange to me at first, but I drew the pain and separation from my children. I felt I was releasing my pain onto the paper. I saw my illness was not all of me; it had affected only part of my body. I saw that my will was stronger than the pain. In the next session I drew the same pain but smaller than before. I hope the day will come when I have nothing to draw.

I used to say I loved my life but I had cancer; now I say I’m a cancer survivor....

I resist the disease and God willing, I will not give up. Now I don’t wait for death,

I seek life.

by  
Ghada Radwan



*Ghada Mahmoud Radwan holds an MA degree in Educational Psychology. Her Master’s thesis is titled “The Effectiveness of a Counseling Program of Focusing Skills in Improving Life Skills among Al Azhar University Students in Gaza” and was supervised by Jerry Conway, Mary Jennings, and Dr. Mohamed Altawil.*

*Ghada is project coordinator and trainer in Focusing skills at the Palestine Trauma Centre. She teaches individuals and groups of all ages using Gendlin’s Focusing theory, which assists them in identifying their inner problems and how they can resolve them. She can be reached at [ghradwan.ptc@gmail.com](mailto:ghradwan.ptc@gmail.com).*



**Ghada Radwan teaching a session with green sticks**

The Palestine Trauma Centre (PTC) sends their programs to schools, community shelters, and hospitals. Our work with cancer patients has been exceptionally rewarding. To see them change their attitude so they don't dwell entirely in sadness, and to give them hope that they are bigger than their disease – these things make us proud.

“  
*I felt I was releasing my pain onto the paper*”

Chronic disease has a high incidence in the Gaza strip, due to the many chemicals in warfare. Also due to that warfare, medicine and equipment are in short supply. The hospital staff feel keenly the suffering going on around them, yet they are often helpless to alleviate pain. They welcomed our visits, which promised their patients some relief.

The nurses were especially grateful for our twelve-week training. They are the ones whose needles deliver the pain of chemo to their patients. They often feel depressed about their role in bringing sadness to so many. The drawing exercise helped them change their self-image and deal positively with their feelings.

What exactly do we do with the doctors, nurses and/or cancer patients?

We always start a session with guided relaxation. We gently guide the participants to become aware of their bodies, to feel warm and safe, to have trust in God. The most important thing we do next is to have them draw their body on a piece of paper. Then they use colors to draw their body's feelings. Cancer patients draw the painful process of chemo or the sad separation from their family. It helps them to place these problems out-

side of themselves and see that their disease is only one part of their larger self. Drawing gives them a certain distance; it stops them from criticizing themselves or feeling helpless.

After drawing, we listen to those who wish to show how the process went for them. One sub-activity that works well is to have those who have already gone through some of our sessions become listeners for those who are just beginning. Patients who have learned to overcome some of

“  
*Patients who have learned to overcome some of their feelings are highly motivational for newer patients*”

their feelings are highly motivational for newer patients. Experienced patients like Mrs. T understand cancer, because they have it. Yet they are living proof of success because their attitude has changed.

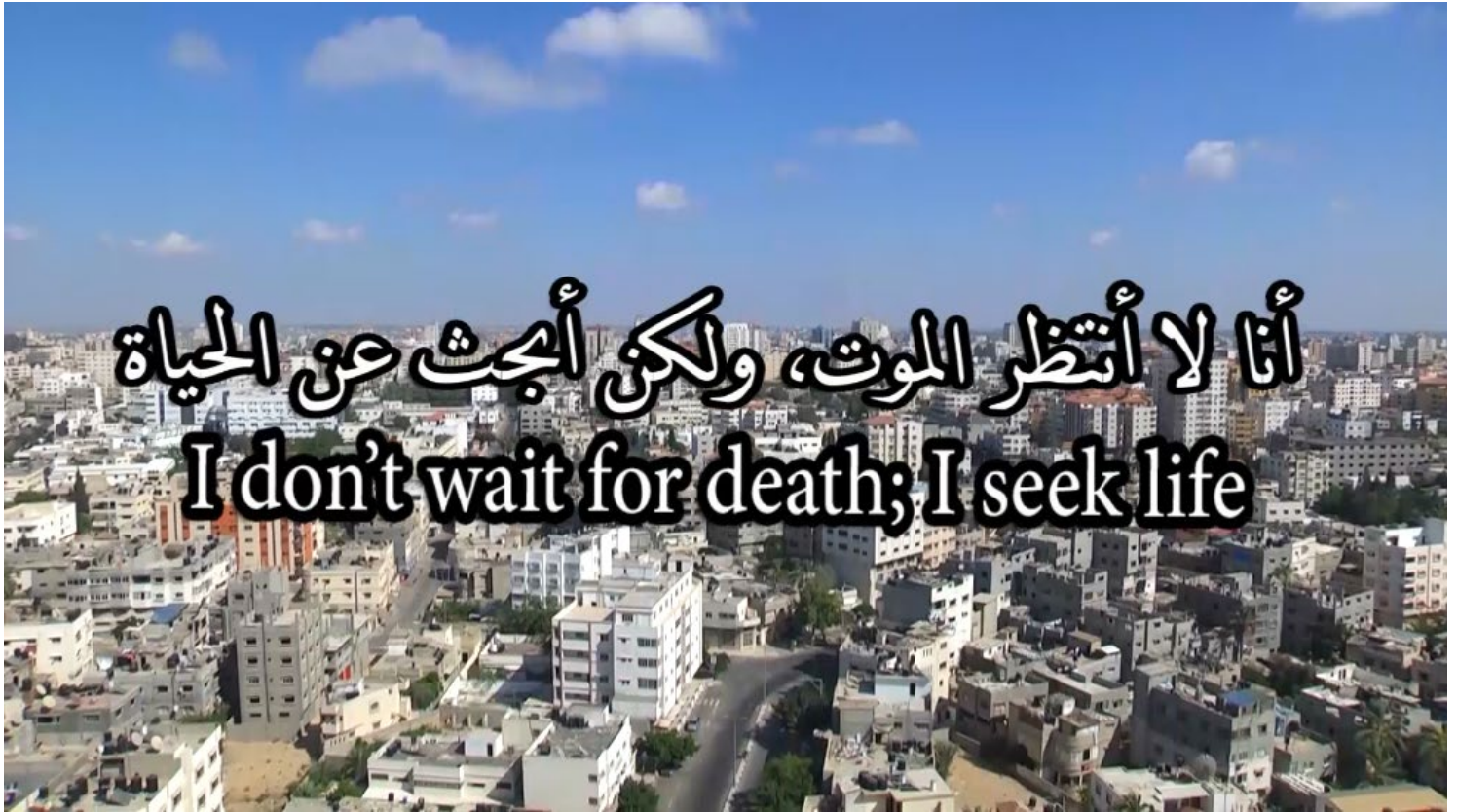
Listening to others is also therapeutic for the listeners. It takes them away from their problems, and forms a foundation for their sense of usefulness and worth. It helps form a we-ness in the midst of individual pain, a community of sharing and caring.

It is gratifying to watch the patients change from feeling hopeless and victimized, to feeling that their disease can be resisted, maybe even defeated. They gain the strength to get well. Focusing inside and listening to themselves and others helps them deal with their experiences in a positive way. One patient

expressed her new attitude by saying, “I am not a victim, I am a survivor.” Such of course could be the motto for many living on the Gaza strip. They learn to echo Mrs. T: “I don't wait for death; I seek life.”

## Positive results of working with Mrs. T:

- In the Focusing sessions, Mrs. T recalled the feelings of pain from the continuous abuse of chemo. She said, “When I touched the green branch, I was touched by another image of my self -- of being strong and brave. The green branch was the mirror of my strength.”
- The Focusing sessions helped Mrs. T overcome the stigma of being a cancer patient. She compensated by being proud of herself and her accomplishments.
- She discovered new skills and techniques that could alleviate the intensity of her psychological distress through distancing, communicating negative feelings, partitioning off negative feelings, and drawing.
- Through listening to others’ experiences, Mrs. T made new friendships.
- Sharing these skills with her family helped create a better atmosphere at home. Spare time was replaced with activities that increased their feeling of closeness.
- Mrs. T played the role of facilitator with a friend and fellow cancer survivor, causing her to review her skills periodically.
- At the end of the sessions, Mrs. T expressed many thanks. She wished the services of the Palestine Trauma Centre could reach all families to strengthen their psychosocial resilience and promote community wellness. She was given the Centre’s contact numbers in case she needed any further assistance.



**Gaza Focusing Film called “I Don’t Wait for Death; I Seek Life,” Feb. 2019  
Implemented by Palestine Trauma Centre (Gaza) [www.ptcgaza.com](http://www.ptcgaza.com)**

**View video either at:**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGiEvoBgmPY&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGiEvoBgmPY&feature=youtu.be)

**or**

[www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=7&v=TGiEvoBgmPY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=TGiEvoBgmPY)



## DRAWING EMOTIONS IN YOUR BODY

**Time:** One hour

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

Have the participants be seated in a space where they can be comfortable, and which also provides a hard surface on which to draw. Invite them to breathe deeply and close their eyes if they wish. Then lead them into about ten minutes of guided relaxation, gradually slowing the pace and lowering your voice as they become more relaxed.

Invite them to return their attention to the room and open their eyes. Have a few participants share how the exercise went for them, if they wish to do so.

Talk about how and where we carry the feeling of pain in our bodies, both the physical pain from the disease and the emotional pain from sad events in our lives. Ask them if they can sense where in their bodies their pain is located. Show them an example of a simple drawing with an outline of the body with the places of pain indicated with some colors and/or shapes, and ask them to draw or add others corresponding to their feelings. Instruct them that each drawing will look different, because they are to draw from their own inner sense.

Allow time for this process. When most participants have finished drawing, invite them to share how the drawing went for them. Listen in a Focusing way, reflecting their words and more especially their feelings. You want to slow down the process for them so they have plenty of time to sense inwardly. In future sessions, once they become more experienced in this process, they can listen to each other.



*The drawing begins with an outline of the body.*

# THE STORY OF CHARITY NAMUTOSI: EXPLORING EMOTIONS

*Uganda is currently home to the largest refugee population in Africa, sheltering more than one million refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, and other countries in the region. Despite the country's own economic challenges, especially in resource-poor areas where refugees often settle, Uganda remains committed to its progressive refugee policies, giving the displaced access to the same schools, healthcare, and employment opportunities as native Ugandans.*

-- Relief International

In West Nile-Uganda, I see rows and rows of grey tents and blue United Nations tarpaulins in the settlement of Palorinya, whose population is 270,000+ refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These "persons of concern" have come to Uganda to escape the turmoil in their own countries. I work for UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as a Project Manager / Senior Protection Assistant for children and youth.

I myself was internally displaced from Far Eastern Uganda in a district called 'Amuria'- as a result of the Lord's Resistance War. At age 10, I fled for my life with the rest of my family members. In Lira, we became beneficiaries of a non-profit (War Child Holland). So later I earned a degree in that field.

Recently I took a webinar and then

some online Focusing training sessions with Dr. Pat Omidian. Prior to that time, I had difficulty controlling my anger. She gave me the power to rediscover my own worth. I learned to use better ways to deal with conflict by focusing and sharing with trusted people in my life.

For example, although I hate to admit this, once when my boss harassed me, I took a glass and threw it on the floor. It shattered before him and I walked out. Pat said, "Let's take a moment to see how you felt. You are responsible for what you do, but you also have the power to discover why you act in a certain way." She taught me how to stop and discuss with myself, before I decide what to say.

I started picturing how beautiful this could be. The normal life-skill classes I was teaching didn't deal with trauma,

and refugees often couldn't learn those skills because they first needed

by

Ocen Daniel Osako



*Ocen Daniel Osako is 25 years old. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Development Studies from Gulu University, Uganda (studying Rural Development and Non-Governmental Organizations) and a certificate in PSS and Early Childhood Development. He has worked for Feed the Children (2014-2016). War Child Holland (2017-2018) and the UNHCR (2018). He currently works for War Child Holland as a psychosocial support/life skills development lead for refugee communities from the South Sudan. After his daily activities, he holds Focusing sessions for adult participants.*

*the power to rediscover my own worth*

to heal and to have their minds settled. Now I had a way to help them with one of the most important things they had to deal with. Learning Focusing made me feel differently about what was going on around me. No longer could I sit back and just do my job – I had to reach out.

For this reason I am propelled to tell the story of Charity Namutosi. Charity was a 9-year-old South Sudanese girl who sought asylum in Uganda as a result of her country's civil war. She lost everything including her mother and was staying with her stepmother (her father's common-law wife). Charity was one of the participants in my group called "Super Star."

She was a quiet introverted girl who didn't laugh or play with the others.

My eight sessions were starting well. Talking about emotions was one of the topics; we discussed how people express different feelings. I integrated Focusing into it. I asked the participants to think of their Calm Place and to treat unwanted inner guests politely, but ask them not to interfere with their personal life. While taking a look at the different drawings, I noticed Charity had drawn an elephant stepping on a woman's head. I thought this was unusual so I asked her about it. She told me she didn't like her stepmother and would be happy if an elephant stepped on her and she died. She also told me that her Calm Place was back in South Sudan where she used to roll the bicycle wheel with her friends and she was happy and her mum would send them to the market and they went fast, rolling their wheels.

After the session I asked her more questions. She was able to relay her emotional distress through Focusing. She told me she is not happy because every day she has to go back to her house. Upon my probing, she told me her neck was sore because her stepmother made her carry 20 litre cans of water on her head (weighing 20 kilos or 44 pounds); she showed me the scars on her shoulders. When she was punished, she often went without food. At this point I realized Charity was being

psychologically and physically abused at her home. With this background I was in a position to involve UNHCR and the Lutheran World Federation to intervene in helping the young girl.

Meanwhile, my class participants showed a wide range of emotions, including crying, sorrow, happiness, surprise and grief during our Focusing sessions. (See Activity below.) The beauty is that many of them acknowledged they

could now forgive or reconcile with their offenders and the people they offended, due to learning self-care and gaining the ability to handle a wide range of emotions.

*She was able to relay her emotional distress through Focusing.*

For instance, in one of my groups, a school-aged girl accused another of lying. When I talked to them after class, the other girl confessed she had lied by telling the teacher her friend had stolen her book. Her friend was beaten by the teacher with a stick (a common punishment in schools here). The first girl admitted she had lost the book but didn't want to get beaten herself. Now the second girl was in a position to forgive, and she did. They hugged. The guilty girl said, "Maybe now the others will play with me. I guess they all knew I lied." I heard later that the two girls started working together on school work and helping each other with chores at home. Other children saw the reconciliation and learned from the event.

I also had the occasion to teach Focusing to some parents in my free time and I received many positive testimonies. They tell me there has been improved communication in the family. They see that giving a beating is not the best way to teach children; talking to them is better. One mother said she started managing her time, cooking earlier, and avoiding unnecessary household arguments. Her husband wondered why she was so nice to him. He made the children eat their food first to make sure his wife was not planning to poison him! Another parent began to make sure his children attended school. School is not compulsory, and also costs money.



## EXPLORING EMOTIONS

**Time:** One hour

**Setup:** Paper and pencil or pen for each participant

**Note:** This is based on Dr. Pat Omidian's Manual Addressing Afghan Children's Psychosocial Needs in the Classroom Workshop One. I blended it with other activities to make it livelier.

Please see [www.healingclassrooms.org/downloads/Addressing\\_Afg\\_Childrens\\_Psychosocial\\_Needs.pdf](http://www.healingclassrooms.org/downloads/Addressing_Afg_Childrens_Psychosocial_Needs.pdf)

A) Showing Cards: I created 10 different cards with "emo's" on them i.e. faces expressing different emotions such as crying, sorrow, shyness, surprise, worry, anger, happiness, disgust, excitement, and fear. We talked about each card.

B) Follow the Leader Game: The children stood. As the leader acted out an emotion, the others copied him.

C) Discussion: The children sat in a circle. I asked them questions: "Have you ever felt this emotion?" "When do you feel it?" "How long do you feel it for?" etc. I took time to hear from every child who wanted to speak.

D) Drawing: I asked the children to draw two pictures, one showing what makes them happy, and another showing what makes them sad. I explained we can help each other, as a team, to deal with our emotions.

# A LABOR OF LOVE: SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND IFOT

with  
Isabel Adon



*Isabel Adon, LCSW, is an Indigenous Focusing-oriented Therapist and Trainer. She has over 25 years of experience in the mental health field and presently works with children and families in an outpatient psychiatric setting in the Bronx. Isabel was a volunteer rape crisis and domestic violence advocate for more than eleven years, responding to crises at six different NYC emergency rooms as a volunteer for the Mount Sinai SAVI program. She has extensive training in diversity work and for over 15 years has been a practitioner of Vipassana and Ascension meditation. Isabel serves on the board of directors of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, MA and also manages an annual LGBTIQ retreat. She has a private psychotherapy practice in Midtown Manhattan and is a certified Focusing Therapist.*

**W**hen I sat down for an interview with Isabel -- via computer technology of course -- I was struck by two things: her calm, quiet manner and her warm, welcoming smile – Dionis Griffin.

*Tell me (I asked), how did you get involved in Social Activism?*

Back in the '80's, many NYC landlords essentially abandoned numerous buildings in the Bronx. So, the, NYC Housing Preservation and Development introduced a scheme called "Temporary Leasing," which offered building shares for sale to the tenants. In 1986 all 23 families "purchased" our five-story building for \$250 per unit, the primal offer by the city to the then tenants. The city would repair boilers and windows, but that was it. We were left without any support or guidance to manage the building. This practice, we came to understand, was a set-up for failure and a systemic way of continuing to oppress and minimize access to homeownership.

I have lived in this building since immigrating to the USA from the Dominican Republic in 1978. Many of the shareholders have lived here longer. So it came as a shock when we received a notice that, as of September 2018, the building had been sold to a developer.

We knew we owed some taxes and the water bill, but we had agreed to pay in installments. We had kept the building in good shape. Why had it been sold?

It turned out our building had been placed in foreclosure. Now many of the building's shareholders were Spanish

speaking and unable to navigate the system, so it became clear that there was a need for someone bilingual to take the leadership role. The shareholders unanimously elected me to be the Board President, and I was thrust into a field that was totally new to me: social activism in relation to housing.

The deed for the building was transferred as of Sept 5, 2018, so we were now going to be renters instead of owners and if the new owner chose to do so, we could be transferred to another building and no telling where. The shareholders were devastated. Some were crying, others wondered what to do. We knew a developer would come in, do major renovation, and receive \$90,000 per unit in incentives, plus add an increase in maintenance of up to 30-35%, which most would not be able to afford. We felt discriminated against as a community of color, since this was happening across the city to blacks, brown, Latinos and low-income populations. But we were not powerless.

Because of my IFOT training (Indigenous Focusing-oriented Therapy), I had some tools that helped me take on the task of organizing. We held a meeting and decided to go in person to the Palante Harlem for additional support. There we learned that over 100 buildings were involved in the same



*I was thrust into a field that was totally new to me: social activism in relation to housing*

situation. It was suggested that we canvass the other buildings to see about forming a coalition.

*How did IFOT empower you to take on the task? (As I looked around the walls of her apartment I could see that the task was huge. From floor-to-ceiling there were stacks of indexed black*

boxes.)

I was able to help our group stay calm, to acknowledge -- and then put aside -- angry or fearful feelings, and to focus on what needed to be done. IFOT gave me the tools to put some space between ourselves and the problem, to be next to it but not in it. I showed them how to keep the problem company without being overwhelmed. Giving the problem some distance gave our meetings a different tone. Animosity was less; connectedness, more.

*How did you become acquainted with IFOT, or Indigenous Focusing-oriented Therapy?*

Five days after I received my Master's Degree in 2008, my mother passed away. A friend suggested I attend a weekend workshop on grief, and the classes helped a lot. As it happened, the originator of the series, Shirley Turcotte, decided to give her complete six-workshop course in NYC the following year, so I signed up for that too. By the way, these courses are sponsored by FII (Focusing Initiatives International).

IFOT impressed me in many ways. First, I learned that setting things aside doesn't mean you don't care. That felt incredibly freeing.

Also important, my efforts to heal myself weren't just for me. They were for others as well – my descendants, my ancestors, and my community. There was a collectiveness to it. Next, with Shirley Turcotte, who is Métis

from Canada, we were free to talk about spirits of all kinds – those that had gone before, spirits around us, this was clinical spirituality. The subject had been taboo in my university psychology courses, but they weren't taboo here. Finally, I learned it's instructive to ask if there's more. Because there's always more.

*What's your current involvement with IFOT?*

I use it both in my life and in psychotherapy with my clients. I now teach one of the weekend modules, the one about suicide. Difficult issues are not side-



**Tenants in front of their building, on their way to court;**

**Isabel, front center**

stepped in IFOT, they are dealt with in a straightforward way; we don't turn away from trauma but rather face it. This module is my favorite because I have experienced the suicide of a relative. When I teach it, I have the participants reflect back on moments when life overwhelmed them and they had thoughts of ending it. I teach them how to deal with those difficult moments in themselves

and also how to keep someone else company in their difficult moments. I ask, what would you miss if you weren't here anymore? I want to bring this subject out of darkness and away from shame. I want to create a shift in attitude.

I also teach IFOT in Duluth where there is a large Native American population. We will soon be starting another series in Toronto. IFOT should be everywhere.

*So – you were able to use IFOT principles with your building coalition?*

I used it to teach them that it wasn't just about "I'm going to lose my apartment." It was "We can't stand by and let the city oppress low-income people." The past-present-future connection was a big deal. We needed to stand up, not just for ourselves, but for those who went before and for those who would come

after. We wanted the extended community to become aware of the problem, for the sake of communities that are under-represented everywhere.

Our most important meeting was to decide whether or not to retain a law firm against the City of New York for litigation. The meeting turned out beautifully. First we took the time to Clear a Space. We put our other concerns aside. Next, I asked them all to sense into their vision of what they wanted for their building. I asked them to get a felt-sense (I used this Focusing term) of what they wanted to happen, their own sense regardless of what other people might say. I asked them to write it down. Then we went around the room and everyone shared their vision. Only after that process, did we vote on whether to hire a pricey lawyer. The voting was unanimous; everyone was in favor. It felt as though it would be worth it, because even if we lost, it was a labor of love.

*What happened after that?*

We had quite a bit of support from some elected officials who wrote letters to the Mayor on our behalf. We had proclamations congratulating us for our efforts. Our court day was January 14, 2019. The guard looked at us strangely as our group filed into the courtroom and began doing breathing exercises. After the hearing, the judge and lawyers adjourned to discuss, so we left, feeling OK with the proceedings. Now we're just waiting to hear the decision.

“  
*I asked them all to sense into their vision of what they wanted for their building*”

## CLEARING A SPACE BEFORE A MEETING

- 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

Ask everyone to take a moment and breathe deeply. Let them sense how they feel in their bodies. (One or two minutes)

Ask if they were a tree, what kind of tree will they be? (It could be any other element like a body of water or a wind). This is helpful in identifying what state of mind the group is in and if anyone is in distress. (One or two minutes) Have them share.

Ask them to become aware of any concerns that might be in the way of their being there, any worries or stressors from their day. Are they worried about anything? Did something good happen? Something not so good? What's it like for them in this moment? (Two minutes) This is an internal process so no answers need be verbalized.

Then suggest they gently put these concerns aside so they can give their full attention to the matter at hand. Give them time to do this, suggesting that they can return to these concerns later, perhaps at the end of the meeting. (Two minutes)

Finally, tell them you would like everyone to share something about what came for them. This sharing will help them set these concerns aside even more and be more present in the group. Say, "I'll start." to model the sharing. If the group is very large, you might limit their sharing to one sentence, or even one word. If the group is meeting for the first time, you may let everyone introduce themselves before they share. (Twenty minutes)

The men who attend often take back seats, and the women sit in front. But everyone is encouraged to participate. As leader, your job is to create a container where it's OK to talk, OK to put your concerns out there. Sometimes someone will come to you later and share a concern which they hadn't wanted to present to the group. If the group is ongoing, encourage them to bring it back to everyone at the next meeting. Tell them they will be pleasantly surprised at the understanding and sympathy of the group. Explain that they will be contributing to the feeling of group unity.



# WELLNESS CIRCLES: DEEPENING THE TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM

I remember clearly how struck I was one day by the miracle of felt-sensing and felt-listening in community. I sat in a room with 14 people in a Recovery group, all in different stages of recovery from substance abuse. The miracle is that they each “went inside” and found their own meaningful felt sense; they each shared what they found; and they listened respectfully to each other. This was recovery in practice: shifting from disconnection to relatedness.

When we share inner experiencing in a group, every person listens with curiosity because it is coming from that felt, vulnerable, and real meaningful space. Over and over again, I am awed by the inevitable bonding and sense of shared “grace” that occurs – and the sense of ‘wellness.’ The ‘wellness’ aspect seems to be exponentially increased when experienced together.

Being ‘un-well’ usually implies some kind of isolation and separation. Trauma, sickness, addiction, etc., all have this “alone and shutdown or shut-in” kind of quality. Wellness implies a certain openness and connection – a relatedness – an interaction with all that is within, as well as an interaction with another person.

Healing makes its own circle. Personal

healing happens within and because of the community setting. As the community heals, the individual heals. As more individuals heal, the community heals further. Eventually, both the community and the individual come to understand that community wellness is essential to individual wellness and vice versa.

The group work that I do is a cross between the Twelve-Step Recovery Program and Focusing Changes groups. As Gene Gendlin said, “By crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before.” As you enable communities to do felt sensing and felt listening, they experience the power of a Wellness Circle.

Felt sensing enlivens the Twelve-Step program – it enlivens any group. It is a natural process they already know. I simply re-

mind them to pause so that their natural wisdom can emerge and come into ‘Focus.’ Then I tell them the practice of waiting for a bodily-felt awareness of something, is called ‘Focusing’.

I am myself a Twelve-Stepper. I learned Focusing two years after coming into recovery, taking all the courses with which to certify, and I saw how Focusing can deepen and accelerate healing. When I got a job as a bilingual counselor at Costa Rica Recovery Center, over the years working there, I developed my H.O.W. We Heal model for Recovery

by

Suzanne Noel



*Suzanne Noel came to Costa Rica in 1985 with the Peace Corps and never left. She began practicing Focusing in 2000, Certified as a Trainer in 2003, and has been a Certifying Focusing Coordinator since 2012. She has presented my H.O.W. We Heal model and Recovery Focusing in several Internationals and four Advanced Focusing Weeklongs. “My present passion is riding my motorcycle all over this beautiful country and having a full body sense of awe and wonder. Not to mention fun!”*

Focusing. Recovery Focusing has since expanded to a second Recovery Center in Costa Rica. I now train addiction counselors and others internationally on H.O.W. To Facilitate Recovery Focusing groups. However, the H.O.W. model can be applied to any group process, and I use it in my workshops and several of my courses.

As a group facilitator, I find it essential to focus regularly myself, in order to maintain a sense of grounded serenity and well-being. I expand my own Focusing development by experiencing Focusing exchanges elsewhere. I want to be able to carry a calm and calming energy to the group so that I can convey the message of healing by living it. This is particularly important when working with challenging issues like drug abuse, domestic violence, or sexual abuse, or dealing with certain populations that touch me on a deep level.

The **H.O.W. We Heal** model can be summarized as follows:

1. Peaceful Lead In.
2. Inspirational reading.
3. **H**/onoring our aliveness with a positive starting felt experience.
4. **O**pening our stuck/blocked energy, particularly by using shift questions.
5. **W**elcoming our sense of hope and possibility by sensing into the best of what can be.
6. Closing with one word or phrase that captures the whole group experience.

Some of the ways that **H.O.W. We Heal** deepens the 12-Step process:

- Based on a process, called Focusing, participants find their inner rightness and aliveness. I don't teach Focusing, we just do it.
- My guiding is very spacious, meaning I invite people to welcome anything that emerges from inside, be it a word or a phrase, an emotional feeling tone, a memory, an image, or a body sensation. I don't mention the body right away. This allows for many levels of experiencing.
- I am Focusing and listening right alongside of everyone.
- The participants learn to offer

reflective listening to each other. This creates a positive sense of meaningful belonging.

- I am not on any kind of stage or platform. We are all together as peers, sitting in a circle, participating in our own and each other's healing process. How safe it is to be among peers!

Millions of people across the planet are on a Twelve-Step pathway and are part of a worldwide fellowship. Twelve Steppers work recovery on three different levels: alone, with sponsorship, and with meetings. Sustaining and improving these three connections are the key to recovery. I have no doubt that bringing the felt dimension into Recovery would make it all the more meaningful and life-changing. Hopefully, the two will continue to cross little by little and eventually there may be functioning Recovery-Oriented Changes Groups or Focusing-Oriented Twelve-Step Groups.

Twelve-Step Circles have guidelines and traditions. These have made them workable everywhere, in diverse communities, religious or not, for over 150 different dysfunctional processes (or what we might call 'skipped/stopped process'). Wellness Circles using the H.O.W. We Heal program can also work with any dysfunctional process, especially if they could adopt some of these traditions for being in groups (See, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1952). Wellness Circles give each member a rewarding connection to their inner self as well as each other.

The most important and perhaps unique part of H.O.W. We Heal is the Welcom-

ing stage. After exploring 'the worst of' an addictive process, we compare it with 'the best of Recovery.' This compare and contrast approach allows us to clearly see our basic choice: to return to

the sunken flat powerlessness of addiction or enjoy the empowered aliveness of Recovery. Experiencing the possible 'best of' our healing, allows our body to have a felt hope of Recovery, an inner manifestation of all that could be. It acts as a light toward which we are moving, a

light which we can actually experience now.

Below are some voices of clients who have done Recovery Focusing in the Costa Rica Recovery Center, San Jose, Costa Rica. I invite participants to write down what comes to them. Writing helps them share their experiences later, and also prepares them for continuing the process on their own. Reading what they have written is like hearing their words reflected.

**Step One of the Twelve-Step Program: "We admitted we were powerless over [our addiction] and that our lives had become unmanageable."**

(Alcoholic Anonymous: The Big Book)

**Focusing Instruction: What comes from inside about powerlessness and unmanageability?**

**P** (Alcoholic): I see my brain, all the veins filled with blood. It is turning into to something white, and then something comes, a connection between my brain and my heart -- a back and forth connection between them. (She stays with it) Now, I feel a lump in my throat. A lump caused by alcohol. (And an insight comes.) I can see that alcohol is break-



*participants learn to offer reflective listening to each other. This creates a positive sense of meaningful belonging*



*We are all together as peers, sitting in a circle, participating in our own and each other's healing process*



ing my heart-brain connection.

**M** (Cocaine addict): I see a lot of things broken up, like incomplete. I feel like an empty sack. An empty sack and without sanity.

**M 2** (Crack cocaine addict): I see myself sleeping under a bridge. I feel disgust, nausea right here in my belly. This needs 'Love.'

**L**: The word that comes from inside is 'Remorse.' I want to take everything out of myself that has damaged everything and everyone. (He makes a stabbing motion into his heart and says :) It hurts my heart to think about what it was like.

**E**: I feel like I have sand all over me, everywhere, and like I want to clean myself off, wipe this sand off, but I can't. (He makes motions as if wiping off sand.)

*Here, we see how the clients experience the 'worst' of their addiction. They have gotten in touch with a new sense of it and expressed this. Because the sharing is so heart-felt, the whole group listens quietly and intently. Gene Gendlin*

*has written, "Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness." (www.focusing.org)*

Focusing Instruction: What comes from inside about "Sobriety":

**M**: I get an image of a family picture, everyone is smiling. The words that come with this picture are 'Collective Harmony' where everyone is happy. (He sits up, looks proud.)

**M 2**: I see an explosion of light. I see myself wearing a white suit. The word that comes is 'metamorphosis.' Everything inside and out is white. (He stays with this.) Now what is coming is 'Hello.' (And he smiles.). 'Hello.' (He continues smiling.)

**L**: Sobriety to me means to feel good. It means feeling good, standing up tall, and being well loved. (His entire body posture changes as he sits up and confidently states this.)

**E**. I get the word: 'Freedom.' I see myself going to the top of a mountain which has

handrails. There is wind and I like the scenery. I feel free.

**P**: I see a road, and some cars are moving along fine, moving forward, while other cars are stuck on the side of the road, disabled. I see myself as no longer disabled. I am now running smoothly down the road.

These clients now have felt the experience of sobriety. They have taken their addiction inside and felt its powerlessness, and then have shifted into a sense of what sobriety could be like now. Their mood has changed. They have new hope.

Here I offer you the first stage of the **H.O.W. We Heal** model, since space does not permit me to include the whole program. I hesitated about which stage to include: the last, Welcoming stage is the most important, but it has to come after the process of Opening. So I give you the first stage, Honoring, since it's applicable to any group. You may receive the entire 14-page program free by contacting me.

## **HEART AND SOUL**

*Suzanne Noel*

*In the center of our togetherness  
I have loved you  
Round moon*

*I hear you  
where faces face faces*

*I hear your soul  
Round Earth  
as we speak each other's names  
in the circle of our togetherness*

*Speak to us  
of the surroundingness  
that rims us with prisms  
of each other  
Round Sun*

*Let us pause  
to listen,  
to speak  
from the heart  
of our togetherness.*

## HONORING OURSELVES AND OUR ALIVENESS NOW

**Time:** 20-30 minutes depending on the size of the group.

**Materials:** Chairs in a circle, writing materials.

The “H” in *H.O.W. We Heal* is for Honoring. You want to start the group process with a positive felt-sensing experience. The facilitator chooses something about which the group can feel positive. It is best to have a wide variety of things. Here are some of the things I use to start our process:

- Gratitude list
- Self Empathy
- A Happy Memory
- Four qualities we like about ourselves
- Inspirational aspect of the reading
- Something we did right last week
- Finding an inner Safe Space
- Experiencing our Higher Power
- Counting days, weeks or months in Recovery
- Sensing all that is supporting our healing.
- Something (not a person or pet) we love.

Certain groups may want to honor certain things; for example, if it’s an environmental group, you can ask people to feel into what Planet Earth means to them; if it’s a spiritual group, ask how they experience self-compassion, or what they have done this week that is congruent with their values.

Self Empathy is particularly helpful to people who are recovering or healing. To invite the group to honor Self Empathy, you may guide as follows:

Take some time to sense into your life context now (or into your work, healing, recovery, relationship, etc.).... Ask yourself, “How do I need to be with myself right now? Do I need to be kind, loving, or friendly or forgiving, patient.... supportive, encouraging or compassionate?.... (Include any self empathy words that you choose.)

Just take some time finding the right way to be with yourself... When something comes, please write this down.... Allow yourself to bring this inside. Hold it and wait... You may get an image, gesture, feeling tone or body sensation, as your experience of self empathy.... Write this down....

Notice how you are feeling in your body now. Take your time.... What is the feel of this inside you...? Please write this down.... Come back to the group when you are ready.

Felt Sensing is always fresh and new. Don’t be afraid to repeat the same topic in several meetings, because new meaning and experiencing will always emerge. For example, if you often start with the Gratitude List, the feel of gratitude will be unique and new each time.

**Recommendation:** As an occasional change, invite the whole group meeting time to be positive. Find some reading or news which represents what the group is moving towards, such as “The Serenity Prayer.” Break it down into its essentials (such as serenity, courage, wisdom) and do a round of positive Focusing on each one. The energy in the group will be intoxicating!

After each Focusing session, go around the circle and let each person share what came for them. They may choose to say, “I pass.” They may choose to say only one word. Or they may choose to speak for three to five minutes. The facilitator reflects what is said.

Conclusion: In one Recovery Focusing meeting, several people experienced the felt sense of the words “Spiritual Awakening” in their chests. One man said it was as if his chest was opening and receiving wisdom. He made the motion of “everything coming into” his chest. He said he felt this energy flow throughout his whole body, in his veins. He said it gave him a sense of “feeling more wise” and of continued hope. And didn’t we all get a sense of this wisdom and hope as well, as we listened to him? Yes, we did. We experienced a sense of well-being and a sense of being together in that well-being, which made it all the more meaningful for all of us. This is the power of Wellness Circles and the H.O.W. We Heal Model: we all gain a deep, embodied sense of mental, physical, and spiritual well-being...together. We are no longer alone with our wounding, but part of a greater unfolding of healing.

# USING DIAGRAMS TO SHOW UNSEEN RELATIONSHIPS

by

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 Darrer 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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I frequently use diagrams in teaching and fieldwork as a way to represent social relationships and institutional impact. When I use them as a teaching aid, I find students discover new ways of thinking about group dynamics. In Community Wellness projects, diagrams can help groups understand possible avenues to positive interventions and/or social support. They are quite effective in quickly identifying unseen relationships.

The image below is typical. Created by a group of women in Western Pakistan, the blue circle (IDP) stands for “Internally Displaced People” – in this case, Pakistanis who had to flee their homes because of fighting along the border with Afghanistan (related to the fight against terrorism). With the help of local NGO’s (Non-Government Organizations), these families were moved to areas of safety. The rest of the circles in the diagram represent how important some agency, person, place or thing is to the IDP.

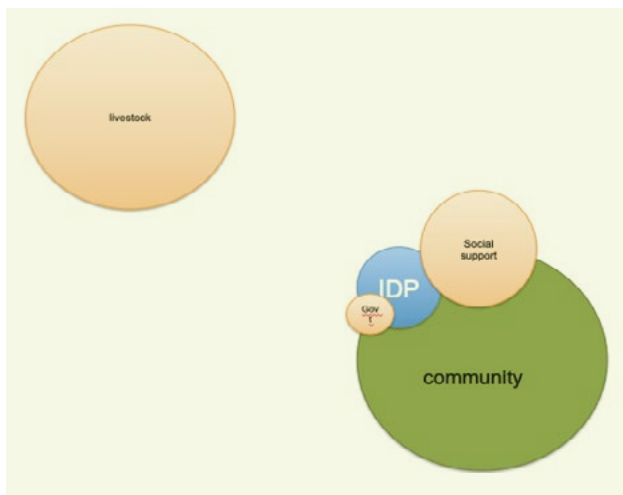
For example, people in the IDP group said their community (green circle) was most important to their personal well-being. The next most important was their livestock (tan circle). The large size of these two circles indicates their importance. Members of government service sectors who were in close contact with the IDPs (hence the close proximity

of that circle) were not perceived as of equal importance to Community or to Social Support, so its circle is the smallest.

This chart makes it clear that, while the IDP’s have access to their community, social support, and government agencies (the circles close to the IDP), they do not have access to their livestock (the circle at a distance). In Western Pakistan’s rural areas, livestock is cared for and often owned by women. Their animals are a powerful symbol of their position in society. To be forced to leave the livestock behind when they fled to safety, meant the women had to abandon both their status and their wealth. This puts them at added risk for psychosocial distress.

Programs that focus only on housing or food miss something very important to a woman’s perception of well-being.

It happened later that a woman veterinarian attended one of my Community Wellness Trainings. The government deploys women veterinarians to work in those areas where the women manage the livestock. Both the villages of origin and the IDP camps are suspicious of outsiders, but women vets are trusted and can move freely in and out of the villages where the animals are kept. This particular woman vet was excited to learn that she could help the women in more ways than just check-



ing their livestock. She added CWF to her program and found that women welcomed her short lessons on ways of supporting emotional and psychological wellness. For instance, she taught about The Calm Place and the Balance

of Blessings. (A CWF manual in Pashto language was created in 2015.

In another example, my class of psychology students in Karachi created a diagram showing the social and institutional relationships for a hypothetical single

mother. (Note that the same principles apply to an individual as to a group.) It gives a visual image of the various sectors that impact a single mother as she struggles to support her child, hold a job and deal with life in general.



- The Pink Circle in the middle of the cluster represents the Target Group -- a Single Mother
- Large Purple = Community
- Green = Home, Family, and (far right) Financial Security
- Mustard = Parents' Home; "single mother" defined on its right as 1) Teenagers, 2) Widows, and 3) Divorcées; (the two farther to the right) Banks, Day-Care
- Blue = Children, Education, Salary, Government, Child Protection, Lawyer

*Note: the color of the circle is chosen at random and has no symbolic meaning*

After the diagram was completed, stars were placed on the three most important circles: Financial Security, Child Protection and Day Care. The psychology students then discussed these three issues and decided they could make the biggest impact in the shortest time by working, not with the mother as they had first supposed, but with Day Care. If Day Care failed, they reasoned, the mother could not work. The students felt they could work with Day Care institutions to

give them a better understanding of the psychosocial support needs of single mothers, whose numbers are increasing.

In one other, more simple example, a group of Pakistani brick workers proposed a useful change. On their poster, they imagined the target group (themselves) in the center. They placed institutions to the left, and to the right they placed people. Above they put institutions or people with positive impacts;

below they put those with negative impacts. As they considered where to place each note, they became excited by the new insights they were gaining.

It is this kind of excitement and these insights that motivate me to teach with diagrams. If you want to develop your group's Community Wellness program, this is a good place to start. The following activity will walk you through the steps.

## CREATING THE DIAGRAM

**Time:** 1 Hour

**Materials needed for each group of 4-5 people:**

- Paper and pen (for making a list)
- Colored sheets of paper cut into circles of various sizes (small, medium and large); or instruct them to cut their own
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers
- Large sheet of white poster paper for each group

**First:**

1. Divide your class into groups of 4 to 5 people. I have found 5 to be the optimal number.
2. Have each group decide what community or person they wish to diagram. It should not be someone they know, but could be a situation they know. Or it could be hypothetical.
3. Have them make a list of its various needs and social connections.
4. Go back over the list and note the importance of each of these to the group (or person). Use a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being the most important.
5. Review the list again, noting the social, emotional or physical distance for each connection. This time use letters "A", "B", "C," with "C" being the most distant. For example, my son and his family are very important to me so I would give them a "3." But they live in another state and are hard to visit, so I would give them the letter "C".
6. Make no judgment of these needs or issues. If two groups diagram the same person or community, they will learn there is more than one way to look at the same thing.

**Next have each group:**

1. Pick a circle to represent the chosen group, community or person and make sure it looks different from the other circles. Glue this circle onto the poster paper.
2. On the list, each need or social connection now has both a letter and a number. For example, my personal list says: "My son & family: -- 3, C" For each connection or need with a number "1," choose a small circle and write the item on it (only one item per circle). For each with a "2," choose the medium circle to write on. Write each item with a number "3" on a large circle.
3. The letters on each list correspond to the distance of each circle from the chosen group (or person.) Those with an "A" are closest and those with a "C" are furthest away. Distance will vary some, but they see that size and distance can be quite different. Glue the circles now in the appropriate places.



**Select a target:**

- Consider which connections or needs must change in order for the group or person to thrive, and put a star on that circle on the diagram.
- As a group, consider which resiliency point to support. For instance, in my example, I might look for technical solutions to our distance—like phones, Skype or other video conferencing. These would help me design an action plan to meet my needs.

**Your assessment of the results will include:**

- The kind of community this group represents.
- The various needs of the group.
- The kind of resilience which can be supported.
- Be sure to approach your program from a wellness, not an illness or problem, perspective.

# PRESENCE IS THE HEART OF HUMAN RESILIENCE

by

Addie van der Kooy



Addie van der Kooy is a Focusing Institute Certifying Coordinator in Wholebody Focusing (WBF). He has been working for almost 20 years with Kevin McEvenue, founder of WBF. Addie lives in the south-west of England where he offers one-on-one on-line WBF sessions and training. He also offers webinars on Practising Presence. He can be reached at

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I like the English term “human being” to describe you and me as a member of the human race. It points to two dimensions that live in us. One is our human-ness where all the ripples, waves and currents of thoughts, emotions and physical sensations are experienced. The second dimension -- our being-ness -- is more like the underlying depth and vastness of the ocean that is unperturbed by what is going on at the surface. We are all quite familiar with our human-ness but the underlying depth of being-ness is for most an uncharted terrain, a frontier still unexplored.

It has sometimes been described as “the underlying field of alive Presence” which can be sensed inside us as the life force animating the physical body. From its depth, wisdom, intelligence and creativity can rise to the surface. Perhaps at times when the surface of the ocean is calm and our minds and hearts are relatively quiet, we can sense that underlying aliveness, a bodily felt sense of “Me Here” that is unaffected by anything that happens inside and around us. In the Bible it has been described as “the kingdom of heaven within you.”

Habitually we are so preoccupied with our thoughts, emotions and physical sensations that we are not at all aware of this underlying depth of Presence inside us. And out of this preoccupation

flows a seemingly unstoppable drive to be active in terms of thinking and doing. Yet, this natural state of Being has so many resources to offer us – qualities like stillness, spaciousness, steadiness, peacefulness, strength or just aware-

ness - the sheer joy of being alive – even when on the surface we may be experiencing some choppy waters!

To live to our full capacity as a human being and live a truly balanced life, it is vital to explore this inner frontier of Being.



*the underlying depth of being-ness is uncharted terrain, a frontier still unexplored*

## “Me Here” at the Core of Human Resilience

To be able to access the dimension of being-ness inside you is the core of human resilience – it allows you to experience that the essence of you, “Me Here,” cannot be touched and affected by whatever the storms of Life whip up and throw at you! You are in touch with a natural sense of self-confidence that wells up from the depth of your Presence.

To learn the skill of accessing and felt sensing Presence or “Me Here” is at the heart of what I offer as a Wholebody Focusing (WBF) Trainer. With WBF the natural Focusing skill of felt sensing is not only used to “sit” with difficult places inside us, but is also employed to make space for a body sense of “Me Here.” This means you can know a sense of the aliveness of Presence whilst also

experiencing the woundedness inside. This creates a whole new dynamic which makes it so much easier to be with your suffering as there is a sense that there is more to you than the suffering. It also allows your wounded places to directly and physically experience the aliveness and OK-ness of your Presence – and it is often this dynamic that allows deep healing to take place.



*allows your wounded places to directly and physically experience the aliveness and OK-ness of your Presence*

### **The Inner Core Muscle of Stepping into “Me Here”**

To learn to access and settle into a sense of “Me Here” is like learning to exercise what I call an “inner core muscle.” As we’ve noted, we are usually so tangled up with our thoughts that it takes deliberate action on our part – like the stretching of a muscle – to untangle our attention away from the conceptual mind and instead take time to sense the underlying “field of alive Presence” within.

To exercise this inner core muscle of stepping into “Me Here” requires practice, just like it takes practice to exercise and strengthen your physical muscles. That is why as a WBF trainer I emphasise the need for daily practice: to set some time aside each day to re-direct your attention away from thinking and let it come to rest on a body sense of the aliveness of “Me Here,” however and wherever it is felt. It can be sensed as a tingly energy or aliveness, a flow of energy or felt qualities like stillness, strength, spaciousness, etc.

This can also be awakened inside you by your surroundings – a sense of the surrounding silence or space, a sense of the sound of a bird song, the way sunlight streams into your room, an energising sense of the connection between your feet and the ground – anything that

makes you feel alive and present in this moment, aside from thoughts, emotions and physical discomfort. Personally I often feel naturally drawn to the colours I perceive around me, some of which evoke strong body senses of aliveness and beauty within me.

Setting such times aside every day is like going to the gym for some Presence building! It’s also a wonderful way of committing yourself to explore and hon-

our that dimension of being-ness inside you.

### **Pauses for Presence**

What is also very effective is what I call “Pauses for Presence.” We spend a lot of time during the day waiting – waiting for the kettle to boil, waiting for a red light, waiting in a queue, waiting for the computer to re-boot, etc. You can use these brief moments to become fully present in the moment and sense the aliveness around and/or inside you: for instance, taking in the expanse of the sky, the vibrancy of a red light, the sense of your feet touching the ground, the feel of the breath moving through your body or the aliveness felt inside of simply just Being Here.

It is that switch from being lost in your thoughts to coming home to a felt sense of being present and alive in this moment. Even if is just for a few seconds. And the more you’re able to intersperse your day with these pauses for Presence, the more this underlying energy field of aliveness is activated and the easier it becomes to access. Neural pathways are created which begin to develop a new habit: to step out of your thoughts into a bodily sense of “Me Here.”

## TEACHING “PAUSING FOR PRESENCE” IN A GROUP

**Time:** 1 Hour (Can be divided into two separate sessions)

**Materials:** None (Unless you wish to include one of my videos)

(10 min.) Present the concept of the “Me Here” muscle. Discuss when and how individuals in the group have experienced a sense of “Being-ness,” perhaps as a child. Check how they currently manage their thoughts and whether they can let them go.

(10 min.) Have them sit comfortably and close their eyes if they want. Tell them they will be trying out various ways to Pause for Presence. Speak slowly and allow long pauses.

- a) Suggest they sense how their body is being supported by the chair... and the floor ... Have them sense the space around them ...
- b) Can you imagine coming to your senses? ... Make yourself a home in the present .... Imagine taking your attention away from thinking . . . and let it settle on what you see ... hear ... touch ... smell ... or taste ...
- c) Now let your thoughts go ... Whenever you find yourself back in thoughts, don't make a problem out of it. It's normal and to be expected ... As you become aware that you were lost in thought, you are already back in the Here and Now, so just let go of the thought ... return to your sense perceptions. ... You may have to do this regularly, so be patient ...

(10 min) Discussion and sharing about the above exercise.

Discuss how they can use “Pauses for Presence” in their daily lives. For instance, when out in nature, they can imagine taking their sense perceptions inside. As they look at the sky, they can see if they can sense the sky somewhere inside them. If they hear a bird song or a piece of music, they can notice how that feels inside. Touching something may give them a sense of the whole of what they are touching. The same for taste and smell. They can open themselves to a body sense of the aliveness – or Presence – that surrounds them.

Discuss other ways they can incorporate these pauses into their daily lives. Let them suggest certain times when they wait for something.

(10 min) Have them get comfortable again and tell them they will be practicing two more ways to

Pause for Presence.

- a) Become aware of the movement of breath through your body ... Do not try to change it, just let it be as it is ... See if you can sense how the breath energizes your body ... For instance, notice with each in-breath how the lungs and belly are energised and how this energy spreads through your whole body ...
- b) Take some time to become aware of your whole body and sense its energy and aliveness ... the underlying field of alive Presence – which is unaffected by whatever thoughts, emotions and physical aches and pains may be there.... See if you can settle into and rest for a while in that unruffled sense of “Me Here,” a body sense of just being alive and present.

## ADDENDUM

*The following notes and comments are from the editor of this article, Dionis Griffin.*

The reader may recognize some of the exercises in the activity above as similar to the “relaxation exercises” or “lead-ins” often held at the start of group. Although similar, Pausing for Presence has a deeper purpose, and if practiced daily, can create a real depth of being-ness. These exercises can and should be practiced alone.

After listening to Addie’s videos, I started practicing myself. I like to play games on my Kindle, but dislike the frequent interruptions for ads. Now these pauses have become an opportunity to stop and become aware of the “Me Here.” I slowly repeat “Me – Here” to myself, sometimes telling myself to be with “all that” or “with all experience.” Different phrases come to mind.

Another Wholebody Focusing student shared how she had used it while sorting the contents of her bookshelf.

Each time I paused, I felt more like myself. I felt more appreciation for who I was, the struggles I’ve survived and the beauty I created along the way. This is an appreciation I had never felt before because I was always too busy trying to change myself to be something or someone “better.” Instead, I now know that ... whenever I pause and hold space with equal regard for what is there, something new about me will emerge. (from Wholebody Focusing Blog)

For more rich examples and a discussion of this muscle practice, you will want to look at the videos of conversations between Addie and Kevin McEvenue to be found on YouTube (Type in “Addie van der Kooy” or “Focusing Initiatives International.”). Kevin McEvenue, founder of WholeBody Focusing (WBF), explains in video Part I:

I get a very physical experience when I return to “Me Here.” It comes from my centre, it spreads through my core, it brings me to a physical sense of myself in balance with my thinking. It’s a delicate balance, difficult to put into words but it’s a definite physical experience of self. I need to repeat it frequently, especially when I’m confused.

The six videos are listed below:

- Part One: The “Me Here”
- Let Your Experience Be: Part II
- Holding Both (Part III)
- Me Here and My Thoughts
- The Right Next Step
- Why talk about Muscles?

For those of you unfamiliar with it, WBF, as its name implies, expands the practice of Focusing by having you sense into the whole body, not just the chest and stomach area. WBF is usually learned by hour-long sessions with a certified WBF trainer, but, as we have seen, Addie encourages his clients to practice pausing for Presence on their own.

# WRITING FOR RESILIENCE

by

Anna Willman



*Anna Willman has been a certified Focusing Trainer since 1982. She retired in 2008 after fourteen years as director of the Confidence Clinic, a Focusing-oriented community wellness program for women. Since retirement she has written extensively about the program's history, its philosophy and practice, and its outcomes, including a book called *Creating Confidence: How to do Social Work without Destroying People's Souls*. She has also published six novels, one of which, *Kaleidoscope*, is specifically about Focusing-oriented Therapy. Both *Creating Confidence* and *Kaleidoscope* are available at *The International Focusing Institute's* online store.*

*Anna currently serves on the board of Focusing Initiatives International, for which she teaches a three-part writing webinar called *Writing from Your Body*: 1) Fiction, Poetry, Journaling, and other Imaginative Projects; 2) Work-related Nonfiction Writing; 3) Writing for Resilience.*

*You are welcome to contact Anna for more information on either the haiku or the weather exercise at*

*vawillman@gmail.com.*

At the Confidence Clinic we introduced an exercise based on a very roughshod version of the haiku. If you leave out the rules about numbers of lines and syllables, haiku poetry has the virtue of being extremely short and therefore not frightening to women who are insecure about writing. After reading together a number of classic haiku, the women had no trouble understanding the simple themes of a haiku – the capture of a moment, a sense of contrast, the intimacy of nature – and were able to create lovely two and three line poems. They wrote them on cards and read them aloud and posted them on the bulletin board and then went home excited and proud because they had actually written a poem.

For many years I was director of the Confidence Clinic, a program for women going through major life transitions. We served women of all ages with diverse backgrounds and issues. Many had dropped out of school at an early age for marriage, work, or family reasons, and now found themselves suddenly on their own and uncertain how they were going to survive when they had never worked or even balanced a checkbook before. Some had lost good jobs in a declining economy and could not find another. Some were recovering addicts or alcoholics, learning how to negotiate the world for the first time while sober.

Virtually all had low self-esteem.

Our participants were strong, resilient women. They had raised healthy children on a shoestring budget without losing their sense of humor, carried their babies to safety on long miles of country roads to escape a drunken abuser, helped their addicted teenagers get clean, fought with the school bureaucracy for their special needs children's education, survived catastrophe after catastrophe while keeping alive their hopes for a better life.

These women came to us hoping for solutions. And we helped them get their schooling and figure out what jobs they could do. We steered them towards community resources that would help them find safe housing, stay sober, parent their children, and tackle the road blocks ahead.

“  
our real job was to help them discover that the solutions were already there inside themselves

But our real job was to help them discover that the solutions were already there inside themselves. **They already knew everything they needed to know.** They knew they had to go to school, get a job, stay sober, leave their abusers, and keep their children

safe. What they didn't realize and what we helped them see was exactly how amazing they were, what miracles they had already accomplished. The core of our program, which was started and designed by women just like our participants, was simply confidence-building. **The women needed to rediscover their strength, recover their personal power. They needed to believe in themselves again.**

For many of our women, writing was a powerful tool for self-discovery. They



were all given blank journals to use as they wished. I remember one woman who used to start her day at the Confidence Clinic by reading sections of her journal to the other women. Sharing her writing not only inspired others to use their journals, it gave her validation as well. Reading her words aloud worked very much like reflection works in Focusing. Hearing her innermost thoughts as she spoke them gave her access to them on a deeper level – a bodily knowing of the truth of those words.

I now teach a webinar series called Writing From Your Body for Focusing Initiatives International. One class in the series, Writing for Resilience, teaches how to design and use writing exercises to help people (and communities) heal.

When my webinar class discusses what makes a writing exercise work, we find that good ones do many things. For example:

- I generally start my writing exercises with a pause, a “sitting quietly with” the whole of the subject. What emerges is often a fresh understanding, a recognition of one’s personal experience of the subject. Putting
- This new understanding into words somehow makes it seem more real and consolidates the gain in self-knowledge in a way that can lead to self-acceptance. I asked my haiku writers to think of a moment they had experienced during the past few days – a moment of beauty or insight – and just sit with how they carried that moment in their body right now at this moment. One woman wrote: “115 days clean,/ Wild and free./ Life is all new to me.” Another wrote: “Doors with windows – / Everyone likes to see./ Looking at you, looking at me.” These women went home excited because they had created a poem, but they also were energized by what the poems said about themselves.
- This initial pause also provides practice in the skill of looking inward, setting the stage for learning the healing practice of Focusing. When we introduced our women to

Focusing at the Confidence Clinic, we were glad they already had this grounding in self-reflection.

- A good writing exercise can serve a community-building purpose if participants share their writings with each other. When group members know each other on a deeper, more intimate level, they work together more easily, solve problems together more creatively, and grow strong community together. Many recognize their own struggles, their own truths, in each other’s stories. One woman at the Confidence Clinic began by being very judgmental of women who stayed in abusive relationships. Near the end of the 16-week session she confided in me that she herself had been in a domestic violence situation for years and that no one could really understand what was happening for someone else without first “walking a mile in her moccasins.” Hearing others’ stories helped her heal, and as she healed, she became more accepting of herself and, therefore, of others. She became able to provide support where once she had judged.
- Participants can learn healthy self-care and self-protection by being able to choose not to share, or to share only what is safe to share. As a session of the Confidence Clinic progressed, we found that the quiet women shared more, and those who had initially shared everything sometimes became more selective.
- Writing can create opportunities for participants to feel successful in small, but important ways. At the Confidence Clinic we treasured opportunities for success, knowing that each small success builds



*they experienced the world differently, but in the present for that brief moment of sheer beauty*

confidence for the next challenge. A haiku can lead to a career in journalism or to another 115 days of sobriety. One task successfully completed builds energy for the next.

- An exercise can create a new awareness. Our haiku poets start noticing those intense moments and arrive at school the next day or week all excited to say they just had a “haiku moment.” They might not write it down, but they experienced the world a little differently, were fully in the present for that brief moment of sheer beauty (or laughter, or insight, or whatever the moment promised).
- A writing exercise can become an equalizer within the group. A third-grade dropout and a PhD have the same access to their internal experiencing. Words and metaphors that come from the body are always fresh and true. A haiku about people peering at one another through windows in doors captures freshly the universal sense of curiosity and connection. Insight is everything. Grammar is irrelevant.
- Of course, there is the obvious mundane purpose of the exercise – an exercise that develops a particular skill related to the purpose of the class. At the Confidence Clinic, that purpose might be career assessment, or learning how to write an essay for the high school equivalency exam, or clarifying personal values in making life choices.
- Possibly most important, good writing exercises are fun. Even those hesitant writers soon become engaged. The women applaud each other, “ooh” and “aah” over a haiku with a cliché description of a rainbow, because they see past the cliché to the magic moment. They too love rainbows and all that they symbolize: colors of hope.

## YOUR DAY AS WEATHER

- Goals:** A great way to begin any group event! It works very much like “clearing a space” in Focusing, helping people let go of the events of their day, recover from the stress and excitement of arriving, and turn their attention to the workshop/meeting/conference at hand. I use it when teaching Focusing and to begin most of my online writing webinars, but I have also used it to begin a meeting of city bureaucrats, heads of nonprofit organizations (NGOs), and school officials.
- Time:** Paper and pencil (or crayons or felt tip markers if the group will be drawing instead of writing.)
- Materials:** Paper and pencil (or crayons or felt tip markers if the group will be drawing instead of writing.)

Once people are gathered together, give the following instructions. Read slowly and pause frequently. Give them time to be with each step.

- Relax into your chair and just spend a moment thinking about your day so far.
- You can close your eyes if it is comfortable for you to do so.
- Just let your mind go over this day and all its events or nonevents – what you did, heard, said, and saw from the time you woke up to the present moment – who you spoke to or interacted with – how it all felt – what smells, colors, emotions, thoughts you experienced so far today. Don't try to re-experience each thing, but just sit with the whole of it, without thinking too much. Just let all the events of your day flow through your body.
- Now just notice how your body is carrying all of that right now. Notice where your body is tense, where it seems loose. Check your shoulders, your throat, your chest, your belly.
- Now imagine that your day so far is a weather report. Would it be calm? Sunny? Partly cloudy? Scattered showers? A thunderstorm? Or a hurricane?
- Sit with this image until you feel that you have it just right. Take your time, notice the colors, smells, sounds, all the details of the weather. Let yourself feel it in your body.
- Now take your pen and paper and write a description of the weather of your day so far. Make it as detailed and rich as you can. Don't give me the details of your day, but the details of your weather. Describe the air, sun or the storm as richly as you can, drawing on the sense of your day that you found in your body. The colors, the smells, the feel of the air on your skin, the sounds. Whatever comes. As you write, check to see if the words you are using fit the feelings in your body.

After about fifteen minutes of writing time, tell the participants they have five more minutes.

When you feel that most or all are done, invite them to introduce themselves, giving their name, maybe where they are from or some other small piece of information, and then invite them to share their written description of their weather if it is comfortable for them to do so. Be sure to stress that passing is an option. No one should feel pressured to share.

After everyone has had a chance to share, you can make space for anyone who passed the first time around.

## Variations:

- With some populations, participants might prefer to draw the weather instead of doing a written description.
- This exercise is revealing of cultural particularities. Dr. Pat Omidian tells me that in Pakistan rain means calmness or happiness, while in many Western cultures it's more likely to symbolize sorrow or trouble.
- This exercise can work with a variety of images. It doesn't have to be weather. Try different metaphors: an animal, a recreational activity, a kind of music, or how people are feeling about a specific local situation.

## Examples of weather reports:

*Bright sunlight reflected off the snowbanks. Almost blinding me, making me giddy. Not joy, but something deeper, some old pain wrapped up in splendor. A lone crocus struggling to welcome the overdue spring. A deep chill touched by hope. Hoping for warm spring rains to melt the ice and nourish the green life underneath.*

*Hurricane strength winds today. All is destruction. Sweep the old away. Turning my life upside down. Welcome the new.*

*Woke up sunny, but soon came dark clouds. Thunder and lightning. Electric smells. Too mad for tears, so no rain. Just the waiting. Stuck. Stuck. Stuck!*

*A soft rain, sweet smelling. Blessing the earth. Flowers bending. Puddles growing. Worms swimming, birds feeding. Death feeding life. Life goes on. Sorrows ease in spite of resistance. Some kind of happiness becomes possible.*

*Changeable weather – quick shifts from sunshine to storm and back again. Slow paced, then too fast. Busy, then bored, then rushed. Can't hold it all. Makes me dizzy. Morning sunshine was sweet, slow, like a bee buzzing in the garden. Then a trip to town and errands like crisp breezes pushing me from place to place. Laundry, library, groceries all rushing past. Dorothy's cyclone with the witch on her bicycle flying by. Then home and too slow, dull, tired of myself. Desert heat dulls the senses. Sleep like the dead. Then a last minute rush to get here. Near panic – I hate to be late.*

# EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION IN EL SALVADOR: CROSSING FOCUSING WITH NVC<sup>2</sup>

by

Beatrice Blake



Beatrice Blake became a Focusing trainer in 2000 and is now a certifying coordinator with TIFI. Since 2007 she has used Nonviolent Communication as a door to Focusing. She combines the two practices in her online classes in 'Generating a Culture of Peace' in English and Spanish. She also teaches *Thinking at the Edge* and leads online partnership practice groups for people who need the Focusing Partnership Proficiency Award in order to participate in TIFI's Partnership Network. Find out more at <http://possibility-space.com>

*There is a world so unknown, intriguing, changeable, questioning, contradictory and noble inside each one of us, just waiting for us to visit it and understand it. I am surprised now by the frequency and clarity of my feelings, and that helps me pay more attention to them. It's very interesting to discover this, to know that you can learn how to accompany yourself in your inner world and that doing so helps you manage your emotions, channeling them so that you don't feel so much frustration.*

--Rafael Zelaya, Youth Group Facilitator

I first became close to Salvadorans in 1982-84 when I volunteered at a clinic in Costa Rica for refugees from the Salvadoran civil war. The people I met there were warm, inspired, and dedicated to social equality and justice. Towards the end of the war, in the late 1980s, community organizations formed in El Salvador to help with repatriation of refugees and to continue the struggle for social justice through the formation of new democratic systems. These organizations still exist today, and in some parts of El Salvador, they have been able to keep their communities free from gangs.

Even though El Salvador is now known for its murder rate, there are many dedicated people from the 1980s who are still committed to the dream of justice and equality. In February 2019, with the largest electoral turnout in the history of the country, Salvadorans elected a young, innovative president from the New Ideas movement, President Nayib Bukele, who promises to curb the corruption that leads to gang formation.

Salvadorans are ready for new ideas, and Focusing El Salvador is giving its citizens the psychosocial tools of Focusing and Empathic Communication

to think outside the box and reduce violence in their own families and workplaces. Many small miracles happen every day.

- A wife pauses when she is angry with her husband, and writes down her feelings, thus gaining perspective on where her anger is really coming from. She is able to tell her husband about her insight, and that gives him the safe space to tell her what he has been going through.
- A counselor is able to guide a woman from being a victim in an abusive relationship to finding the inner strength and confidence she needs to live on her own.
- Parents and teachers in a school system learn the benefits of just listening to each other.
- A man who is concerned about a violent relative is able to become aware of his own violent thoughts, and can thus better prepare himself for a peaceful conversation with his relative.

In 2007, I was invited by a Salvadoran

<sup>2</sup> - Much of this article was first published in the British Focusing Association Newsletter, July 2018.



community organization to teach Focusing in an area that had taken part in the civil war but had since been turned over to farming families as part of the Peace Accords.

The head of the organization wanted me to address the mental health of the people. In a previous short session with me, this leader had experienced the positive impact of Focusing. But once on the ground, I found there was general unfamiliarity and

impatience with anything having to do with ‘psychology.’ The fear was that if you talked about your personal pain, you were weak or already ‘loco.’ In that atmosphere, people did not see any advantages to learning Focusing. They were not interested in personal growth, but they were interested in solving the problem of violence in their country.

As it happened, I had taken a class in **Non-violent Communication (NVC)** just before going to El Salvador. Putting NVC theory into practice had made a big difference for me in resolving my own personal conflicts. My friend Melba Jiménez, who had been a medic for the twelve years of the civil war, suggested that I start, not with Focusing, but by sharing what I had learned about NVC. I noticed the difference immediately. People’s eyes lit up. The simple games and exercises that I had learned in NVC attracted their attention.

The **Feelings and Needs** card game, developed by NVC trainers Morrison and King (see Activity below), gives each person the opportunity to speak for three minutes about some experience that went who can discard any cards that do not reflect his or her feelings. Then the speaker goes through the Needs cards well or did not go as they wanted. The rest of the group makes no comment. Instead they silently choose Feelings cards that reflect what they think the speaker is feeling, and put them in front of the speaker, to see which universal Needs gave rise to the feelings.

This game can lead to paying attention to what is going on inside; in fact it is like

‘training wheels’ for Focusing. If you can help people identify their feelings and needs in a situation, you can then gently ask them how the situation feels inside, and they are much more likely to get a felt sense of the whole, which is necessary for Focusing. You can then often lead them into a full Focusing session without having explained the Focusing steps. It’s wonderful to be able to say, “What we were just doing is Focusing,” rather

than, “Here’s how you do Focusing.”

One of my students who is well-versed in both Focusing and Nonviolent Communication said: “I use Focusing in order to sense inside my needs, to feel personally how words from the list fit with my body and my inner world. For example: I had a felt sense about my need for family. The word “family” is not on the Needs List, but I felt this deep need for family inside me. I understood from the body the importance of this need for myself, not from any theory.”

Equally, NVC can be of service to Focusers. When people are angry, it can be difficult to quiet down, let alone get a felt sense. In that moment, it’s useful for the angry person to look at the list of needs. It helps them identify what led to the anger. It can also make them more receptive to looking at the needs of the others involved. Recognizing needs on an initial level leads to a kind of settling down inside. After that, a Focusing session can give more insight and lead to more heartfelt communication.

In 2018, we had the welcome opportunity to demonstrate the value of our program. Invited by the Salvadoran non-profit, **Glasswing International**, we trained 15 of their staff who work with victims of violence. Our trainings started with a 14-hour workshop in the revolutionary Pause and Nonviolent Communication (which we called Empathic Communication). The second 12-hour workshop covered self-empathy and Focusing. The third 12 hour-workshop gave them practice in Listening and reflecting back.

We were clear from the beginning that the goal of our workshops was for the staff to integrate Focusing and Listening into their own lives. After three workshops we accompanied our trainees in partnership practice: six 2-hour sessions in groups of three or four. Their familiarity with the Pause, the Felt Sense, listening and reflecting back, led to daily progress for everyone. People who had been feeling uncertain about participation were able to voice their concerns in the smaller groups, and were finally able to experience Focusing for themselves. People who were too much into talking learned to Pause, sense inside, and stay there for a while. As listeners, they made great progress in learning to trust the Focusing process.

We have worked to make our training accessible to people at all levels of life so that it can impact a community through all aspects of its culture. We have witnessed many beautiful felt shifts bringing inner messages of confidence and self-esteem, and with improved relationships at work and at home.

Psychologist Ana Vilma Sosa gave a workshop about pausing and listening for needs, based on the Revolutionary Pause diagram on the left. A young man who organizes soccer teams took the workshop. Some tensions developed between rival soccer teams and after a certain game, things were about to explode. The soccer coach sat everyone down and got them to talk about their feelings and needs and to listen to each other, avoiding a confrontation.

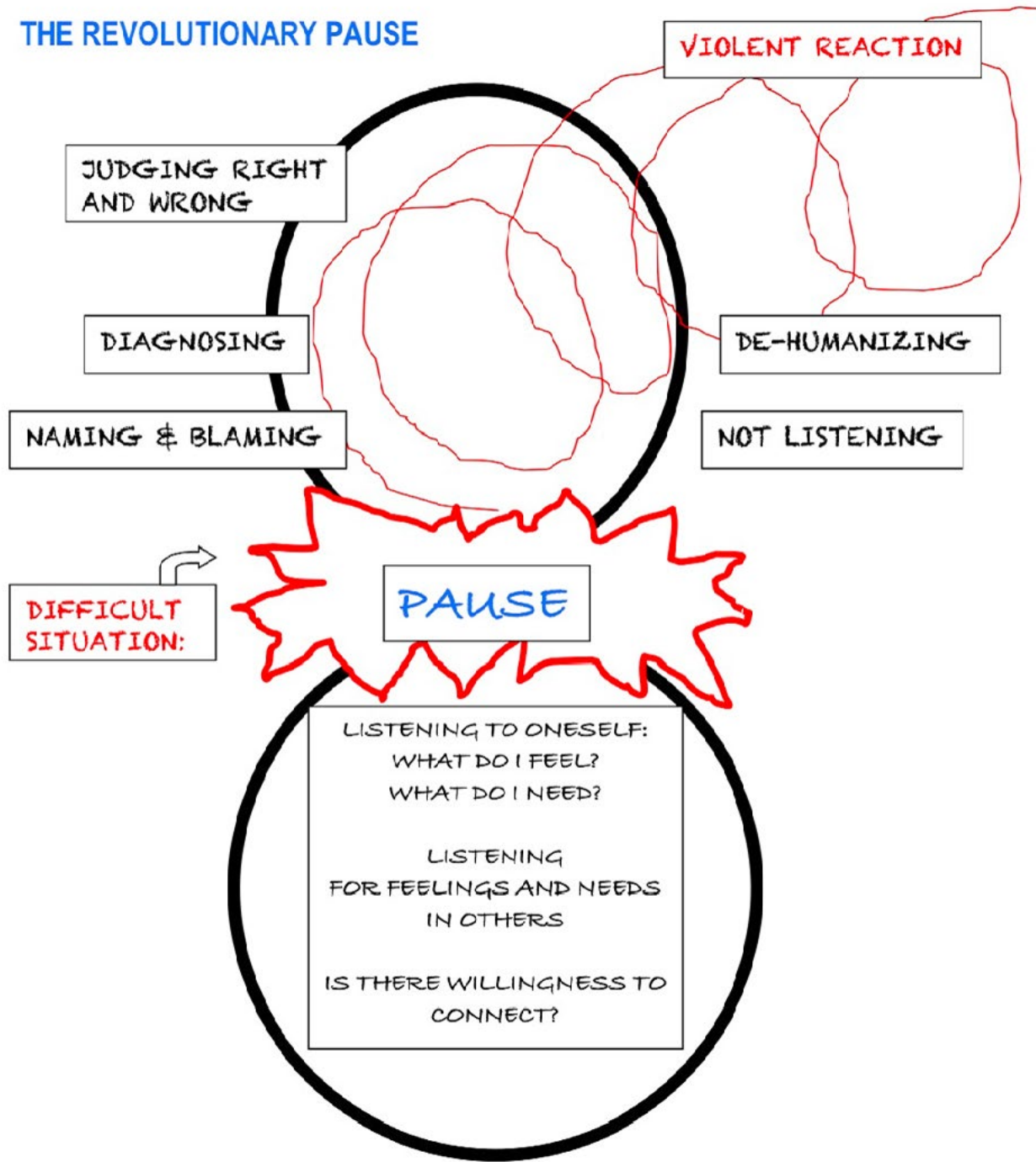
Yara Jiménez and I had given a series of workshops to people who work in the crowded, chaotic Central Market in San Salvador. One woman said, “Before the workshops, I would get mad and blow up at the people around me. All of us who work here have different opinions. Now I’ve learned to listen to the people who work near me and I enjoy it. It’s good for me to listen to what others are feeling. It’s good that we all think differently, because that makes life more interesting. I like to be listened to as well. Before the workshops, I just worked all day and never took time to notice how I feel and what I need. I never took time for myself. Doing that really helps me act in a better way.”



*by sharing what I had learned about NVC, I noticed the difference immediately. People’s eye lit up.*



## THE REVOLUTIONARY PAUSE



## FEELINGS AND NEEDS CARD GAME

**Time:** Twenty minutes per participant. If there are 4 people at a table, allow an hour and a half.

**Setup:** 2 to 4 people at each table. The Feelings and Needs card deck for each table.

Once people are gathered together, give the following instructions. Read slowly and pause frequently. Give them time to be with each step.

**INTRODUCTORY GRAPHIC:** We draw or hand out the figure-eight graphic found in this article as our introduction to The Revolutionary Pause. It illustrates that when a situation impacts us, we have a right to pause. In the pause, we can either decide to go inside and notice what we are feeling and needing (known as 'giraffe language' in NVC), or turn outside, diagnosing who is to blame and why (known as 'jackal language' in NVC). If there's time, the class can role-play being jackals or giraffes in relation to a hypothetical statement. Or we might use jackal and giraffe puppets to illustrate.

### GAME:

#### STEP 1: 3 MINUTES

In this game, everyone is a Giraffe. Each table decides who will be Speaker. The Speaker is also the Dealer and deals all the Feelings cards face down to each Listener. Next, the Speaker tells about a personal experience for three minutes. The rest of the group listens in silence.

This is NOT a good time to talk about a deep, traumatic experience. There's not enough time to attend to trauma appropriately in this game. Advise your group to choose an everyday occurrence. It can be positive or negative: Tell them to choose either an experience that felt good or one where things did not go as they wanted.

#### STEP 2: 5 MINUTES

After the Speaker has ended the story, the Listeners pick up their Feelings cards and select those Feelings which they think the Speaker felt during the situation. Listeners place their chosen Feelings cards face up before the Speaker, who decides which of the cards resonate with what he or she was feeling and discards those that do not resonate.

The Speaker then goes through the remaining Feelings cards and adds, face up, any other Feelings that resonate but which were not chosen by the Listeners. The Speaker usually ends up with at least 15 cards.

Advise your group that it is not necessary for the Listeners to be 'right' about the Speaker's feelings. Listeners just make their best empathic guess. The attitude needs to be "Oh, that's what she felt," rather than "Oh no, I didn't get it right." Only the Speaker knows what he or she is feeling. It is not the Listener's job to interpret, analyze, or suggest solutions. The Listener is to practice a receptive, allowing attitude (which will incidentally prepare them for Focusing.) The game also demonstrates that the Speaker or Focuser knows their own experience. It doesn't need to be interpreted by someone else who is more perceptive, wiser, or smarter.

### STEP 3: 10 MINUTES

The Speaker goes through the deck of Needs cards and lays out the Needs that were producing the Feelings named in Step 2, checking inside for resonance. Usually at least 15 cards are chosen.

When the Speaker has laid out the relevant Needs cards, one of the Listeners reads the chosen Needs in a kind, empathic voice. Usually the Speaker will notice that hearing their Needs reflected by another, creates a different feeling inside. Having one's needs validated is almost always a moving experience, showing the power of Reflective Listening.

If there is time (which there often is not, when working in groups), the Listener who read the Needs cards pauses and gently asks, "Is there more?" waiting quietly for the Speaker to respond. The Listener then reflects back, repeats or paraphrases what the Speaker says.

Steps 1, 2 and 3 are repeated with each member of the group.

## RESOURCES

NVC Card Game: GROK (\$28 plus postage), available from [www.grokttheworld.com/products](http://www.grokttheworld.com/products)

A free printable copy of the Feelings and Needs in Spanish (or English) to aid in making your own deck. Available from [beablake7@gmail.com](mailto:beablake7@gmail.com)

Find out more about the people of Focusing El Salvador, take our online classes and find out how you can contribute to our community programs at [focusing-el-salvador.org](http://focusing-el-salvador.org)

Graphic of Jackal (top) and Giraffe (bottom) attitudes, with the Revolutionary Pause between, was designed by Focusing trainer Wendy Webber.

# 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.

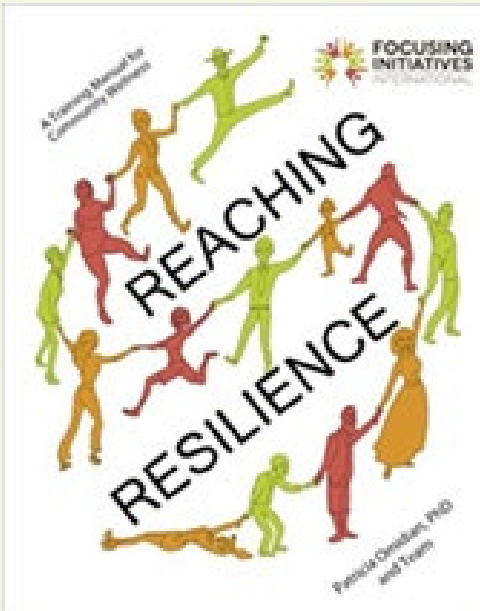
Focusing Initiatives International bases its work on the following discoveries:

- 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](http://www.focusinginternational.org)
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# REACHING RESILIENCE: A TRAINING MANUAL FOR COMMUNITY WELLNESS FOCUSING



In 1986 medical anthropologist Pat Omidian worked with Afghan refugees in San Francisco and first realized that people and communities in severe distress can find their own solutions when resilience is supported in culturally relevant ways. Since then, her practice has taken her to places and situations such as Afghanistan under the Taliban, earthquake-torn Pakistan, post-tsunami Japan, and Ebola-threatened Liberia.

**Reaching Resilience** offers activities Pat has developed, as well as lessons she has learned from others, in an easy-to-use psychosocial health approach called Community Wellness Focusing (CWF). Each chapter explains a basic principle and gives examples of activities that support inner sensing, group learning.

This book represents the combined work of many dedicated community activists and healers.

Reaching Resilience is available at <https://www.tinyurl.com/FII-Reaching-Resilience>. You can also contact Melinda Darer: [melinda@focusinginternational.org](mailto:melinda@focusinginternational.org).

## ***Here is what readers have said about Reaching Resilience:***

*It is inspiring and helpful in equal measure, with great clarity about concepts that I can absorb and use. It gives me hope to read how Omidian has been able to help people even in inhumane conditions. 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.*

*. . . a fantastic resource based on lived experiences of community focusing intervention in such a wholistic and interactive way.*

*. . . extremely well done, the language*

*clear and accessible, the exercises precise and easy to follow. A way of doing community development that emphasizes the ability of disadvantaged and traumatized communities to empower themselves, drawing on the resources of their own culture.*

*. . . what I love most about this manual is the way it combines clear and detailed instructions, with the gentle tone and spirit that we need, when doing trauma healing work. Dr. Omidian has developed this work in partnership with communities who have endured and survived significant amounts of trauma, from both war and structural violence.*

*So the gentleness, warmth, and healing spirit of the simple yet powerful activities that she describes, are particularly significant in these contexts... may this work find its way into the hands of those who can apply it wherever it is most needed!*

*Reaching Resilience provides an eminently accessible model for restoring the spirits of traumatized people successfully. I give it extra credit for building a model that ordinary people can replicate without requiring excessive supervision by experts.*