

Western Australian Solution Focused Interest Group (WASFIG) Meeting 20



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

1. Share SF knowledge and update our SF knowledge since our original training;
2. Connect and network with like-minded SF practitioners to reduce isolation and enhance a community spirit;
3. Grow interest in the SFBT approach in WA and beyond and 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 for greater focus;
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 20 Review: Saturday 26 October 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time

When: Saturday 26 October 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD = 11:30pm-1:30pm; VIC/NSW = 12:30pm-2:30pm), SA/NT = 12pm-2pm; New Zealand = 2:30pm-4:30pm)

Where: Zoom

Attendees: Dion Sing, Matt Cameron, Theresa Acutt, Nadia Truong, Samantha Smith, Michele Thomas, Shona Scallan, Heather Bunting, Tracy Shirvill, Ruth Leveson, Tash Canes, Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond (Co-ordinators).

Apologies: Emma Burns, Rebekah Collins, Roger Lowe, Fiona Skahill, Ben Buttfield, Sara Ristovska, Lucy Fisher, and Yvette Strawbridge.

Group Facilitators: Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond

Group Presenter: Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond

Building Towards Better: Cutting Edge Solution Focused Ideas and Practice Reflections for 2024.

Our last WASFIG meeting of the year reviewed highlights of SFBT ideas and practice from 2024. Steve shared cutting edge SF ideas and his key learnings of latest SFBT thoughts from UK SFBT Conference 2024, and Steve and Kerry both presented key learnings of latest SFBT thoughts from ASFA Sydney Conference 2024 with Mark McKergow as keynote speaker. It is encouraging to be around and connect with like-minded SF practitioners who are passionate and energetic about making a difference in their clinical, organisational or educational fields. We were excited to be joined by Dion Sing, President of ASFA, who kindly shared his time and experience with us!

Steve invited attendees to introduce themselves and to reflect on and share one word that described our current interest in SFBT. This was a great way to pause and reflect on our SF journey as practitioners and what this means to us at the moment. My word was 'breathe'. SFBT helps me 'breathe' despite problem saturated narratives clients can present with, and in turn this helps me help my client's breathe as well as they consider answers to SF questions which can bring them closer to articulating the change they would like to bring into their lives despite the problem.

It was a pleasure to hear the thoughts and experiences attendees shared and how everyone's words resonated with us as well. We were inspired to hear glimpses into the work practitioners are doing with their clients and the difference they are making by inviting their clients to notice what they might have missed when focusing on the problem. We were also pleased to hear practitioners reflecting on the positive impact SFBT has had on strengthening themselves personally! As Evan George of BRIEF London has said, SFBT is good for our clients and good for ourselves as practitioners as well!

Executive Summary

For clarity we decided to create a summary of the key points presented by Steve and Kerry and invite you to refer to the expanded notes at the end of the WASFIG October 2024 Summary.

Steve's Key Points from the UKASFP Conference in Colchester 2-3 July 2024:

1. Being your best solution focused sponge: a reflection on learning the solution focused approach - Katie Turner
2. "Bravery over comfort" Thinking about what works to make BRIEF SF training stick? - Ian Smith and Juul Haakonen.
3. NHS Culture Change using SF Practice - Andrew Gibson

Kerry's Key Points from ASFA Sydney Conference 12-15 September 2024:

1. Mark McKergow - Change is happening all the time, notice useful change and amplify it.
2. Mark McKergow – How Does SFBT 'Work'? Stretching the Mind or World of the Client
3. Emma Burns - Talk to the person, not the offender.

Steve's Key Points from ASFA Sydney Conference 12-15 September 2024:

4. Recording sessions Open Space facilitated by Miriam Korman
5. Matt Cameron Grief and Loss and the Solution Focused Approach
6. SFBT and spirituality - the view both ways Steve Runciman's Open Space

Kerry's Final Key Points from ASFA Sydney Conference 12-15 September 2024:

4. Mark McKergow - SFBT Ruffles Feathers by Challenging Widely Accepted Common Knowledge in the Psychology Field
5. Adam Froerer - No Pain No Gain VS Less Pain, More Comfortable Gain
6. Matt Cameron - SFBT in Two Questions

Resources:

Matt Cameron kindly shared:

His website to find more information on the 6 C's in grief work and SFBT practice exercises:
<https://discoversolutions.nz/>

A useful children's book about grief and loss:

<https://youtu.be/TeEbud74OwM>

References:

Connie, E. E. and Froerer, A. S. (2024), *Change Your Questions, Change Your Future: Overcome Challenges and Create a New Vision For Your Life Using the Principles of Solution Focused Brief Therapy*, California: Hay House LLC

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

Information for our Upcoming WASFIG Zoom Meeting 21 in February 2025

WASFIG February 2025 Zoom Meeting 21: Saturday 22 February 2025 9:30am-11:30am WA Time

When: Saturday 22 February 2025 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD = 11:30pm-1:30pm; VIC/NSW = 12:30pm-2:30pm), SA/NT = 12pm-2pm; New Zealand = 2:30pm-4:30pm)

Topic: Digging for Gold in the Journal of Solution Focused Practices

Please join us to reawaken our SF energy after a well deserved holiday break over the new year on Saturday 22 February 2025 9:30am-11:30am WA time. There are so many inspiring articles in the *Journal of Solution Focused Practice* that has free online access <https://journalsfp.org/>. Our only limitation is time! There is even a handy search function in the top right corner of the website to search for a topic that interests you! Let's band together and prioritise a SF treasure hunting expedition through the journal over the holidays and come back to share the gold nuggets you discovered!

In preparing for our February 2025 WASFIG meeting:

- Come along and bring your favourite SFBT article from the *Journal of Solution Focused Practices* and 3 to 5 points to share with the group about what you learnt or found interesting about the article;
- What difference using these lessons have made in your client work and in your personal life, or what difference you hope it will make in future;
- Once you have chosen your article please send an email to invictuscounsellingservice@gmail.com by **1 February 2025** to let Kerry know the name and link to this. On 1 February 2025 Kerry will email a Zoom link for the meeting along with a list of articles that have been chosen by attendees for anyone who might like to have a look at your article ahead of time to prepare some comments to better engage with your thoughts at the meeting;

- We also invite you to ask any questions on client cases you have or if you are feeling stuck with a client and would like some inspiration from the group to reconnect to the Solution Focused mindset to move the session forward in a positive way for your client.
- Or just join us to enjoy hearing about the lessons learnt, changes made and skills developed that you might like to try out in your own life in becoming the practitioner you aspire to be!

WASFIG News:

- **ASFA Conference 2025: November in Dunedin, New Zealand.** Stay tuned for more details about the date and who the Keynote presenter will be! Follow our WASFIG Facebook page and see the ASFA website: <https://www.solutionfocused.org.au/>
- **ASFA Conference October 2026 in Perth?!** Thank you again to our Perth based members Shona, Samantha, Theresa, Fiona and Amy who have volunteered to help Steve and I research the possibility of an ASFA conference in Perth! We are still collecting numbers of who would be interested to attend to know whether there is enough interest to host a Perth conference so please reach out if you have not already!
- **November 2024 SFBT Skills Practice and Supervision Groups** with Kerry via Zoom – Friday 8 November 2024 9:30am-11:30am and Saturday 23 November 2024 9:30am-11:30am. The last SFBT Skills Practice and Supervision groups for 2024 are on in November.

November 2024: Solution Focused Skills Practice and Supervision Groups via Zoom

“When we struggle in session we may feel we have done a bad job, but when we are struggling is when we are most creative but we tend to focus on the struggle instead of the creativity. It is easier to see the brilliance in our colleagues that we struggle to see within ourselves.” – Chris Iveson, June 2024

SF group supervision is an opportunity to share in the same inspiring and hopeful conversations that we have with our clients with each other as practitioners. I find it energising to leave with useful SF ideas to use with my clients, rather than having suggestions that don't always fit with my way of weaving hope into gaps in client conversations. SF colleagues are focusing on what we did well with our client and what is working to build on to move more intentionally in the direction of bringing desired change into their life.

You are warmly invited to join Solution Focused Skills Practice and Supervision Groups with Kerry Drummond (Clinical Counsellor and Registered Supervisor with the ACA, Level 4). Experience the Solution Focused 'difference that makes a difference' and leave group supervision feeling energised with a sense of renewed confidence as a practitioner. These are open groups embracing the SF mindset trusting that you know when group supervision would be most useful to engage in for yourself. With changing life circumstances, what was once a suitable time locked in at the beginning of the year might not be useful later in the year. SF Skills Practice and Supervision Groups are an empowering space where practitioners can feel a sense of connection, validation and encouragement.

Groups are held during the year on the alternate month to WASFIG (March, May, July, September, November) either on a Friday or Saturday for 2 hours via Zoom with 3 or 4 practitioners to receive support on client cases and to practice SF skills together. The next groups will be held on **Friday 8 November 2024 at 9:30am-11:30am WA time** and **Saturday 23 November 2024 9:30am-11:30am**. Fees are \$80 for the two hour group. There is a 10% discount (\$72) for your first group for WASFIG members who have attended a meeting, a training workshop with Steve and Kerry, and for all ASFA members. Please contact Kerry on invictuscounsellingservice@gmail.com for more information. Looking forward to connecting with everyone to share SF ideas on client cases and to build fluency in SF practice.

What are your Best Hopes for WASFIG 2025?

We invite you to consider topics to discuss at WASFIG in 2025. Please share these with us via email us or on the WASFIG Facebook page. We would love to hear about your SFBT work with clients and how this has made a positive difference for them. If you would like to present some of your 'sparkling moments' of client work at a WASFIG meeting, we would be happy to facilitate and support you with this.

To connect with SF practitioners across Australasia, please join the ***Australasian Solution Focused Association (ASFA)*** to access free training during the year, monthly online peer group supervision on Monday afternoons, discounts for SF training and the ASFA Conference, and access to the private Facebook group. <https://www.solutionfocused.org.au/>

Tap into inspiring conversations between WASFIG meetings by joining our ***WASFIG Facebook Group!*** Keep connecting and building our network between meetings, see up to date news and information for our group, share great SFBT resources and link in with support while working with your clients: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3103428583276551>

Thank you all for attending our October 2024 WASFIG meeting! We look forward to seeing all who can attend our first WASFIG meeting in February as we go on an SF adventure digging for gold in the *Journal of Solution Focused Practice*, to awaken our SF energy for continuing to be the difference that makes the difference in 2025.

Warmly,

Kerry and Steve

WA SFBT Interest Group Co-Coordiators

October 2024

"Change is happening all the time, notice useful change and amplify it." – Mark McKergow

Expanded Notes from Steve and Kerry's Key Ideas and Practices from the UKASFP and ASFA Conferences 2024

Steve shared some of his highlights from the **UKASFP Conference in Colchester 2-3 July 2024**:

1. Being your best solution focused sponge: a reflection on learning the solution focused approach - Katie Turner

SR suggestion: Write your own story of 'When I fell in love with SF and what makes the love continue to grow?'

2. "Bravery over comfort" Thinking about what works to make BRIEF SF training stick? Ian Smith and Juul Haakonen.

SR suggestion - Implement real-play training quickly and comprehensively in your work site with others doing likewise with you.'

3. NHS Culture Change using SF Practice Andrew Gibson

SFP is our club that we are members of and drive forward.

SR suggestion – Reflect on what you are building for the future of SFP?

Kerry followed on from Steve sharing some highlight from the **ASFA Sydney Conference 12-15 September 2024**:

1. **Mark McKergow - *Change is happening all the time, notice useful change and amplify it.***

This is another good 'anchor in the problem storm' quote. It is easy to be overwhelmed when the client is talking about the problem or it is a complex problem with a long history and we worry about how to fix this big problem. This quote is another reminder that we do not have to 'fix' the problem. We just have to ask what the client wants instead of the problem and then notice when this change the client wants is already happening and ask questions about this to amplify it for the client and bring these moments out of 'the shadow' as Evan George of BRIEF has said. Chris Iveson of BRIEF has said the client comes to the session with both the problem and the solution, a gap in the problem is a piece of solution to be built on.

Problem-focused approaches focus on the stuckness of the problem, instead solution focus shifts to what is already working, reduce the pain of problems. There is already something working to build on, and the practitioner does not need to do the 'unsticking' (or fixing) of the problem as this has already started, the practitioner instead looks for gaps in the problem to build on and shifts the client's attention to the unsticking of the problem that they did not notice was already there.

2. **Mark McKergow – *How Does SFBT 'Work'? Stretching the Mind or World of the Client***

"Language creates reality rather than describes it." – Steve de Shazer.

Mark McKergow shared that Gregory Bateson (grandfather of SFBT) whose ideas around communication Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg built on in creating SFBT, perceived 'mental illness' as *disrupted communication patterns*.

- Clients have ruminated and built language for the problem in their own minds and with family and friends over the years.
- In this way, clients have 'disrupted' their capacity to communicate about their Best Hopes/Desired Outcome as they have focused more on problem language and becoming an 'expert' on their problem.
- Instead, SFBT works to 'stretch the mind or world' of the client as Mark suggested, by looking to 'interrupt the problem pattern' (Jacqui von Cizifra-Bergs) by inviting the client into a description of their Best Hopes and Desired Transformation to build language for 'wellness' rather than 'mental illness'.

- Engaging in the SF process can lead clients to experience hope, positive emotion, improved creativity, and problem solving capacity which can enable them to more clearly see the presenting opportunities they have 'mentally rehearsed' in session showing up in their life, and to take the pathways that will more likely lead to the change they wanted.

3. Emma Burns - Talk to the person, not the offender.

Emma shared this powerful comment during her presentation on Solution Focused by Stealth. We can of course generalise this for those of us not usually working with offenders to 'talk to the person not the problem'.

This idea sits with the SF mindset or stance that chooses to view the client as a person capable of success rather than from a lens of their presenting problem or diagnosis. This mindset is a powerful 'tool' we bring into the session and with it we bring hope and possibility which aligns with the client's hope and possibility for coming to the session to see change in their life. When we talk to the person, not the problem, and we assume and believe in their capacity for success, the version of the client who aligns with this desired change is evoked to engage in the session and reclaim control of their life.

As is acknowledged in the SF community now, it is actually the SF mindset or stance which is more important than the SF questions that we ask (you can ask SF questions in a problem focused way when they are mistakenly used for assessment) as our questions naturally follow our mindset. When we believe in our client and speak to the version of themselves they wish to be, the client builds language for this version (Mark's mind or world stretching) and they transform more into this version. The version of the client who leaves the session is different to the version who arrived. "How we see a person impacts how we speak to the person which impacts who they become". Evan George and Chris Iveson have said we co-create our clients in session by choosing which version of the client to have a conversation with and bring into the session.

Steve shared his highlights from the **ASFA Sydney Conference 12-15 September 2024**:

4. Recording sessions Open Space facilitated by Miriam Korman

Mark McKergow - Steve de Shazer suggested share with colleagues 2x 5mins of sessions that did/not go well.

SR suggestion - Audio record, listen when convenient

5. Matt Cameron Grief and Loss and the Solution Focused Approach What we see (and hear) depends mainly on what we look (and listen) for. John Lubbock

The loss will always be there and we continue to live with it What helps? Look for signs of 'continuing bonds' and the 6 Cs Connection, Compassion Contribution Curiosity, Creativity, Confidence

SR suggestion – Review one of your losses in light of the 6 C's and idea of 'continuing bonds' with lost loved ones.

6. SFBT and spirituality - the view both ways Steve Runciman's Open Space

"I think the reason we spend so much time developing this model has much to do with wanting to show professional people how to be respectful of the people they work with. That is what I consider as very holy."
Insoo Kim Berg

Integrated SFBT and spirituality – Faith, hope, love, gratitude, interconnection, interdependence, meaning are values which underpin both the SF approach, and spirituality. They can speak to and help each other.

SR suggestion – What is one of your deepest values and how do you express this in your work as a SFBT practitioner?

Kerry shared her final reflections of key points from the **ASFA Sydney Conference 2024**:

4. *The (SF) Difference that Makes a Difference: Mark McKergow - SFBT Ruffles Feathers by Challenging Widely Accepted Common Knowledge in the Psychology Field:*

Why the push back on SFBT given it's benefit to clients and practitioners alike?

Mark pointed out that SFBT challenges widely accepted common knowledge in the psychology field:

- Effective therapy takes a long time
- Clients cannot be trusted to make their own decisions
- Practitioners need to read between the lines
- Effective work needs to go 'deep'
- Big problems require big fundamental shifts.

SFBT Perspective:

Effective therapy takes a long time → change is happening all the time.

SFBT values brevity and knows that change can happen in a moment, this ah-ha moment can change a client's life from then on, this is the power of single session therapy.

Clients cannot be trusted to make their own decisions → from competition to collaboration, belief in the client and their capacity for success and the 'death of resistance'

- *Good for the client* – enables the client to hold onto their self belief throughout the sessions rather than the practitioner holding this at the beginning and having to rebuild self belief in the client later.
- *Good for the practitioner* - hearing about positive change clients have made but forgot to notice not only builds hope for clients but also our vicarious resilience against vicarious trauma.
- Working in collaboration instead of in competition with a client can also build a stronger therapeutic relationship.

Practitioners need to read between the lines to decide what the client's 'real' issue is → adopting radical acceptance, believe in our client not always believe our client – see through the problem to possibility – listen to the problem and hear the hope (Simon and Taylor)

- SFBT adopts a radical acceptance approach when working with clients, accepting what they say as true for themselves at the time, adopting a position of engaging with our client with genuineness, non-judgemental acceptance and unconditional positive regard instead of adopting a 'practitioner knows best as the expert' approach.
- Focusing more on the client's Best Hopes rather than focusing on the practitioner's Best Hopes for the client to work on reduces resistance and enables the client to engage in the therapeutic process to bring positive change in the area of life they would like to focus on which can then have a positive ripple effect on other areas of their life as well.
- Mark provided the example that if the client reports they have no drinking problem we accept this and move to talk about something that is important for the client to focus on, being a good parent. Working on being a good parent can indirectly create positive change within the client's substance use as well. A client wanting to be at their best as a father would then realise they cannot engage in substance abuse as the version of the client that is a good father cannot coexist with the version of the client who engages in substance abuse. In contrast, focusing on getting the client to admit they have a drinking problem sets up a power struggle, blame, shame and resistance.

Effective work needs to go 'deep' -> stay on the surface to be present and hear the client's immediate concerns to engage in relevant and meaningful conversations.

- Stay on the surface - When searching for what is below the surface, what is 'deep' we take our eyes off what is in front of us and likely to be most important to the client – be present and connected with your client in the moment for them to feel heard and their words prioritised.
- These conversations are more likely to be 'deep' and meaningful in the right way for the client.

Big problems require big fundamental shifts -> small shifts have a power impact, SF is outcome and difference focused, looking to amplify gaps in the problem and instances of the outcome.

- SFBT is not focused on the problem but is focused on what the client wants despite the problem, building more of what the client wants instead of the problem shrinks the focus going into the problem so it is less consuming of the client's life. SFBT acknowledges one small change can impact the system, the value of small differences and ripple effects that have a powerful impact.
- Chris Iveson has acknowledged that clients come with the problem and a piece of the solution to be amplified. We listen to the client for exceptions (gaps) to the problem or instances of their Best Hopes being present and look to amplify this through questions.

5. 'No Pain, No Gain' VS 'Less pain, more comfortable gain' SFBT looks to See the Possibility Amidst the Pain

Kerry added in another feather ruffler 'No Pain, No Gain' VS 'Less pain, more comfortable gain' SFBT looks to see the possibility amidst the pain as an alternative perspective in addressing trauma as shared by Adam Froerer of the SFU.

- There is the belief that in order for counselling to be effective, a client must sit in their pain in order to process trauma in the body and heal from this.
- SFBT challenges this idea and encourages practitioners to realise there is another way to bring change into a client's life without causing more suffering from past challenges and trauma.
- This is to listen for the hope and possibility the client brought with them to the session amidst the pain and look to amplify this instead – 'water the flowers and not the weeds', 'if you focus on the pain you will continue to suffer, if you focus on the lesson you will continue to grow'.
- Kerry asked this question of Adam Froerer to get a good response to be able to more clearly explain this to practitioners who ascribe to the 'no pain no gain' approach and Adam kindly created a video response: https://youtu.be/Kfovo2C_duc?si=K6MTGF978hJHzvF9

6. Matt Cameron - SFBT in Two Questions

Matt Cameron presented workshops on grief and on working with children and young people. Matt shared that Chris Ward (UK SF therapist, coach, Registered Mental Health Nurse and founding member of the SFU) suggested that SFBT can be summed up in 2 questions 'Instead?' and 'Suppose?'.

1. Instead – "What would you like instead of...(the problem)?"
2. Suppose – "Suppose you woke up tomorrow and it was just one of those days where you were at your very best, what might be the first sign you would notice..?" (also history and resource description questions)

Steve reflected that he had read that 'what else?' is the most commonly used SF questions in session so we added this to the list to have *SFBT in Three Questions*.

3. What else? – “What else would let you know?” (also who else?, where else?, how else?)

Reflecting and building on this Kerry shared that SFBT can actually be summed up in *Ten Questions*:

1. **‘Best hopes?’** – ‘What are your *Best Hopes* from our talking together?’
2. **‘Instead?’** – ‘What would you like *instead* of X?’
3. **‘What difference?’** – ‘What *difference* would that make?’
4. **‘Suppose...?’** – ‘Suppose you woke up tomorrow and somehow it was one of those days where you were at your very best, what might be the first thing you would notice that would let you know this had happened?’ (this also includes history and resource description questions)
5. **‘What else?’** – ‘What *else* would let you know?’ (also who else?, where else?, how else?)
6. **‘How much?’** – ‘How *much* of what you want is happening already?’ (scaling for progress)
7. **‘How did?’** – ‘How *did* you do that?’
8. **‘Happening more?’** – ‘What would you first notice that would let you know it was *happening more*?’
9. **‘Noticing signs?’** – ‘Would you mind *noticing signs* of your Best Hopes showing up in your life over the next week?’
10. **‘What’s been better?’** – ‘What’s *been better* or different since our last session?’