

## **Western Australian Solution Focused Interest Group (WASFIG) Meeting 13**



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

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

### **WASFIG Zoom Meeting 13: Saturday 24 June 2023 9:30am-11:30am WA Time**

**When:** Saturday 24 June 2023 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (VIC/NSW/QLD = 11:30pm-1:30pm, SA/NT = 11am-1pm)

**Where:** Zoom

**Attendees:** Michele Thomas, Theresa Acutt, Nadia Truong, Magdaline Wendot, Ruth Leveson, Fiona Skahill, Theresa Hewlett, Matt Cameron, Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond (Co-Cordinators).

**Apologies:** Yvette Strawbridge, Janet Lim, Shona Scallan, Johanna Saltis, Michael Bazeley, Brent Dagleish, Lisa Jooste, Eleni Goimil, and Emma Burns

**Group Facilitator:** Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond

**Group Presenter:** Kerry Drummond with the support of all Attendees!

### **Topic: Meeting Evan George: Tips for the Next Generation of Solution Focused Practitioners**

Evan George is one of the premier SF trainers, educators, and practitioners in the world today. He along with his colleagues and friends, Chris Iveson and Harvey Ratner, are the founders of BRIEF London over 30 years ago which is now the leading SFBT training organisation in the UK (see link: <https://www.brief.org.uk/>). Evan, Chris and Harvey contributed to the shift from SF 1.0 to SF 2.0, as Mark McKergow has called it, and mentor leading SF experts like Elliott Connie and Adam Froerer of the SFU. Evan is also an invaluable, generous and affirming consultant to Steve and Kerry personally in our SF professional development.

Evan talks more about how SFBT has evolved over the years to 2020 in this video: <https://vimeo.com/436732403>

In Meeting Evan George, our June 2023 WASFIG group considered Evan's thoughts on what he wished he knew 30 years ago when he just discovered SFBT, and his 'top tips' for working with clients who seem to want to talk about the problem as well as the advantages, and 'disadvantages' of SFBT, how to move through common stuck points of the approach and how working from this approach can reduce the risk of burnout for practitioners.

As we had a smaller group of attendees this meeting, instead of the usual break out rooms, Steve Runciman led the group in completing Guy Shennan's (2017) exercise together in sharing what has been good in our client work or in our lives more generally. The group was then invited into a 2 minute creative silence reflection on what they had appreciated hearing and learning from fellow attendees and a few were invited to share their thoughts.

"What have you been pleased to notice about how you've been working recently?" This can be separate things in your life you are pleased to notice yourself doing or a few good things you saw yourself do in working with a client in session.

Ask what else 5x. Keep going until you have come up with 5 answers or for five minutes, whichever comes first.

Listener/Observer: Give feedback to speaker about what you appreciated hearing, what you were impressed by.

*Shennan, G. (2017) Solution Focused Practice (Second edition). London: Bloomsbury*

In preparing for the meeting, Kerry created and shared a handout *Evan George's SF Tips for the Next Generation SF Practitioners* for attendees to read though some of Evan's thoughts to familiarise themselves with his work. Attendees were also encouraged to view Evan George's video blogs and blog:

**Advantages of SFBT:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGcM1qiov5g>

**Disadvantages of SFBT:** <https://www.brief.org.uk/resources/faq/disadvantages-of-solution-focus>

**How SFBT protects us from Burnout (2020):** <https://www.brief.org.uk/videos.html>

Steve played some of Evan's video sharing the advantages of working with SFBT to bring him into the room. Kerry invited the group to reflect on Evan's work and to share their thoughts and experiences with the following questions in mind:

What is one tip that you found useful from Evan's *Tips for the Next Generation of SF Practitioners* (or videos and blog) for:

- 1. Guiding yourself to work from the SFBT mindset which focuses more on noticing client's capacity for success and strengths and believing in your client's capacity for change?**
- 2. Working with clients that you either have used with your clients previously or would like to take to use in your client work?**
- 3. Developing your fluency in Solution Focused language?**

In reflecting back on our journey together with WASFIG attendees over the last three years, Steve and Kerry were in awe of the level of competence and confidence of practitioners who shared their inspiring client experiences with the group. One attendee appreciated how these shared experiences were able to inspire others to share their own stories of 'sparking moments' with clients. Also how WASFIG attendees 'teach' each other from their own experiences about what worked for them, present information and readings from recommended books like Elliott Connie and Adam Froerer's (2023) recently released *SFBT Diamond*, or share a helpful SFBT podcast to expand on an idea the group was discussing. It is a joy and honour being part of such a group of SF practitioners who bring amazing and magical changes to their client's lives.

Here are some of our attendees insightful thoughts:

- How SFBT seems to have an almost 'magical' impact when working in crisis situations with clients where immediate intervention is required to create safety for a child.
- How SF questions use the power of language to build hope and possibility for clients who might be problem saturated and help them transform into more hopeful versions of themselves who are inspired to make changes in their own life.
- "Inspired people are unstoppable!" – Evan George
- The importance of not being 'solution forced' and of having 'one foot in acknowledgement and one foot in possibility' and asking questions that validate the client's struggle and challenge, and then get curious about how the client is managing given such circumstances or what they might like to see happening differently if things were to move more in the direction they were hoping for "what do you know about yourself that lets you know you are the kind of person who can manage these sort of challenges?".
- How SFBT is a language that we can build fluency in over time so we can use it to have hopeful conversations with our clients regardless of when they 'go off script' or say something we did not expect, that we can continue to ask the next hopeful question bringing in possibility and moving towards the client's Best Hopes.
- The difficulty of working with clients who might be 'prickly' and how this might throw us off and make it difficult to ask SF hopeful questions when these can make the client angry. In these situations it is helpful to connect to our compassion for the client, remember they are not meeting us on their best day, that they have other versions of themselves who are able to cope better and it is our job to tap into these, and the importance of validating the client where they are at and moving at their pace, looking to introduce just as much possibility with gentle persistence of SF questioning as they can accept at the time.
- The difficulty of working with clients who struggle with visualising and verbalising their Best Hopes and answering SF questions to create a description with "I don't know" as some clients are more easily able to draw on language to describe their Best Hopes than others are. In these situations it is helpful to slow down and give the client time to think through creating this new language and find the right words that fit for themselves. Even leaving the session with a few new words would have 'stretched their reality' and provided them with the opportunity to notice more of what they would like to have happen in their life since they were able to articulate this a bit better than before. One example was given of suggesting a word for the client who then was able to dismiss this word as not quite right for them and then they were able to come up with another word that was a better fit to move forward with.
- The importance of persisting to create a rich description of the client's Best Hopes becoming reality, or what might be different if the client were to have transformed into the best version of themselves in dealing with their challenging situation. It is the detailed description that creates change in our client's lives – 'language creates reality, rather than describes it.' – Steve de Shazer. SF questions invite clients to notice things they may not have considered previously and answering these questions stretches the mind of the client (Mark McKergow) and is more likely to lead to change. "What did your spoon notice about the way you stirred your coffee on this morning when you are at your best?"
- SFBT questions like the Miracle Question or Tomorrow Question creating a 'hopeful snowball' effect of possibility building more and more towards the end of the session so the client is seemingly transformed to a different version of themselves when they leave the session.
- Difficulty of not knowing where to go next in a follow up session if the client does not report a new Best Hopes but wants to maintain their previous Best Hopes – invite the client to scale their progress so far from the last to the current session, signs that let themselves and others know they are at this point, what one point up might look like if they were maintaining their progress over the next few weeks; consider a Resource for the Outcome question asking the client what kind of strength they have drawn upon that has

contributed to their capacity to maintain their progress so far (eg. Determination, confidence) and inviting signs that let themselves and others know this is showing up and signs of this strengthening in a way that is helping them maintain progress over the next few weeks; consider legacy questions asking the client who they learnt this strength from and what this person would be pleased to see in the way the client continues to carry the strength as the legacy they learnt from this person.

- The importance of asking the client for a Best Hopes that is meaningful and purposeful, know the client's 'why' and their 'currency' to build energy and positive emotion into the conversation which is more likely to contribute to change. If you find the Best Hopes was not what you thought and the conversation seems to fall flat, go back and ask the client for their Best Hopes again. Ask 'what difference would that make?' in different variations to get to a more meaningful Best Hopes for the client. There is more information on this in Elliott Connie and Adam Froerer's (2023) new SFBT Diamond Approach book on page 123.

### ***When the Journey is Just as Important as the Destination:***

Evan George has suggested that ***for some clients the journey to their positive outcomes occurring in their lives is just as important as the destination.*** For some clients even though SFBT has created positive changes in their life that they came to counselling for, they remain dissatisfied due to the way in which the change came about. For some clients, if they have not spent time talking about, unpacking, and looking for insight and understanding from their problem, they may feel what they experienced was not 'real counselling'. As Elliott Connie has reminded us clients have the autonomy to choose to benefit from SFBT or not to and can choose to select a different approach that fits better with their expectations for what counselling should look like. While an approach that is brief, nondisruptive for a client's life and enables a client to get back to living their life as quickly as is possible without going through painful past details for them may be helpful and preferable for some clients, for others these may not be advantages. As practitioners we can know that we have shown up as our very best to support our client but that at times we may not find a way to best fit with them and this is ok. If we hold the mindset to continue to believe in our clients and that they can bring about positive changes in their life, we continue to hold hope for them as long as they need us to. Working with a practitioner who believes in them makes it more likely that the client can bring positive changes into their life.

We were pleased to be joined by **Matt Cameron** from New Zealand who previously belonged to the Solution Focused Universe and shared his insights and experience with SFBT. Matt shared the following link to a Podcast Simply Focus by Elfie Czerny and Dominik Godat who interviewed SF expert Frank Thomas on his thoughts on practice based evidence. Frank Thomas shares how practitioners can improve the effectiveness of their SFBT practice with clients by checking in at the end of the session about how it went for the client to enable the client to provide feedback on: how they are, how the relationship with the practitioner is going and how the process in session is working for the client: <https://www.sfontour.com/project/sfp-55-practice-based-evidence-looking-at-what-is-effective-in-what-we-do-with-prof-frank-thomas/>

### ***Thank You for Your Inspiration Evan!***

The group was invited to reflect on what they appreciated about Evan George and some reflections included how Evan clearly articulated his thoughts in a deliberate, nurturing and encouraging way; that Evan is very generous in sharing his knowledge for Next Generation SF practitioners to learn from; and that they enjoyed Evan's slow pace, in how he is present and takes his time so we can easily listen to and learn from him.

### ***References and Recommended Reading:***

Connie, E. and Froerer, A. (2023), *The Solution Focused Brief Therapy Diamond: A new approach to SFBT that will empower both practitioner and client to achieve the best outcomes*, Hay House Inc.: USA

Iveson, C., George, E. and Ratner, H. (2018), *Briefly Does It*, In Switeck, T., Strahilov, B. and Panayotov, P. (Eds.) *Making Waves: Solution Focused Practice in Europe*. EBTA

Iveson, C., George, E. and Ratner, H. (2012), *Brief Coaching*, London: Routledge

Medina, A. and Beyebach, M. (2014) The Impact of Solution-focused Training on Professionals' Beliefs, Practices and Burnout of Child Protection Workers in Tenerife Island, *Child Care in Practice*, 20(1): 7-36, DOI: 10.1080/13575279.2013.847058

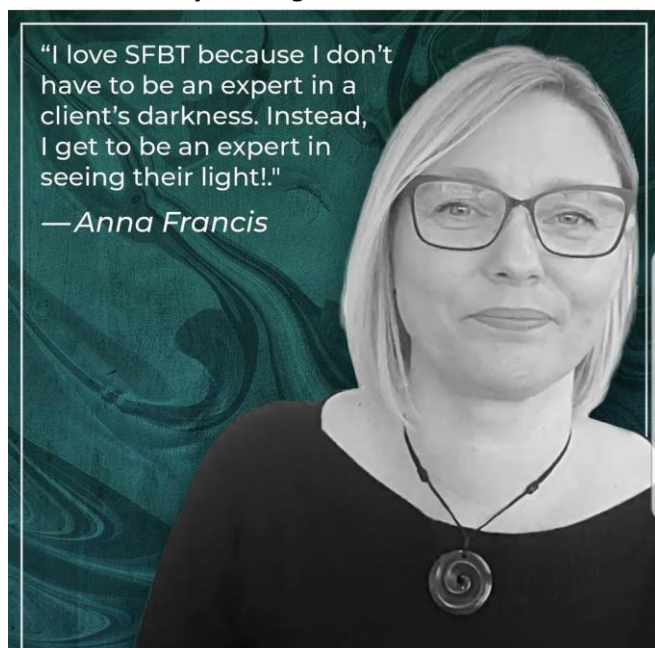
McKergow, M. (2021), *The Next Generation of Solution Focused Practice: Stretching the world for new opportunities and progress*, Routledge: London

Ratner, H., George, E., and Iveson, C. (2012), *Solution Focused Brief Therapy: 100 Key Points and Techniques*. Routledge: New York

### **Information for our Upcoming WASFIG Zoom Meeting 14 in August 2023**

#### **WASFIG Zoom Meeting 14: Saturday 12 August 2023 9:30am-11:30am WA Time**

**When: Saturday 12 August 2023 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (VIC/NSW/QLD = 11:30pm-1:30pm, SA/NT = 11am-1pm)**



#### **Topic: Meeting Anna Francis: Anna's SF Tips for Working with Clients Managing Grief and Trauma**

Anna Francis is an expert SFBT trainer/coach and Registered Counsellor based in New Zealand. Kerry recently completed the 16 week Coaching Course with the Solution Focused Universe (SFU) <https://thesfu.com/> and is freshly inspired and encouraged by Anna who facilitated the weekly Coaching Calls with Elliott Connie, Adam Froerer and Cecil Walker, and led the weekly SF Skills Practice groups. Amongst her million contributions to keeping the SFU on track in supporting and encouraging SFBT practitioners worldwide, in her 'spare time', Anna supports clients through her private practice *Good Grief Counselling*: <https://goodgriefcounselling.co.nz/>.

Anna has released a new video series through the SFU called "*Don't Forget*" where she shares inspiring and practical suggestions for building our confidence and competence as SFBT practitioners. Anna highlights common areas SFBT practitioners may get stuck and how to navigate our way around these to maintain our belief in our clients, ourselves and the SFBT process. Be inspired by Anna's first video in the series where she discusses the importance of adopting the SF mindset of believing in our clients: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erUczj3nozY>

Please join us at our WASFIG 12 August 2023 meeting (**at the special time of the second week of August instead of the last week of the month**) where Anna will join us live and talk about her SFBT work with clients experiencing grief and trauma, and share her own amazing SF journey which has led to her being CEO of the SFU. Find out what it is like working alongside SFBT powerhouses Elliott Connie, Adam Froerer and Cecil Walker and how the SFU supports and empowers practitioners globally as the largest SFBT training organisation! Please bring along your questions for Anna on working with clients experiencing grief or trauma or any other SFBT related questions.

We will send around more information and resources once we have confirmed these. We invite you to come along to meet Anna, ask your SF questions and share your thoughts with one of SFBT's leading ladies! Please let Steve and Kerry know if you would like to join us and we will email you the Zoom link.

### **ASFA CONFERENCE BRISBANE 7-9 July 2023:**

Reminder of the upcoming ASFA Conference in Brisbane at the Queensland University of Technology for 2023.

Have a look at this link for more information and to register:

<https://www.solutionfocused.org.au/conference/2023-conference>

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

### **FIND US ON FACEBOOK: WA SFBT Interest Group Facebook Group**

Please join our WASFIG Facebook Group to keep connecting and building our network between meetings, see up to date news and information for our group, share great SFBT resources and get support in working with clients. If you have any more thoughts to add on this June 2023 Summary it would be great to start a discussion in the Facebook group so we can all join in: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3103428583276551>

Thank you again to all attendees who shared their thoughts and experience of SFBT and we look forward to seeing you again at our August 2023 meeting.

*Indeed on reflection we realised that there was no reason for change to be painful since after all change, we realised, was happening all the time and indeed the client was already living elements of their preferred future, the exceptions and the instances that so often went unnoticed or at the least unvalued. Further change could be thought of as the client doing more of things that they were already doing. The person that the client wished to be was already there, present albeit in the shadows of the client's life, unnoticed, and very often all that we were doing was asking questions which invited that version of the client into the lime-light, to take front-stage.*

*– Evan George (2022)*