

# SOLUTION FOCUSED PRACTICE IN ASIA



EDITED BY  
DEBBIE HOGAN, DAVE HOGAN,  
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In 2000, I was invited to Singapore by Insoo Kim Berg to offer training and supervision for a graduate diploma in solution-focused brief therapy. In 2004, three from that initial group set up the Academy of Solution Focused Training. It is a testimony to the sustained level of their enthusiasm and dedication, and that of later associates, that the Academy continues offering graduate courses; that training is being exported to other countries; that successful international conferences have been organised; and that now this book has been published, containing 50 chapters by 48 authors representing 11 countries in Asia. The breadth of applications of the solution-focused approach attests to the excitement and creativity generated in the region by those who have continued this work. This book is a worthy tribute.

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This book is a celebration of solution focused practice. It is full of gems: simple stories, both practical and inspirational, which take the reader on a journey through street gangs, hospitals, boardrooms and many other places where solution focused work can be found. Examples range from how to engage disaffected youth, create a better work-life balance, improve performances or manage an impossibly busy workload by developing the 10 minute session. This is a showcase book, a convincing account of how a solution focused approach can be applied to almost any area of life in any part of the world. Do not hide this book. Keep it in view, not on a bookshelf!

Chris Iveson, BSc  
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BRIEF  
London, UK

This book is a must have for any clinician who wants to use the solution focused approach in today's society in any country with any population. This compilation of work provides the reader with explanations and applications of the solution focused approach in a multitude of settings. Written clearly with case studies, lists of questions and concepts of the solution focused approach, the reader will find virtually any situation in mental health typically brought to therapy in this book. The use of case studies in business, schools, hospitals, agencies and more shows how the model is versatile and usable when its core tenets are used to construct valuable questions. Those new to the solution focused approach will efficiently learn how the approach works. Seasoned solution focused practitioners will find themselves smiling at the end of each case description.

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This is an impressive book. It's impressive through the span of the work presented, the number of people who are doing it, the diversity of the use of solution focused brief therapy techniques in so many diverse settings and with such diversity of practitioners' experience.

As I read this book I was reminded of something Steve de Shazer once said to me:

Solution focus is a slow virus. Sometimes someone tells me that they heard about this stuff 10 years ago, didn't like it, thought it was oversimplistic and now it has eaten itself into their practice in such a way that they can't stop doing it.

I think Asia is infected.

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This book is more than yet another book on SF practice: It is a comprehensive collection of examples of the many and varied applications of the SF approach across many countries within the Asia-Pacific region.

There is something for everyone within this book, whether it be SF therapy, supervision, school counselling, coaching, training, consulting or managing change.

I have found many of the chapters most interesting, and one which I like particularly is a Singaporean one, written by a senior school counsellor. It deals with the 'I don't know' response that so many of us get when working with young people. It outlines how persistence pays off when the firm belief is held by the counsellor that perhaps the young person does know really, or eventually, they will know.

Debbie, Dave, Jane and Alan have achieved a mammoth task, in both editing the book and writing their own offerings, to make this such a wonderful collection of SF practice stories. Furthermore, among SF texts generally, my belief is that it will soon be regarded as a seminal work.

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## **Solution Focused Practice in Asia**

This book is a collection of solution focused practice across Asia, offering case examples from the fields of therapy, supervision, education, coaching and organisation consulting. It demonstrates the usefulness of the solution focused approach in the Asian context by providing practice-based evidence, and highlights the diversity of application. By sharing real case examples in action across Asia, it is the aim of this book to stimulate the curious and inspire the converted. It gives readers a taste of what it is like to use this approach within an Asian context, in different areas of practice and within a broad spectrum of clinical issues. The examples offer exciting and creative ways in which solution focused practice can be used within the Asian context – with the hope that more practitioners will be curious enough to give solution focused practice serious consideration as a viable, evidence-based practice.

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## **Solution Focused Practice in Asia**

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**Debbie Hogan**

**To my husband, Dave, who is my best supporter and encourager in life and in work and loves me unconditionally. To my daughter, Breda, who has touched my life so profoundly and so deeply and the gift she continues to be in my life. To Insoo Kim Berg, who inspired me and encouraged me to keep going. And I never turned back.**

**Dave Hogan**

**To Debbie, my best friend and partner in life, who through her dogged, disciplined and dedicated determination ‘dragged’ me into the amazing Solution Focused world and introduced me to new friends and opened new doors of joyful collaboration together.**

**Jane Tuomola**

**To my husband, Petri, who is always there for me; my daughter Sophia, whom I miss more than words can say and who inspires me to make the most out of life; my daughter Alexandra who brings untold joy and laughter into our lives; and my growing bump, whose imminent arrival has helped push this project through to completion – we can’t wait to meet you!**

**Alan K.L. Yeo**

**To my dad and late mum; the love you have given me will last me several lifetimes. To Debbie, for teaching me that the best gifts are the ones we can pass on.**

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# Foreword

This book gives us the opportunity to walk through a wonderful garden where we can admire what becomes possible when the soil, the irrigation and the fertilising is perfectly adjusted to the need of every single plant. In other words, it is a testament to the huge work that has been done by all the people who have been trained in the solution-focused (SF) approach in Asia. It is a testament to their flexibility and their competence to make the essentials of the solution-focused approach work, embedded in different environments with various values and belief systems. What impresses me most is the high level of awareness to not leave footprints behind and the big effort to use language that can be understood and that is filled with the sense of the cultural context the clients live in. This work has been successfully done in many different fields: therapy, supervision, in schools, coaching and organisational development.

All this would not be possible without the little SF plant that Insoo and Steve planted at the beginning of this century in this part of the world and the way Debbie and Dave Hogan nurtured this seedling with devotion, passion, endurance and high professional skill to make it grow to the Asian SF tree of today.

Since 2004 the Academy of Solution Focused Training has offered multiple trainings in Singapore as well as abroad. It also offers a lot of SF supervision, a necessary core experience for everyone that starts to work in a solution-focused way. Here, I wish to highlight another step Debbie and Dave took—to my understanding, a very altruistic step. They encouraged people to offer local SF training possibilities, for instance in the Philippines as well as in Indonesia.

All these enormous efforts the two made, and with them many former trainees, created the preconditions so that the knowledge of

the model, or let me call it the SF virus, could spread in Asia as fast as it did.

Yet, there is even more to discover in this book: If you listen to the different authors' thoughts on how they made cultural adaptations it is like listening to a new description of the model you are very familiar with, and this turns out to be a big enrichment. Besides that, you will find many inspiring new ideas on how SF work can be done, in ways that will work throughout the world. It is like a box that holds many little and big treasures for anyone that gives support from the SF stance.

A big thanks to you, Debbie and Dave, my dear friends, and all the co-editors and authors for the wonderful job you have done and still do.

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## Biographies of the Editors

**Debbie Hogan**, originally from the US, has lived in Singapore for 28 years. She has a BS in Psychology, an MS in Counselling and an Advanced Certificate in Ericksonian Psychotherapy and Hypnotherapy. She is Board Certified with the American Psychotherapy Association, with over 30 years of experience as a psychotherapist, and is a Master Clinical Member and Supervisor with the Singapore Association for Counselling. Debbie trained with Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer and earned a Graduate Diploma in Solution Focused Brief Therapy. As a family therapist in private practice, she works with a wide range of clinical issues. Debbie is a Professional Certified Coach and Mentor Coach with the International Coach Federation and coaches executives and individuals from the private sector. Debbie is the Managing Director of the Academy of Solution Focused Training and conducts training in the solution focused model in therapy, education and coaching, leading to professional certification. She is a Supervisor and Examiner with the Canadian Council of Professional Certification and the International Alliance of Solution Focused Teaching Institutes. Debbie has been interviewed on the radio and has contributed to numerous magazine articles and book chapters, including *The Art of Solution Focused Therapy* and *Encounters with Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg*.

**Dave Hogan** has an MTh in Theology and a BA in French, with a specialisation in Coaching and Counselling. He is originally from the US and has been involved in spiritual development and leadership training and development in Asia for more than 30 years. As a consultant he has worked with many organisations in team building, organisational development and change management. Dave is a Professional Certified Coach with the

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**Dr Jane Tuomola** is a Clinical Psychologist, originally from the UK, who has lived and worked in Singapore for the last eight years. She completed her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Sheffield. Following that, she worked for several years in the NHS, specialising in adult mental health with an interest in psychosis. She has supervised for over 10 years, including trainee and qualified clinical psychologists, nurses, social workers and case managers, in both individual and group supervision. In Singapore she has worked in private practice, and as a Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at **James Cook** University, teaching on the Masters and Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Courses. She supervised interns on clinical placements as well as supervising research theses. She completed a graduate diploma in solution focused therapy in 2010. As well as using this model with clients, she has supervised others in the approach and taught a basic introduction to solution focused therapy course to psychology students. She is also a consultant to the Early Psychosis Intervention Programme at the Institute of Mental Health. She is a Master Solution Focused Practitioner (International Alliance of Solution-Focused Teaching Institutes) and Certified Solution Focused Therapist (Canadian Council of

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**Alan K. L. Yeo** has a BSc (Hons) in Psychology, an MA in Experimental Psychology and an MEd. He also has an Advanced Certificate in Eriksonian Hypnotherapy. He is an Associate of the Academy of Solution Focused Training, Singapore. He is a Registered Counsellor and Registered Clinical Supervisor with the Singapore Association for Counselling, and a Life Member of the Singapore Psychological Society. Alan has been in private practice in Singapore since 2003. He was among the pioneer batch of cohorts trained under Insoo Kim Berg, Steve de Shazer and their associates in 2000. He has held appointments of Counsellor for Staff at a local university and polytechnic. He lectures at various tertiary counselling programs, supervises interns and practitioners, and conducts counselling workshops. He is among 20 Singapore-based therapists featured in the book *Lessons From Therapy* by Toh Hwee Boon (2011). Alan was the Editorial Consultant for a teen magazine, and contributes to various local periodicals. Alan is a Master SF Practitioner (International Alliance of Solution-Focused Teaching Institutes), Certified SF Therapist and SF Coach (Canadian Council of Professional Certification). Alan recently ended a 10-year appointment on the Film Consultative Panel, Media Development Authority, Ministry of Communications and Information, Singapore.

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## Foreword

For many reasons, it is an honour and a pleasure to provide this foreword to *Solution Focused Practice in Asia*, edited by our dear friends and much admired colleagues, Debbie and Dave Hogan, and their associates, Jane Tuomola and Alan Yeo. This is an extremely ambitious and satisfying work which demonstrates how professionals in Asia have fully embraced the SF approach, adapting it beautifully to the cultures and customs of Asia. One of the hallmarks of the SF approach is its adaptability to different situations and populations, and this theme is apparent throughout the chapters.

The topic of SF practices in Asia has special meaning to us because of many conversations on this topic with our long-time colleagues and dear friends, the late Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer. They watched the growing development and utilisation of the SF approach in Asia with keen interest. Oftentimes, we would meet for dinner just after they returned from teaching trips throughout Asia. It was a long journey to Asia from their home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and these trips typically involved multiple stops accompanied by gruelling teaching schedules. Yet, Steve and Insoo always came home energised and enthusiastic and told wonderful stories about the excellent work being done by their many colleagues and friends throughout Asia. They also spoke warmly about the wonderful hospitality and kindness. Steve, an avid and very gifted cook, often returned with a new recipe or some special seasoning ingredient that tasted wonderfully exotic to us back here in the American Midwest.

In the mid 1990s, when I (YD) accompanied Insoo on a multi-stop teaching trip through Japan and Korea, and during subsequent trips to Singapore and Hong Kong, it quickly became clear why she and Steve had such deep respect and warm feelings

for their Asian SF colleagues.

Like many visitors from the West, I was initially overwhelmed by the rich history and unique cultural complexity of the many countries that define Asia, and quickly recognised that one could spend a lifetime studying the many different customs, languages, religions and traditions of the amazing continent without arriving at anything approaching a complete and accurate understanding.

Early on during my first teaching trip with Insoo to Japan, I was worried that I would make some cultural blunder when presenting the SF approach. During the first day of our workshop, I kept silent while Insoo did most of the teaching, but then my heart sank when she asked me to do a live session with a father and son. During the tea break that preceded the live session, I begged her to give me some advice, or better yet, to do the session herself (!) explaining that my understanding of the Japanese culture was far too superficial.

Insoo gently agreed that my understanding of the Japanese culture was superficial, and limited, but reminded me that it is the clients, not the therapist, who determine the goal of an SF session and the solution development process and it was important to always remain mindful of this fact. She went on to remind me that because SF goals are necessarily based upon the hopes and desires described by the client, the goals naturally reflect the unique cultural, familial and religious traditions that characterise each client's life experiences. In inviting clients to search for exceptions and resources that already exist or at least have the potential to exist in the context of their everyday life, it is the clients themselves who ensure that the resulting solutions are going to be both culturally and personally relevant and achievable. Over the years, we (TT and YD) have found Insoo's explanation of SF 'cultural fit' to be very meaningful and helpful, so we were particularly pleased to note that the various chapters in this book beautifully embody this way of working mindfully so as to deeply respect and honour each client's unique life experience.



This book is a monumental work whose scope goes well beyond merely chronicling solution focused brief therapy in Asia. The 50 chapters provide one of the most comprehensive contemporary examinations of the state of the art of SF practices available. This book can and should be read by *anyone* interested in understanding the full scope of SF practices, including therapy, supervision, in education, coaching, and organisations, be it in Asia, or anywhere in the world.

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## Acknowledgements from the Editors

The editors would like to personally thank all the authors who contributed to this book. It was a massive project, and without their contributions it would not be possible. It is a celebration of their work. The editors would also like to express appreciation to the mentors, reviewers and the international SF family for their support, on whose shoulders we stand, for those who have nurtured our work and interest in doing this project.

During the last stage of this book project, the editors faced many challenges and personal crises – complicated pregnancy, health crisis and surgery, family crisis and the unexpected death of a close friend. It is a testimony to the dedication and commitment to the book project that it was completed. It served as a reminder that through the challenges of life, individuals are called to draw from their most inner resources and support system. This is a profound truth that is so relevant to what this book is about. This book acknowledges the hard work and resilience of the clients, for whom this book is written, and how their stories are a reflection of the ability of the human spirit to keep going and bounce back.

The editors would like to give special acknowledgement to our mentors and key supporters. Thanks to Therese Steiner, Yvonne Dolan and Terry Trepper, who have become close friends and collaborators. Thanks to Brian Cade, Chris Iveson, Linda Metcalf, Harry Korman and John Henden for writing endorsements, believing in us and investing in the work in Asia. Thanks to Mark McKergow and Peter Szabo, who have contributed greatly to the development of coaching and consulting work in Asia. A special word of gratitude to Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer for bringing solution-focused practice to Asia and leaving their

indelible footprints across this vast area.

Finally, a special thanks to our families, who were patient and understanding when we were 'otherwise engaged' in book writing and editing.

With much gratitude,

Dave Hogan

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## Confidentiality

Protecting client confidentiality has been of the utmost concern to the authors and editors in the preparation of this book. The majority of the client examples (whether these are therapy clients, supervisees, schools, coaching clients or organisations) are based on actual client work done by the authors. In these cases, the clients have read the relevant chapter that their story appears in and given written consent for their story to be included. Various demographic characteristics (e.g., names, ages, occupations) have been changed to protect the clients' anonymity. All organisations that are mentioned by name (e.g., specific hospitals, schools, companies) have also read the chapters and given written consent for the name of the organisation to be mentioned in the chapter. To further de-identify their clients, some authors use composite cases drawn from several clinical experiences but based on real clinical cases. As such, any resemblance to real clients is purely coincidental.