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## COVID-19 Challenge Cultivates Creativity and Connections

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## COVID-19 Challenge cultivates creativity and connections

Debbie Hogan and Dave Hogan

*JSFP* Donor: Academy of Solution Focused Training

During the initial phase of COVID-19, the Academy of SF was in the midst of our 2020 SF Therapy and SF Coach training. When it became apparent that the F2F training was not possible, we co-constructed alternatives with our participants. One group wanted to play it safe by deciding to take the training to an all online platform, which they adapted to quite well. We were already used to doing online training, but not everyone had this experience, so there was quite a bit of scepticism. In the end, participants were both pleased and surprised by the value and intimate nature of online training. We kept to the original training dates, with 1.5 hour session blocks, with breaks and a long lunch hour each day. For another group, they wanted to maintain the F2F format so they elected for a later date. As a concession for the 4-5 month delay until the next F2F training module, we offered free weekly “Coaches Meetup” sessions until we could resume our F2F training. This proved to be a valuable lifeline for most of the participants who were isolated as individuals or as a family unit. Some shared that our weekly sessions were the highlight of their week or the one oasis from their rather chaotic and stressful family life, taken over by home schooling or endless zoom work meetings. Our weekly meetings solidified relationships and created possibilities to practice their SF skills that otherwise was not possible. They were often re-grounded and re-aligned with the SF mindset, an important anchor during uncertain times when negativity can creep in.

During the subsequent weeks of the COVID-19, we saw the accumulative effects, the wear and tear on people’s nerves and the sense of helplessness many were feeling. Common themes of struggle emerged with both clients and trainees in our programs. With a firm belief that focusing on the questions “What is going well, in spite of?”, “What have you learned about yourself during this time?”, and “What difference has this made?”, useful conversations occurred. These discussions helped people to gain a sense of control, build their sense of resilience, and redirect feelings to hope and possibilities, all while acknowledging the hard pieces. This balance seemed to help.

We have a very strong and active SF community in Singapore and throughout the region. Our pre-COVID-19 Singapore based monthly SF Coaching Circle gatherings usually had around 8 – 15 attendees. Once we recalibrated to our online platform during COVID-19, our attendance has increased to more than 30 SF Coaches. Again, the message was clear, people long for and appreciate the support, meaningful connection, and the encouragement they receive from fellow SF practitioners.

As SF trainers and practitioners, we felt there was more we could do to support the wider SF community of therapists and coaches who were not already connecting on the channels described above, but were part of our Facebook, LinkedIn, and peer group gatherings. A lot of support was already being offered to individuals and families in the form of crisis lines. We felt more could be offered to front line workers, not just in the health care arena, but counsellors, especially school counsellors. Many were very creative in how they used social media and other alternatives for keeping in touch with students and families. The Academy reached out to professionals and offered free counselling, or coaching, for front-line workers. The stories we have heard are very touching and inspirational.

### Top 10 Collective lessons from the field

1. These tough times have brought out the best in people we know.
2. Everyone struggles and when you reach out, you realize you are not alone.
3. When you focus on the care of others, it helps to take the focus off of your own situation
4. Self-care is vital, especially during high stress times (e.g. adequate sleep, eating well, and exercise)
5. You can’t pour from an empty cup
6. Stay connected to others, especially to people that help you remain hopeful and optimistic
7. Stay tuned to your best coping strategies (common themes: mindfulness & gratitude)
8. Cultivate your personal ‘workspace’ and *HOW* you show up at “Your Best” (physical or mental)
9. This too shall pass.

10. Imagine you are sharing your experience, in a future time, of how you managed to survive well during the COVID-19 challenge, and your listeners are inspired and impressed by what they hear.... What is your story? (or your relevant version)

### **Importance of Supporting the Journal of Solution-Focused Practice**

We believe it is important to support cutting edge research in the field of Solution-Focused Practice, as well as highlighting creative applications of its use across different areas of practice. We also believe it is important to build contextualized, emergent practice and critical thinking within the context of the Asia Pacific region. Building a strong evidence-based body of research can only strengthen the appeal, understanding, and credibility of Solution-Focused approaches in the global arena.

Because of the close proximity of Australia and Singapore, it makes even more sense to build a strong alliance and collaboration between these two communities. This will promote the validity of the Solution-Focused approach in a wider context, not just in Singapore (Asian) or just in Australia (Western), but beyond both borders to the wider Asia Pacific region and beyond.

For many years, a common question asked by participants in Asia has been: “Yes, but does it work in Asia?” as there was a sense in which a perceived western concept or approach might not be relevant in Asia. There is a growing body of research to substantiate that Solution-Focused practice is both relevant and suitable within the Asian-Pacific context, but more evidence is needed. In 2017, the first seminal book was published, *Solution Focused Practice in Asia* edited by Debbie Hogan, Dave Hogan, Jane Tuomola and Alan Yeo. The 48 authors in this book represent SF practitioners across the Asia Pacific region. In May 2020, *Solution Focused Practice Around the World*, edited by Kirsten Dierolf, Debbie Hogan, Svea van der Hoorn and Sukanya Wignaraja was published to highlight the international appeal and applicability of Solution-Focused practice.

A limited amount of research on Solution-Focused practice is conducted in the region surrounding, and including, Singapore. Currently, the Academy is collaborating in a research project with Joe Chan and the REACH Youth Team in a research project in conjunction with National University of Singapore. The Academy has also collaborated with another SF practitioner conducting a research study on the efficacy of Solution-Focused approach (i.e. compliance of patient treatment outcomes) in the government hospital. We are excited that more research is being conducted in Singapore and the region.

The *Journal of Solution Focused Practices* provides a platform for newly emerging practitioners to highlight their work and creates an avenue for sharing, reflecting, and advancing best practices.

Finally, we want to celebrate with and applaud the work of David Hains, Sara Smock Jordan and their team for the impressive, high quality *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*. This journal will definitely elevate the work of Solution-Focused practice in the international community.

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