

## Member Appreciations

We are unlucky to have lost two valued and active members of the SFCT community. This section of the journal offers tributes and appreciation to Steve Onyett and Greg Vinnicombe.

### **Steve Onyett (1961–2015)**

It was with great shock and sadness that I learned of the death of my dear friend and colleague Steve Onyett. Steve was on a charity cycling ride in Palestine when he suffered a fatal heart attack. He was 54 years old.

I first met Steve at the second SOLWorld conference in Bristol in 2003. Steve was interested in SF for both clinical and organisational use, and lived in Bristol, so it was natural that he came. However, the conference dinner on the Friday night was also Valentine's Day, and he had at that time a routine of going out for dinner with two (female) friends to celebrate their single-ness. So, he brought the friends along too! The following day, the Saturday, Steve left the conference to join with a million others in London for a Stop The War march against the proposed (and feared) invasion of Iraq. This for me sums up Steve – he was committed to a better world, and if that meant political engagement sometimes taking precedence over professional practice then so be it. He was pursuing a similarly humanitarian mission when he died.

Steve went on to train with us in Solutions Focus, joined me in the SFWork team, and worked closely with us in our work introducing SF coaching into the UK National Health Service in various ways. He was a member of SFCT and came to our regular UK chapter meetings from time to time. He also served on the Editorial Advisory Board of *InterAction*, allowing us a share of his visiting professorships at the University of the West of England (UWE) and then Exeter.

During the years I was developing ideas around Host Leadership, Steve was a constant source of encouragement and

critique. He was instrumental in getting my first paper on the subject (Leader as Host; Host as Leader: Towards a new yet ancient metaphor) published in the International Journal for Leadership in Public Service in 2009 (he was one of the journal's editors at the time). He maintained his interest in developing the host leadership metaphors and ideas, and joined our small 'inner circle' of practitioners and developers last year – an involvement which continued until his death. He wrote guest blogs about host leadership and solution focused coaching.

We had occasional jousts about his fascination and engagement with things like 'the Way of Council' and 'shadow side' facilitation (vital new development or old hippy nonsense? It was he who proposed the latter term – we laughed.) Steve became very involved in the Embercombe community, acting as Chair of Trustees for their charity and being involved with programmes as well as helping to steward the organisation. He loved being outdoors, and spoke to me of the inspiration he found in Embercombe's Devon countryside setting. It seems fitting somehow that he met his end in the open air, engaged in a cause in which he passionately believed. He is a great loss to people in so many circles and contexts, and we will still feel his presence in our continuing work.

**Mark McKergow**

### **Greg Vinnicombe (1963–2015)**

Greg Vinnicombe, from Bradford in the UK, tragically died in a road traffic accident on 21 October 2015 at the age of 52. Greg was coming to be known in the organisational and coaching field through his attendance at UK SFCT Chapter meetings and was well known in the field of Solution Focused Practice as a practitioner, trainer and passionate promoter of the Solution Focused approach. As a trainer, Greg drew on 25 years of Social Work with children, young people, families and adults in both community and residential settings and within the public, private and voluntary sectors. Greg also

drew on substantial experience as a manager in the public, private and voluntary sectors. With such a wealth of experience, Greg was seldom at a loss for answers when people wondered how the SF approach could be used in a particular practice setting. In many situations, whether this was as a practitioner or manager, Greg had been there, done it and seen it work.

Greg was a founding member and former Chair of the Yorkshire Solution Focused Brief Therapy Group and a member of the General Committee for the UK Association for Solution Focused Practice. Greg's knowledge and experience of the SF approach took him into many training and teaching arenas as an Honorary Tutor at Leeds University and Part-time Lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University, York University and Huddersfield University. In April 2009 Greg and colleagues delivered training in China following the tragedy of the Sichuan earthquake and the interest of a local practitioner who had read an account of the approach. In recent years Greg had been delivering training in Turkey where he and his family enjoyed a holiday retreat.

I will miss Greg greatly as co-founder of Solution Focused Trainers, a training company we had set up to provide externally validated training in Solution Focused Practice in the UK. Sharing a passion for the SF approach, and a vision for training the next generation, made us ideal business partners. Sharing the Solution Focused mindset and language also enabled us to navigate differences when they turned up and find novel ways forward. The appreciation and generosity of the Solution Focused community enabled me to gather together a wealth of tributes from the UK and beyond and from our past students, and present these to Greg's wife Thelma and daughter Katherine on the day of his funeral.

Greg always finished a training course by playing Lou Reed's *Perfect Day*. As I reflect on the line "You're going to reap just what you sow", I take comfort in knowing that many lives came closer to perfection as a result of Greg's direct work and many more practitioners are now equipped to help

others move towards their perfections thanks to Greg's many endeavours.

**John Wheeler**

John Wheeler is a full member of SFCT, President of IASTI and Head of Centre for Solution Focused Trainers.