

# CANADIAN SFBT NEWSLETTER

FALL 2023

EDITOR: DINA BEDNAR

## Fall 2023

Welcome to our fall newsletter! The fall is one of my favourite times and the time of year that I start to make my plans for the year. Suppose a miracle happened and this turned out to be the best fall ever for you – how would you know? What would you be doing in the fall? What else? SFBT gives us the opportunity to live in what Bill O’Hanlon would call ‘possibility land’. The importance of that is if making space to have these conversations, that’s what SF does so brilliantly.

In this newsletter we have the privilege of an interview with Pamela King from Logan, Utah. After many years as an exceptional SFBT therapist and author of articles and a book on SF and children (book review in this newsletter), Pam has opened a SF training center that I had the good fortune to visit. WOW!!!!!!! Pamela is supervising and training in the true SF

way and it was a delight to witness it all. At the end of this newsletter we have included the links to Pam King’s training and some upcoming announcements from her center. We hope you enjoy the interview with Pam as much as I did!

Dr. Ron Warner, “the quiet giant of SFBT’ (Frank Thomas) in Canada has officially retired. If you have fond memories and recollections of this exceptional SFBT psychologist, trainer, educator, supervisor, and all around great guy we would love to hear them. Please send them to [info@Canadiansfbc.com](mailto:info@Canadiansfbc.com) .

We can be reached at: [info@CanadianSFBTC.com](mailto:info@CanadianSFBTC.com)

## TRIBUTE TO DR. RON WARNER

I had the good fortune to meet on Warner at the SFBT Conference in Banff, Alberta in 2011. It was the last

day and we met over breakfast and had a delightful discussion about the conference and the astounding utility of the SF approach. We spoke as if we had known each other for years – we were speaking the same language. A few weeks later Ron contacted me and asked if I wanted to instruct the SFBT child and adolescent workshop at the School of Social Work's continuing education at u of Toronto. And that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship and an inspirational professional relationship.

Ron Warner has been one of my major mentors and role models. I can safely say that he has done this for countless of others: psychologists, therapists, students and perhaps most importantly, clients throughout Canada and the world. It was Dr. Frank Thomas who called Ron the 'humble giant of SF in Canada'.

Ron started the SFBT Certificate program at the School of Social Work in 1999. He didn't have any great expectations and in the first few years he thought the program would be cancelled. It started as one course and slowly started to grow. The year 2023 marks twenty-four years of this outstanding program and a multitude

of graduates to the level of SFBT 'specialists' who are making a difference in mental health and other disciplines. Since Covid the certificate program has gone online and has drawn an even bigger audience. Wow! It has made a profound impact in Ontario, around Canada, and many parts of the world.

I particularly want to draw attention to two specific accomplishments/items/things, first, Dr. Warner's exceptional SFBT manual entitled "Interviewing for Solutions". If you do not have this book – get it! It is an elegant primer on how to conceptualize and utilize SFBT, it even includes information on micro-analysis and ways of looking at language. In this stellar book Ron also further simplifies SFBT by introducing three distinct phases of the interviewing process that he called the Tri-Phase approach: Empathy Phase, Goal Setting Phase, and Goal Striving Phase. I have learned a great deal from this man! He has been a mentor, a good friend, and an inspiration to me and probably to hundreds of others. Ron has promoted, trained, and instructed SFBT throughout Ontario and Canada. Thank you Ron for your lasting legacy and the indelible print you have left on all of us. Your voice

will go with me! Always – Merci! And enjoy this next chapter!!

#### INTERVIEW WITH PAM KING (WOW)

Pam, I am very excited that you have agreed to be interviewed! Your SF work with children is legendary and I still use your scaling tool. Not to mention your book on SF and children that I highly recommend: *Tools for effective therapy with children and families: A solution-focused approach* (there will be a book review in the newsletter).

Pam, how did you discover SFBT? Can you give us a short history?

My head was first turned in grad school, which was 30+ years ago. I was captivated and delighted by the ideas in *Working with the problem drinker: A solution-focused approach* by Insoo Kim Berg and Scott Miller and then *Family based services: A solution-based approach* by Insoo. I was fortunate to have Thorana Nelson (SF scholar and prolific writer) as the director of my program and later mentor, colleague, travel buddy, and friend. I saw Michelle Weiner-Davis teach at a conference in the early 90's which reinforced this career-long exploration of focusing on solutions. I started attending the SFBTA Conference in the early days, so I was fortunate to meet both Insoo and Steve de Shazer. I wish I'd had the chance

to study at BFTC, but thankfully Insoo and Steve's legacy was passed down through texts, videos, and generous teaching.

#### What 'hooked' you about SFBT?

The focus on what's working grabbed me first. It fit my world view. My mother taught me the Louis Shimon poem *I Know Something Good About You*. As a child, I found reassurance and I suppose a sense of direction in those words. Early in my career I worked in a domestic violence treatment program using a respectful, solution focused approach. I was able to balance safety and accountability with a future focused 'what do you want instead' mindset. These court ordered clients also played cello, coached soccer, loved to read, hike, or fish. I learned something good about them which often contributed to the solutions we co-constructed.

#### What keeps you hooked?

I recently realized this is my 30<sup>th</sup> year as a therapist. I refer to SF practice as *burnout prevention juice*. When we believe in our clients as experts in their own lives and trust they have what they need to succeed in life, it frees us from being a problem solver. Microanalysis of conversations is fascinating for me. In addition to live supervision and consultation, I look at tapes with my interns. This helps emerging therapists to notice what is working in their own work.

Pausing a tape and discussing what we see and hear slows down the process to notice what clients want and what is working.

Being a solution focused therapist or coach is a sort of choreography or conducting. As the ballet and symphony is co-constructed by talented artists and those who highlight and enhance those abilities, we as therapists and coaches capitalize on and highlight the good ideas of our clients to find the artistry in their lives.

[I know you have worked with some significant SFBT therapists – who have been your Mentors and how did they influence you?](#)

In my book dedication I mention Victor Nelson as *the best boss ever*. He helped shape my career and love of curiosity. Thorana Nelson, mentioned earlier, was an endless source of encouragement as I was writing my book and becoming an approved supervisor. There are so many people I admire and have learned from. Frank Thomas, Heather Fiske, Teri Pichot, Haesun Moon, Dominik Godat, and Elfie Czerny have been supporters and encouragers of my work. These SF friends saw something in me before I saw it, invited me to teach, and lifted up my work. I love the SF communities support of one another. Inviting me to this interview is one example of highlighting and celebrating colleagues. Thank you. I

have friends around the world because of my solution focus work.

[I had the privilege of coming to Logan, Utah and seeing your training center and agency – wow!! How did all that come about and what are your plans \(training plans?\)? How can people find out about your training?](#)

Having a training center is a 25-year-old dream. Some dreams have holding power! It came in several parts. Fifteen years ago, I re-started recording my own therapy sessions to use in workshops. This was followed by writing a couple of articles and then my book. I am thrilled and honored to teach internationally at conferences, institutes, and organizations. In 2020, pushed by the pandemic, I launched my online training center. Now I host renowned Solution Focused experts to encourage the growth and enthusiasm around SF practice. Having Dina Bednar (!! ) as an invited trainer was a recent sweeping success. The physical training and therapy center was built to my dream's specifications. Six therapy offices with viewing and recording capabilities and an observation room. It was an absolute treat to have you do guest supervision and encourage my trainees by watching live sessions and being part of our team.

[SFBT was always intended to be an approach and not a manualized model – this way we can tailor it to the client, but](#)

also utilize our own strengths as therapists. How have you adapted SFBT? What has been your evolution?

When I started writing about and teaching Solution Focused Play Therapy (SFPT) there were not many others (that I was aware of) doing this work. Now, thankfully, there are a number of researchers, scholars, and authors who have brought more light to SFPT.

What are you excited about right now?

Solution focused practice, improvisation, and humanitarian clowning share the same tenets. Make your partner look great = highlight what's working; Yes-And = co-creation and listen-select-build; focus on preferred future + laugh together.

Therapeutic clowning puts the care in healthcare. What excites me now? Sparking joy in others, loving humor, my big red shoes, and my clown nose of course!

"If people never did silly things nothing intelligent would ever get done."

**Ludwig Wittgenstein**

What advice would you give to developing SFBT Therapists?

Find your thing. When I was a new clinician, I thought there was nothing unique I could contribute. I was wrong. I am unique, while staying true to time honored SF tenets my application of SF is unique. Each of my clients are unique and

the solutions we build together are uniquely theirs.

The powerful learning experience of watching your tapes and being on a team can not be over-stated. Find a way to play with others.

A MILLION thanks dear Pam!!!!!! If you want to change a question or add a question, or omit a question please do!!

Thank you for this opportunity Dina. It was fun.

I Know Something Good About You

Louis C. Shimon 1935

Wouldn't this old world be better

If the folks we meet would say

—

"I know something good about you!"

And treat us just that way?

Wouldn't it be fine and dandy

If each handclasp, fond and

true,

Carried with it this assurance —

"I know something good about you!"

Wouldn't life be lots more

happy

If the good that's in us all

Were the only thing about us  
That folks bothered to recall?

Wouldn't life be lots more  
happy  
If we praised the good we see?  
For there's such a lot of  
goodness  
In the worst of you and me!

Wouldn't it be nice to practice  
That fine way of thinking, too?

You know something good  
about me;  
I know something good about  
you.

Book Review:

### Calendar:

Please send us your SFBT events so  
we may announce them to:  
[info@CanadianSFBTC.com](mailto:info@CanadianSFBTC.com)

Also we encourage you to visit  
Pamela King's website  
[www.solutionplay.net](http://www.solutionplay.net) for more  
information on Pam King, her  
training center, and the excellent  
workshop she delivers!

On December 8<sup>th</sup> Pam King and  
Chris Chickering are delivering an  
online workshop entitled *Magic and  
Mastery of Relational Ethics*.  
Register at [www.psychmaven.org](http://www.psychmaven.org)



**Book Review: *Tools for Effective  
Therapy with Children and Families:  
A Solution-Focused Approach* by  
Pamela K. King.**

Pamela King, an experienced and master  
solution-focused child therapist has  
written an excellent, practical, and  
hopeful primer to working with children  
using the solution-focused approach.  
Many years ago I attended a workshop of  
Pam's where she was also promoting her  
brilliant invention - a small magnetic  
white board with just enough space for a

long scale. Even though I had a big white board in my office this smaller one served as a reminder to me about how useful scaling is with children and it was conveniently portable for home or school visits. It quickly became an essential part of my work and I still have it! Pamela's book is full of these kind of creative, practical ideas and vignettes that bring her work alive to the reader.

Using the playful acronym HOPSCOTCH Pam sets out all the little steps (and sometimes big jumps) for success when working with children and their families. This book is well structured, the reader can easily start putting the essential pieces together such as the tenets and assumptions of SF; how to integrate play into effective therapy including specific games, the SF interventions and how to use them with children.

Pam intentionally highlights the importance of getting to know the child and the family and figuring out the goal, and how to word or reframe it for maximum impact. The books also focuses on how to use scaling and exceptions with this population in ways that invite imagination, playfulness, solutions and results.

The chapter on 'trauma and abuse solutions' is particularly useful. Here Pam highlights how asking questions allows children to discover and uncover their own strengths and competencies "and elicits *their* assessment of *their* accomplishment, which is more effective and likely longer lasting" (p.114) then simply complimenting children. Ms. King demonstrates how 'possible' therapist questions can elicit 'possible' positive attributions that can change the child's narrative/story about themselves. Here we see the dramatic power of languaging. This book offers many useful techniques and ways to approach change and finding solutions such as the exercise 'There's good stuff too', where the dialogue is not only on the hard stuff, but the okay stuff and even the 'good stuff' (p. 116). Using sentence stems such as '*I like looking at*', Pam invites children to see and appreciate the many ways they have and can develop to cope 'inch by inch' (p. 117). The author also provides methods to explain, normalize and reframe 'flashbacks' as a 'school false alarm', and other useful strategies. Additionally, I appreciated the many tidbits of information including advice Pam King received from Steve DeShazer that bring another level of 'knowing' to the work.

If you work with children and families this book should be in your library, I guarantee you that it will soon be worn by use. A ten out of ten! It is a pleasure to read!  
By Dina Bednar

## Training Pearl

One of the exercises that we utilize in our training is a strength finding exercise. And, we find that this is a rather an easy and fun exercise when we ask people to talk about something they like to do (i.e. hobby) and have people share strengths and values they hear as a result of the story shared.

Our exercise is a little different and we ask you to join us in this exercise. Find a partner and ask him/her to think about a pet peeve of theirs. What really bugs them? What can really get under their skin? Can they give examples of when this pet-peeve really got to them? Can they remember when they noticed it for the first time? Often a pet peeve has the potential to show weaknesses and the nasty side of us.

Yet, while your partner is sharing their story, your job is to only listen for strengths and values. Once she/he has finished their story, share with them your reflections of their strengths and give reasons as to why you saw these strengths and values. After you share this with them, ask them to reflect on your reflections. Then switch and share your pet peeve and give the other person the opportunity

to do the same. We are always so impressed with the depth of conversation this brings.

This past spring we had the privilege to do some training for the Durham School Board. Several people told us how this was such an amazing tool to use when they were frustrated with the student in front of them. They began to listen for strengths and values instead of problems. One person asked to leave for a few minutes so she could email her husband to tell him the strengths she now noticed in his pet peeve that often “drove her nuts” which in turn would result in frustration.

We encourage you to try this on personally and then try this the next time you hear a partner or parent talk about their frustrations (pet-peeves).

## UNTIL NEXT TIME...

We hope you have enjoyed this Newsletter! We welcome your training pearls, book reviews, or any other SFBT submissions. You can contact me (Dina Bednar) at [info@CanadianSFBTC.com](mailto:info@CanadianSFBTC.com). Also, we may be hosting a SFBT Working with Addictions course in 2024. If you are interested please let me know!

### WATCH FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE

We look forward to your feedback, questions, ideas, and subscription requests. Please contact us at [info@CanadianSFBTC.com](mailto:info@CanadianSFBTC.com)