

2. *The 6th Focusing International Conference*

Focusing with a small 'f' refers to a natural human process of putting attention onto something. With a capital 'F', Focusing is a method that helps to develop the process of focusing on internal experience. The 6th Focusing International Conference was held in Germany in May 1994.

Peter Afford

I take my hat off to the German focusers. They have managed to preserve the eccentric spirit of Focusing while at the same time organising themselves as impressively as the British expect of German folk. And, to boot, they do it in style. The conference – the first Focusing International to be held away from Chicago, its birthplace – included specially commissioned artwork and entertaining touches, such as the magician who opened the proceedings with the help of a deck of cards and a self-levitating cigarette.

The magician was followed by Gene Gendlin. Gene had come just for the first evening to exercise his prerogative as the grandfather of Focusing: to exhort us all to seek out philosophers and tell them about the innate knowingness of the body (Gene leads a double life at the University of Chicago as a philosopher and a psychologist). Later, he demonstrated his devastatingly successful ploy to get people talking in a large group — he simply points at someone, and says 'say something!'. Those who were pointed at obliged.

The great debate of the conference was around the question 'Shall we have a Fo-

cusing therapy?' – that is, a specific school of psychotherapy with Focusing at its centre, whatever else it might have around its edges. The main people proposing this were the Germans and Kathy McGuire from Oregon. The German focusers are so well developed that they are now in a position to train therapists in depth in a style of working with Focusing at the core.

Reluctant to accept the idea and the name 'Focusing Therapy' were some other Europeans and the Focusing Institute. In some countries, Focusing is already well integrated with the person-centred approach, the resulting blend sometimes being known as 'experiential therapy'. And the traditional view that Gendlin and many others have held is that Focusing is best mixed into other approaches rather than standing on its own.

The Germans, confident on their home territory, seemed to be winning the argument. Of course, they will not teach only Focusing; but what are they to call their therapy if not 'Focusing Therapy'? The term 'experiential' is too general, and would be claimed by most approaches and schools these days.

Barbara McGavin

The Focusing Institute in Chicago has acted as the centre for Focusing in the world for the past thirteen years. It has grown and developed and changed as Focusing has developed, and there is change in the wind again. The people at the Institute are also keenly aware that the old ways have outgrown their usefulness and new structures need to be found. Their primary concern is that the life that wants to grow and develop within the Focusing community will be able to move forward while ensuring that Focusing does not become diluted, distorted or fragmented.

We in Britain have been feeling the need to find a way of being able to train and accredit teachers in this country for some time. At the moment, people who wish to become accredited Focusing teachers have to travel to Chicago after they finish training here to do a week-long workshop with Mary McGuire and other Chicago trainers. These people are assessed and accredited individually. This has slowed the development of Focusing in this country considerably and left a number of skilled and experienced people feeling uneasy about their relationship with Chicago and the Chicago accredited trainers. To meet the challenge of finding new structures and developing our relationship with the Institute, the British Focusing Teacher's Association (BFTA) was formed.

There was a strong feeling that the people in the Focusing world are no longer willing to be supportive of a hierarchical centralised system. We need to have structures that mirror the underlying political

structures of Focusing – being true to the inner wisdom that each of us holds. The structures that evolve need to hold our diversity, allowing each to be heard, so that the diverse does not become divisive. We can be rich with variety that doesn't dilute or fragment us.

It is very clear to me that fears must not be the reason that we choose structures – fears for Focusing, or our livelihood or our status. I am clear that we need to find our solutions out of a deep sense of the green shoots pushing through. If we get the process of our finding this structure right then I have confidence that the structure that comes will be perfect for this situation. If the ability to change is built in so that we do not become structure bound, then we will not find ourselves saddled with something that will restrict us or quickly become outdated.

As a group we are committed to work for consensual agreement, shared responsibility and equal involvement. A central facet of our approach is the process of self and peer assessment of trainees and trainers. We are committed to working together in a way that ensures that everybody will be heard, that there is space for Focusing and Listening, that human relationships are taken care of, and that we will never get turned into a hierarchy or a bureaucracy. The warmth and positive energy which we have felt at our initial meetings have been really wonderful. We have accomplished far more than we'd have believed possible, and all from within the Focusing process itself.