

Solution News

PRE-CONFERENCE SPECIAL EDITION

UKASFP

United Kingdom Association
for Solution Focused Practice

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Building Bridges
UKASFP Conference
LIVERPOOL 14th &
15th June 2018

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Bridges, Eventbrite"

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Have an article
for Solution
News?

Email:

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Editor's question:
What most helps you integrate
your professional SF values into the
way you live and learn
personally?

Editor - Naomi
Whitehead.

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1. Naomi Whitehead: Thoughts from the Editor.

Welcome to the Spring 2018 **PRE-CONFERENCE SPECIAL EDITION** of Solution News. Here at the UKASFP Committee we are both working hard and at the same time blissfully delighted in anticipation of this year's Building Bridges Conference. As cuts to fundamental public sector organisations such as the NHS are further felt and startling contrasts politically worldwide take place, this conference seeks to discover that which unites not that which divides us and invites us to collaborate or simply connect in the name of greater social equality and opportunity.

There will be young clients, drama and outdoor hiking equipment used in *SF in Arts & Activities**, lego and SF undercover in ERASMUS explored in *SF in Education**, passion, talent and resilience considered in their abilities to drive *SF in Organisations**, the lasting and significant difference made in neurological *SF in Physical Health and Medicine**, how people with autism and gang affected young women have all been supported and how this connects with the critical and radical movements of *SF in Social Change**, bridging the disciplines of solution-focused and spiritual accompaniment: *A bridge too far?* will be considered in *SF in Spirituality** and ideas around the miracle trance, IAPT and postmodern family therapy members are just some of what *SF in Talking Therapies** will guide your mind to contemplate.

****See UKASFP website for detailed stream specific conference flyers***

As for this newsletter, yet again, I have been left feeling privileged to read and discover current thinking and inspiration. The bridges between articles are about treating clients on a fundamental level as experts, not only in their lives but also in strategic planning for services. I see a sustained commitment to discover very precisely what works, drawing on practitioner's unique skills and qualities to do this in a robust, accountable way. I note a philosophical and political rigour to walk alongside client's journeys with two purposes, one to see their world objectively so you can listen and ask the most useful questions possible, and secondly to shout about client experiences in the media, to government and campaign organisations more widely so that structural change can occur. Finally I have enjoyed the descriptions of concrete and tangible outcomes that SF facilitates including reduced risky behaviour and incidents of going missing in care leavers alongside increased participation in education, employment and training.

2. Jim Bird-Waddington: Report from the Chair of UKASFP

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Jim Bird, and very proud to be Chair of UKASFP. My own day job entails being the CEO of Caer Las, a South Wales charity, that supports people who experience severe social exclusion; i.e. people who experience homelessness, substance use, mental health difficulties and criminal behaviours. I have worked in this field for 25 years, and fervently believe that solution focus practice offers the most comprehensive and reliable framework to undertake useful work with our clients.

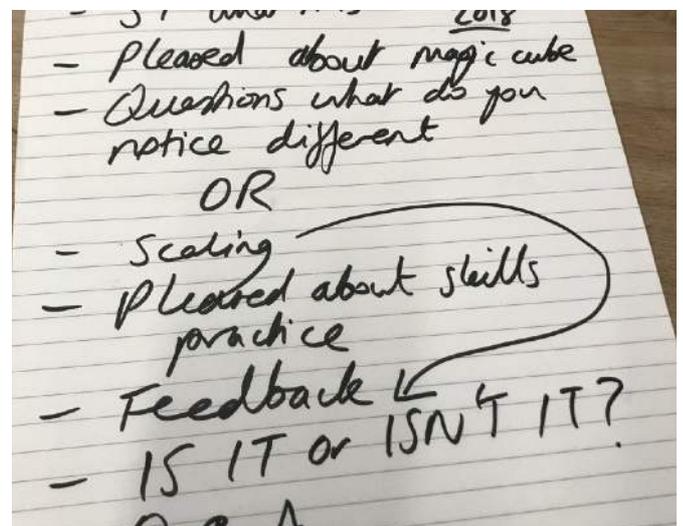


It's a great privilege and pleasure to write these few short notes for the illustrious 'Solution News'. I joined the UKASFP committee in June 2015, and became the Chair in June 2016. Almost two years later, I am reflecting of some of the progress made by the association and its members, and my amazing colleagues who volunteer on the national committee.

I have tried to imagine what my best hopes would be from membership, if I were new to UKASFP, and think about what the committee, and the long-standing members of the association have done to help those hopes become realised.

Firstly, UKASFP has a clear strategy and direction of travel, it knows where it is going, and has publicised it very clearly. So, if I'd joined this highly interesting and diverse group anew, I could see if that direction suited me, and make my own best decision about how I might contribute. My actual experience of this was, that it felt like joining an ambitious and progressive community, that wanted to make a difference in the world. I was caught up in the passion and enthusiasm, and before I could blink I'd become Chair.

As a new member, I would have wanted to become connected with the SF community, learning about all the many and various applications of the approach. My own experience of this was that, from the most accomplished and celebrated members, to the complete newbies, there was a humility, openness, and friendliness that was so welcoming and non-judgemental, I immediately felt right at home. I am very confident, that new members will share my



experience. Local groups, the national conference, the email lists, and the website, are all useful vehicles that help to accomplish this.

I would also have wanted to develop, learn, grow and flourish as a practitioner. Again, my own experience of this has been; amazing insights and inspiration from our conferences, the unswerving support of the members, and the chance to talk to people with astonishing experience about how to grow and develop. The accreditation system with its attention to detail, high quality of published criteria, and oversight by some of the accomplished practitioners, offers an additional route for development.

So, I am pleased to observe that the committee have paid attention to our main offers, and our ambition as an organisation. We have sought to grow membership, expand our remit and to put SF on the map in terms of available therapies and ways of working. We have connected with other bodies such as BACP, opened discussions with DWP and others. We have connected with academic institutions, and developed dialogues with devolved governmental organisation to raise awareness and champion the merits of our approach.

Our offer is simple: A. brilliant conference every year B. support to local groups C. healthy website D. robust accreditation. Whilst all these remain a work in progress, they are all constantly under review, and undergoing development. For example, the

website has recently been moved to our own servers, with a whole range of security updates to protect our member's data. And as the platform becomes more secure and stable, we plan to populate the site with fresh content.

As we head toward the 2018 conference in Liverpool, I note a jaw dropping programme, that is attracting potentially record ticket sales. The UKASFP is not only flourishing now, but has indicators that it is going to achieve even more for its members in the future.

I look forward to the ride. Jim Bird-Waddington. Chair UKASFP



3. Steve Freeman: @SoTCoP (Stoke-on-Trent Community of Practice) Past, Present and exciting future.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) generally and Stoke-on-Trent Community of Practice (StokeCoP) specifically have an impressive pedigree. From community development projects in America to the harnessing of technical expertise in the UK CoPs have been

harnessing untapped resources for years. The Little Miracles report from 2013 describes a project in which the impact of CoPs was assessed <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1808/download?token=hADiBO3p>. Stoke was one of the research centres and the legacy group was developed by key CoP members Bruno Ornelas and Sarah Wilshaw. Phase two of Stoke's CoP came with the introduction of a solution focused practitioner as chair/



facilitator and the development of ideas from the defunct Staffordshire Community of Solution Focused Practice which had been established and run by Carl Plant and Steve Freeman.

So much for the history. What has StokeCoP actually done over the past few years? What difference has it make from its early days? Who has noticed a change? And what have they noticed? One of the most important things has been the development of a

discussion forum with measurable impact on systems change and peoples lived experience in Stoke-on-Trent and beyond. This forum has seen a broad range of experience and expertise. Expert Citizens <http://www.expertcitizens.org.uk/> have been involved from very early in the development of StokeCoP s. People working in, and with experience of, a wide range of sectors have been able to discuss issues such as hospital discharge, prison release and 'dual diagnosis'. Having expertise by experience, expertise by occupation and expertise by study have all been vital parts of the dialogue and developing a shared view of good practice and how to support it. Detailed reports and recommendations have been produced and published. Copies of the reports have been disseminated among the commissioning and delivery communities. The series of CoPs on the Care Act has been a stellar success. The Care Act Toolkit developed by Bruno Ornelas in conjunction with StokeCoP has been adopted in a number of strategic areas in England https://issuu.com/voicesofstoke/docs/careacttoolkit_typeset Copies of other VOICES reports can be found on their publications page <http://www.voicesofstoke.org.uk/publications-2/>

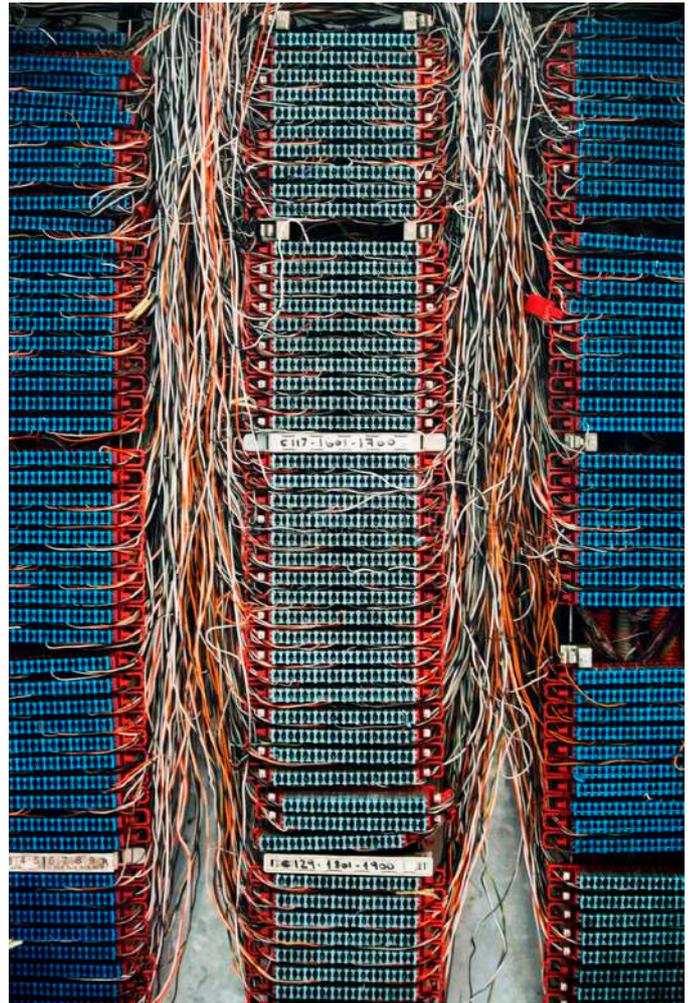
StokeCoP s has had a more subtle impact in influencing. Their influence on members and their organisations has been remarkable. The belief that good practice exists and can be cherished has supported a number of CoP members in difficult environments. In the case of prison release the StokeCoP

developed and put into practice an integrated approach to tenancy agreements and housing which has avoided people moving directly from prison to street homelessness. Equally being able to identify and challenge poor practice has been made easier with the support of colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds.

The current StokeCoP model has been the basis of CoPs for VOICES partner agencies; Homeless Link <https://www.homeless.org.uk/> have trained locality managers in CoP facilitation and supported staff in developing CoPs to develop community based responses to practical and systems based challenges.

By the autumn of 2017 StokeCoP was attracting depleted numbers of people to its meetings and a decision was made to carry out a pause and review exercise.

Key questions included; What works well with the StokeCoP model? What aspects of the Stoke CoP model have made it the basis of other successful CoPs? What can StokeCoP learn from communities of practice in other areas such as IT, research, community development? Has StokeCoP met its expectations and reached the end of its life cycle? How can we include more lived experience? How to develop a CoP of, by and for the community? What are our aspirations for StokeCoP and What will be the legacy of StokeCoP?



StokeCoPs next steps have been identified by the reviewing team. Nothing written stone. It's an iterative process. The CoPs will be influenced and affected by our noticing what works well and asking those involved what works well for them and how we can do more of it. We have two sets of aims. The first is listed below and will need the help and support of the community. The second list is made up of innovations in how we run and develop CoPs as a model and will include some very innovative approaches. Watch this space!

All of the aims listed here will be co-constructed with the Stoke-on-Trent community and influenced by experience.

VOICES to move to a position of “leading from the back” as part of its legacy plans.

Reconvene StokeCoPs as soon as practicable. First topic will be ‘Hospital discharge’ which has been covered before and remains a critical factor as reported in BBC Radio 4s File on Four programme recently.

Administration of StokeCoP to be devolved to community partners. *Arranging venues and invitations, guest speakers, presentations etc is a task which can be hosted by organisations for 6 to 12 months each. *Volunteers sought. *VOICES and partners to develop and provide a CoP resource pack for interested parties.*Investigate how CoPs can best be coordinated and communicated within and beyond Stoke-on-Trent. *Training in setting up and delivering CoPs based on the Stoke model and solution focused practice to be designed and delivered. *Investigate a range of delivery methods for CoPs. *Evaluate StokeCoPs using an action research approach. *Identify common factors and shared expertise in the community.

This will include Relationships, common interests, common problems, common tools and good practice, shared understanding and philosophies.

Lived Experience



*Lived experience will be a core component at every stage.
*Identify and integrate complimentary models for process planning, community development and purposeful meetings. *Link StokeCoP with (inter)national CoP research, evaluation, practice and publication.

What, then, is the difference that makes a difference with the StokeCoP copy model? Those

who know me will not be surprised to find that the answer is solution focused practice. Nothing complicated or demanding of intellect and yet not always as easy as it looks and sounds.

Key solution focused principles include;

Recognising every person as an expert in their own lives and their own situations. This means that everyone attending a CoP is an expert and our role as CoP members is to recognise and encourage the sharing of this expertise. No one is resistant. Resistance is not a personality trait. At worst it is a reaction to the situation and at best it is the person’s best attempt at co-operation. For example someone who often says “Don’t know” is not resistant. They are telling you that you aren’t communicating too well.

No matter how diverse the views of the people in the room there are always common factors. Our role is to ask the

questions which identify the common areas to form a foundation for the CoP, meeting or conversation. There are always exceptions to any problem. More detective work required here to identify and help describe what these exceptions are and how we can repeat them.

These are starter points and bear some further reading. This is a reasonable starting point <https://stevefreeman.org.uk/>

Look forward to seeing you at a CoP soon.
Steve Freeman. Solution Focused Practitioner. Chair @SoTCoP

4. Guy Shennan: Journeys to Liverpool

On the evening of 13 June 2018, I will be making a significant journey to Liverpool. This year's UKASFP conference, on 14-15 June, is called Building Bridges and it will be providing a bridge for me as I step from the world of social work into the world of solution-focused practice. My four years as Chair of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) will be coming to an end on the 13 June, at its annual conference and AGM, this year being held in Cardiff. As I travel up from Cardiff to Liverpool, I want to bring some of what I did and learned with BASW with me.

There are lots of connections, lots of bridges, between the two worlds already. Many of the original Milwaukee team trained as social workers, as did the BRIEF team. I first used the approach when I was a social worker with children and families in the mid-1990s. Bringing solution-focused practice into social work helped me to do that job in a way that

fitted with my hopes when I began my journey into the profession over ten years earlier. Then as I increasingly specialised in the solution-focused approach I gradually moved away from social work, until, in 2014, I was somewhat surprised to find myself BASW Chair!



The highlight of my time in the role involved another journey to Liverpool. On 19 April 2017, a group of social workers set off from the BASW head office in the centre of Birmingham, to walk for over 100 miles to Liverpool, the venue of that year's conference, under the banner of 'Boot Out Austerity'. In the spirit of the hunger marches of the 1930s and the civil rights marches of the 1960s, we were walking to draw attention to the devastating impact of austerity and to call for its end. Eight of us walked the whole way, with over 100 people joining us at some point. We visited food banks and day centres, held rallies and meetings, and met and walked with people who use services and are at the sharp end of cuts and welfare reform.

As we walked, we engaged with the public through social media, coverage in local

newspapers, radio and TV, and conversations on the streets. I discovered something then



about the democratic nature of walking on public roads and paths. Let me set the scene for this via one of the pieces of social work writing that has been most influential on me. In a 1987 article, Bill Jordan tried to get to what characterised social work and differentiated it from other professions. I think there are many connections with solution-focused practice in what he came up with.

One of Jordan's suggestions was that other, older professions - for example, medicine, law and education - are characterised by "the possession of exclusive expertise, dispensed from exclusive professional territory" - hospitals and clinics, courts and offices, schools. Social workers, however, are willing "to forsake the formality of their roles, and to 'mix' it with ordinary people in their 'natural' settings, using the informality of their methods as a means of negotiating solutions to problems rather than imposing them". It should be borne in mind that Jordan was writing over 30 years ago, and it is a moot point whether social work has

always and everywhere retained these characteristics.

Much of my work with people as a social worker, including my early solution-focused work, took place in their homes. There was something equalising about this. One aspect of our relationships was that I was a guest of my clients. They could choose to offer me refreshments and invite me to sit down on their chairs, rather than the other way round. Walking and talking with people on the streets seemed to take this a step further. The streets belonged neither solely to me nor to the users of services. In the words of Sheffield songsmith, Richard Hawley, the streets are ours.

The ecological critic, Karl Kroeber (1994), discusses the importance of walking to William Wordsworth, and the profound effect it had on his poetry. In his 1789 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth calls for a simplicity in language, as a way to break down hierarchies and to make poetry accessible to a wider readership. Walking played a similar role for him, creating a sense of reciprocity "among walker and walked-among", who were on equal ground.

The other crucial aspect of *Boot Out Austerity*, in addition to this equal, democratic nature, and also connected to it, was that it was a collective action. We did something, walking from Birmingham to Liverpool, and we did it together. This created both hope and energy, and BASW's

campaigning on austerity has since accelerated.

It was a central plank of the Manifesto for Social Work produced during the election campaign, and continues to be the subject of public meetings, formal submissions to government and the lobbying of politicians. Supplementing the campaigning, an anti-poverty practice guide is being developed, making the link explicit between poverty and the difficulties that lead to social work involvement, and helping social workers to respond. These are all activities that as a professional organisation BASW has not previously engaged in - at least not for many years.

As I travel to Liverpool again, in June, I will once more be focusing on austerity and poverty, only this time thinking about the role that solution-focused practice can play. This is not obvious and not easy - so collective thinking is required. Which is what we have conferences for! So it is intensely exciting that the organisers of Building Bridges, Suzi Curtis and Steve Flatt, have made SF and politics one of the conference streams. I am certainly committed to taking the solution-focused approach into the area of collective action, aimed at social change. The approach is too good and too useful not to be drawn upon for such vital ends. I look forward to where the bridges to be built in June will take us.

References: Jordan, Bill (1987). *Counselling, advocacy and negotiation*, British Journal of Social Work, 17, 135-146. Kroeber, Karl (1994). *Ecological literary criticism: Romantic imagining and the biology of mind*. Cambridge: Harvard

University Press. Guy is a solution-focused practitioner, supervisor and trainer. Find out more about his work at www.sfpractice.co.uk Information about Boot Out Austerity can be found at www.basw.co.uk/aag

5. Matt Selman: Upping sticks for the “The No Wrong Project”

What job description would invite you to consider moving to a new county, to work with a different client group different and with a drop in job banding? Well factoring in opportunities to move closer to a partner the expansion of North Yorkshire’s ‘No Wrong Door’ and conversations with its team did just this. From adult learning disability in Northumberland I am now in CYPS service in North Yorkshire! In a nutshell what made the change was; innovative practice, cross-service working, great outcomes for service-users and high levels of practitioner satisfaction and all delivered through the solution focused Signs of Safety model; the latter linking with a desire for me



to work in more solution-oriented and systemic ways. So here I’m sharing the original project and its expansion of which I am now a part.

The No Wrong Door (NWD) project was launched by North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) in 2015 as a service for young people, aged 12 to 25, who were either in care, on the edge of care or edging to care. This was a response to the unfortunate fact that looked after children and care leavers are at increased risk of poor outcomes in many areas of life; educational attainment, unemployment, mental health problems, homelessness, involvement in crime and substance misuse.



While I'm unaware if the miracle question was actually asked it in its development 10 core components were established to guide the project which seem like were: always progressing to permanence within a family or community, high stickability of the key worker, fewer referrals, less stigma, robust training strategy same/or similar to restorative practice and therapeutic support, no heads on beds culture, no appointment assessments, a core offer to all young people, multi-agency, intelligence-led approach to reduce risk, close partnership

working, and young people's aspirations drive practice

In practice this project runs through an integrated multi-disciplinary service (including a police liaison, speech and language therapist, clinical psychologist, residential carers and manager of service) from two hubs in North Yorkshire: Scarborough, and Harrogate which were adapted from existing residential children's homes. The integrated team supports the young person throughout their journey, to ensure that they are not passed from service to service, but, instead, have a dedicated team around them. In addition, each young person has a consistent relationship through the continuity of one NWD hub worker.

The primary model of support has been the Signs of Safety model and solution-focused practice with all members being trained in at least a 2 day introduction and the model being embedded in day-to-day practice.

The project was evaluated in 2017 and significant benefits found for the 350 young people supported over the 2 year evaluation period. These included young people remaining out of the care system (more NWD young people have ceased to be looked after children), decrease in placement moves, decrease in time spent in a care placements, lower out of area placements compared to national data, improved outcomes in Education, employment and training, reduced levels of criminal activity, reduced high risk

behaviours, and incidents of going missing halved (from 503 incidents to 253). In addition the staff involved had high levels of satisfaction and retention rates (Lushey, Hyde-Dryden., Holmes, and Blackmore, 2017).

Following the success of this, funding was secured to extend the project across North Yorkshire and to expand to frontline staff in children's social work teams. Additional cross county roles in the Prevention Services and school link for children experiencing SEMH were developed to promote resilience, early interventions and better outcomes for children and families. And this is where I joined the project taking on the role to work with prevention services covering ages 0-19. Providing psychologically informed working developing on the Sign of Safety and bringing a broader systemic approach. There is a commitment from NYCC to training up the entire workforce in Signs of Safety and systemic practice. So in times when services are being cut and more asked for less and when it may seem there is less opportunity for innovation, the NWD project is like a breath of fresh air. With the strengths based working is leading to outcomes speak for themselves the good practice is also being shared with other local authorities (there has been international interest too). So with all the enthusiasm, all the positive outcomes, and a preferred way of working upping sticks to contribute to developing a positive future wasn't too tough a decision. I'm sure I will be

updating with further positive developments over the next year as the expansion becomes fully embedded. If you would like to know please get in touch.

Lushey, C., Hyde-Dryden, G., Holmes, L. and Blackmore, J. (2017). Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Evaluation Report 51. Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Evaluation Report 51. Loughborough University: Department of Education.

6. Helen Williams and Stephen Palmer: Solution-focused coaching models: SOLUTION and FOCUS

SOLUTION and FOCUS were first introduced in the August 2011 issue of Coaching Psychology International. These acronyms are intended to aid recall of Bill O'Connell's already established eight-step and five-step models of solution-focused counselling and



coaching. We're delighted to have the opportunity to share an overview of these here with the UKASFP community. The SOLUTION model represents eight elements of the solution-focused coaching conversation as follows:

S < Share updates >

Invite the coachee to reflect on and talk

through any change observed in their situation or behaviour prior to coming to this meeting.

O <Observe interests >

Interests and hobbies can reveal key strengths and sources of motivation. Invite the coachee to engage in problem-free talk and listen for signature strengths and resources.

L <Listen >

to hopes and goals. Engage in problem-talk long enough to validate the coachee's problems and concerns. Move discussion on from a problem-focus to a solution-focus, helping the coachee to describe their aspirations and formulate their forward-looking goals.

U <Understand exceptions >

Ask questions to understand the exceptions; when has the problem not been present; when has the coachee responded differently and achieved a positive outcome; what was different about the situation; what strengths, skills and resources did they use?

T <Tap potential >

Reflect back the coachee's strengths, skills, competences, signature solutions and other resources; help the coachee to consider how these might be of use in solving the current problem or challenge.

I <Imagine success >

Using a form of the 'miracle question' (de Shazer, 1988), help the coachee to imagine what their preferred future looks like; waking to find their problem solved, what do they notice is different; how are they thinking, feeling and behaving; what is the response from others?

O <Own outcomes >

Clarify the next steps to be taken; what small step might they take next to progress towards achieving their goal? Use the scaling technique to ascertain the coachee's level of confidence to act; on a scale of one to ten, where ten is completely confident, how confident do they feel; If confidence is less than seven, what might help them to be more confident?

N <Next steps >

Confirm next steps and offer appreciative

feedback on the coachee's progress and contributions during the session.

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The FOCUS model represents five more consolidated steps which may be most useful with groups or teams, or when the coachee is highly familiar with the solution-focused coaching approach:

F <Free-talk>

Encourage the coachee or team to talk about hobbies and interests. This is a surprisingly useful step in the coaching process, helping team members to get to know each other, and drawing attention to natural strengths and resources that might be usefully applied to solving current problems.

O <Openly explore goals>

Invite the coachee or team to talk through their goals and aspirations – what progress have they made in this area on the run up to the meeting; what do they see as their specific, measurable and achievable goal?

C <Consider resources and exceptions>

Help the coachee or team to identify core strengths, knowledge, skills, qualities and other resources – when are they at their best; what successes have they had recently and what did they do to achieve it; when is the current problem not an issue; how are they thinking, feeling and behaving at those times?

U <Understand preferred

future> Using a form of the 'miracle question' (de Shazer, 1988), help the coachee or team to imagine what their preferred future looks like; in a near future where the coachee or team have achieved the desired goal, what can they see happening, and what are they doing; what impact is the team having; how are colleagues and clients reacting; how does it feel to be part of this successful team?

S <Sign up to small steps>

Confirm next steps and offer appreciative feedback on the coachee or team's progress and contributions during the session.

© Williams, Palmer & O'Connell (2011) Reprinted with permission Both the SOLUTION and FOCUS models are described in more detail in *Solution Focused Coaching in Practice* (O'Connell, Palmer & Williams, 2012: Routledge). References: O'Connell, B., Palmer, S., & Williams, H. (2012). *Solution focused coaching in practice*. Routledge. Williams, H., Palmer, S., & O'Connell, B. (2011). Introducing SOLUTION and FOCUS: Two solution focused coaching models. *Coaching Psychology International*, 4(1), 6-9. Chris Ward: *The Difference A Solution Focused Community Makes*

7. Chris Ward: The Difference A Solution Focused Community Makes

A little less than two years ago I underwent a lifesaving emergency operation. After I awoke I was told by the surgeon that he had been very pleasantly surprised at how he'd found all my organs were still functioning and fully recoverable against the odds, which I regarded as pretty miraculous!

When I eventually returned to work, I found myself doing so with an enhanced sense that anything can happen at any time, that everything can change in a heartbeat, and that miracles happen all the time. I found I was much less cautious about "giving people false hopes" and started telling everyone I met in the course of my work that I absolutely believe that things can get better for them, the only uncertainties being how long it'll take and what they might go through along the way.

A few months later I was introduced to Solution Focused Practice, thanks to BRIEF 1, and I was blown away by how it seemed to fit with my mind-set. I've been studying the approach and striving to practice in a solution focused way for a year now, and even though I feel like I've only just started out on my journey, more experienced practitioners often comment to me that they are surprised, from the way I communicate about it, that it has only been such a relatively short time. The possible explanation I tend to give for this most often is that I'm absolutely immersed in the



approach as far as I feel able to be. Every single waking hour of the past year (and I believe most of my sleeping hours too!) have been spent thinking, talking, reading, writing about being Solution Focused, seizing every given opportunity to practice the approach, and watching it being practiced whenever that opportunity presents itself as an alternative.

It's taken several things for me to continue in this way. Apart from certain personal qualities which I choose to focus my attention on to nurture, the thing that's really made a huge difference for me is the community that exists around the approach. Joining Elliott Connie's Solution Focused University (SFU) 2 last summer and being involved in the ongoing discussion amongst members that is a huge part of the way in which that initiative helps us all develop and grow is something I can't overstate the importance of to me, both professionally and personally.

When I noticed I had reached a milestone of 500 clinical hours of Solution Focused

Practice, I decided to share my thoughts with the SFU. Only other SFU members have been able to read them up to this point, so I've decided to share them again, this time with a wider audience:



Metaphorically speaking, I've always regarded my work as walking alongside people when they're going through difficult times. I used to ask people "mind if I join you?" and if they said they would like that, I'd ask them about their journey and start walking with them, trying to match their pace. Sometimes they'd turn to me and say, "I don't know where I'm going and I'm scared", to which I would reply "you know, don't ask me how I know this, but I think you're going to be fine, let's keep going and see where we end up."

Since discovering Solution Focused Practice I've added a simple question at the outset. Sticking with the metaphor, it's something which is asking, in effect, "so where would you like to go?", and I've endeavoured to learn how to speak their language as we chat during the walk, using it to marvel with them at the detail of the landmarks along

the route. I've often been very pleasantly surprised at how much more direct the route has been, how much sooner we reach the point at which we're both confident in parting ways, and how much less often the other person returns saying they've lost their way again.

For me this has been a straight forward but difficult journey. However, I've stayed true to myself and on the path of my choosing, and I've been able to overcome the obstacles along the route because I've had a wonderful community of like-minded people walking alongside me.

The SFU is an internet based project. I've also been fortunate enough to frequent regular 'Solution Focus London' meetings 3, and I attended the 'Solution Focused Practice in Statutory Contexts' conference in Essex 4. These have provided opportunities to meet other solution focused practitioners face to face and share inspiring experiences, insights, knowledge, perspectives and above all to connect. I've also been very fortunate to have a wonderfully dynamic, pragmatic and respectful team around me in my workplace, who may not have individually embraced solution focused practice on a personal level to the same extent (to be fair, that might be asking a lot!), but have remained open minded and supportive throughout, encouraged all the time by evidence that what we are all doing is making a difference. As the African proverb has it, 'If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together'.

The upcoming UKASFP conference will provide an opportunity for us all to really immerse ourselves together, strengthen bonds, share our thoughts and feelings in an environment infused with 'hope, love, expectancy, charity and autonomy' 5, and continue forwards in the direction our hearts take us. I, for one, can't wait!

1 BRIEF: www.brief.org.uk 2 Solution Focused University (SFU): <http://solutionfocusedbrieftherapy.com> 3 Solution Focus London Meetup Group: www.meetup.com/Solution-Focus-London . 4 Held at Weston Homes Community Stadium, Colchester, 9th Feb 2018. Organised by Essex Council Divisional Based Intervention Team (D-BIT). 5 Elliott Connie's 'five new tenets of SFBT' as discussed within the SFU (yet to appear in a published book).

8. Suzi Curtis & Guy Shennan: The balance of solution-focused sessions: The EBTA Research Grant 2018 comes to the UK

Each year the European Brief Therapy Association (EBTA) awards a grant to support a new research project in the field of solution-focused practice. We were delighted to learn in March that our research proposal has been selected to receive the EBTA Research Grant 2018, with an accompanying note to the effect that "it is an excellent project, which hopefully will have a positive impact on the field of solution-focused therapy." We hope so too!

We will be investigating an aspect of solution-focused practice that we do not

believe has been previously considered - the balance of preferred future talk and progress talk in solution-focused sessions. Our application was for a preparatory study, with the following aims: *to develop a suitable quantitative coding frame. *to generate specific hypotheses amenable to quantitative testing, for use in a future larger-scale study, addressing the question: What is the most useful balance between different types of solution-focused talk – specifically preferred

future or progress descriptions – within initial solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) sessions?

Where did the idea for this research come from? Steve de Shazer's initial research question, back in the 1970s, was "What do therapists do that is

useful?" By the 1980s this had become "What do clients and therapists do together that is useful?" (de Shazer and Berg, 1997). These questions led to the development of SFBT, the essentials of which by 1997 de Shazer and Berg suggested were made up of the following therapist activities (before a consultation break): "1) At some point in the first interview, the therapist will ask the Miracle Question. At least once during the first interview and at subsequent ones, the client will be asked to rate something on a scale of '0 to 10'."



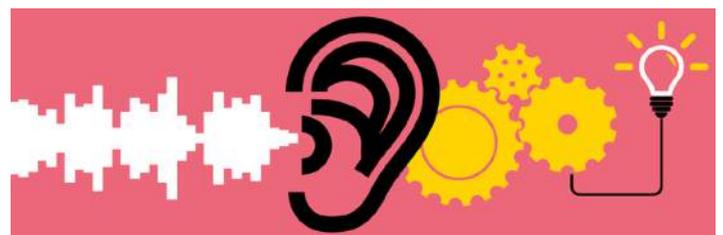
The type of talk these questions aim to elicit we can label preferred future talk and progress talk respectively. What is not addressed by this account - or by any research that we are aware of - is at which point the therapist asks about a preferred future and when after that a scale is introduced. The point at which the therapist shifts from future to progress questions will influence the balance of future and progress talk, and it is this balance and potential effects of its variance that we want to investigate.

We have become increasingly aware of the importance of this question from our experiences on the UKASFP's Accreditation Assessment Panel. Our discussions have focused on the prominence given in initial sessions – in both UKASFP accreditation criteria and currently influential versions of solution-focused practice (Shennan, 2014) – to detailed descriptions of the client's preferred future. Though these versions also include the use of scales and follow-up questions inviting the client to describe progress towards their preferred future, we have noted that most practitioners appear to devote a majority of time within initial sessions to eliciting preferred future descriptions, which fits too with our reflections on our own practice.

We have observed at times that clients who seem to be finding it difficult to answer questions designed to elicit detailed preferred future descriptions appear more engaged, and more readily able to generate

detailed descriptions, in response to progress questions. This has led us to wonder whether the usefulness of first-session conversations to clients may be enhanced by increasing the proportion of time spent on progress description, with a corresponding reduction in time spent on the preferred future. We therefore plan to set up a quantitative content analysis, exploring the relationships between frequencies of different types of practitioner question, different types of client response and measures of outcome and client satisfaction. We hope that findings from this larger study can be translated into practice guidelines that assist practitioners in their choices regarding the balance of their future and progress-focused questions.

A preparatory study: Our initial project, for which we have been awarded the grant, will

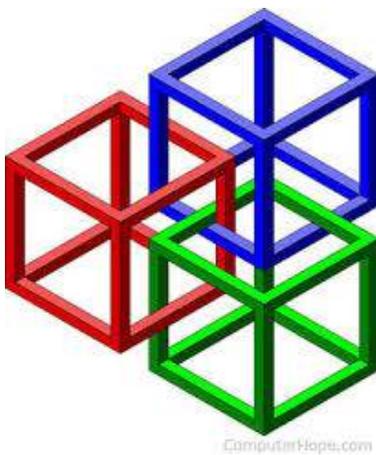


consist of the following activities required in preparation for the larger study:

The recording and transcription of a sample of eight SFBT first sessions, undertaken as part of our regular work. The collection of Session Rating Scale data from clients whose sessions are recorded and, where clients return for a second session, recording of the degree of movement reported by the client

on their overall progress scale since the first session.

A focused literature review of authoritative texts setting out the main solution-focused question-types, and studies detailing different types of client response in solution-focused conversations, leading to the production of a set of categories for coding both client and therapist utterances. A pilot coding exercise in which each of us independently codes the recorded and transcribed sessions. We will use statistical measures of inter-rater reliability such as Cronbach's alpha to assess agreement and the category list will be iteratively refined in the light of the coding of each successive session.



Analysis: On the basis of satisfactory levels of inter-rater agreement on the categorisation of different elements of sessions, we will undertake a quantitative correlational content analysis. The dependent variable(s) in this analysis will be measures of client satisfaction, assessed through the Session Rating Scale, and the client's report of progress. The independent,

or predictor, variables will be more precisely determined by the coding exercise, but are likely to include measures of : *total elapsed time spent in session on preferred future talk. *total elapsed time spent in session in progress talk. *number of therapist questions on preferred future (possibly subdivided into further categories)*number of client utterances describing aspects of the preferred future (possibly subdivided into further categories)*number of client utterances describing aspects of progress (possibly subdivided into further categories).

Outputs: The project will provide a framework for coding solution-focused sessions that is both theoretically informed and empirically tested. It will also provide an indication of the feasibility of and need for a further, appropriately-powered study exploring specific hypotheses relating to the balance between preferred future talk and progress talk.

We look forward to keeping Solution News readers posted about our progress! Thanks to our referees, Chris Iveson and Ian Smith, and to Mark Beyebach and the EBTA Research Grant Committee.

Suzi Curtis and Guy Shennan

References: de Shazer, S. and Berg, I. K. (1997). 'What works?' Remarks on research aspects of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, *Journal of Family Therapy*, 19: 121-124. Shennan, G. (2014). *Solution-Focused Practice: Effective Communication to Facilitate Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.