

BOOK REVIEWS

Creating Positive Futures: Solution Focused Recovery From Mental Distress by Lucie Duncan, Rayya Ghul and Sarah Mousley

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Lucie Duncan, Rayya Ghul and Sarah Mousley present us with a book which, upon reading it, resounds as deeply as the verses of Vallejo with which I started this review: they invite us to remember, to trust, to recover, to get organised, in short, to “put on our soul” to accompany people who face situations of mental distress.

Creating Positive Futures: Solution Focused Recovery From Mental Distress by Lucie Duncan, Rayya Ghul and Sarah Mousley

Silwan Press, 2021, 245 pages, ISBN 9781716560712, US\$15.00 eBook (Paperback edition available)

“Pull yourself together, remember,
confide in your white thread, smoke, check
your chain and keep it behind your portrait.
The day’s going to come, put on your soul.”
(Vallejo, 1968, p. 319)

Lucie Duncan, Rayya Ghul and Sarah Mousley present us with a book which, upon reading it, resounds as deeply as the verses of Vallejo with which I started this review: they invite us to remember, to trust, to recover, to get organised, in short, to “put on our soul” to accompany people who face situations of mental distress. The authors have managed to combine their experience as occupational therapists, researchers, authors, educators, their experience with community work, mental health, and of course, with the solution-focused approach.

Creating Positive Futures (newly available in e-book form) is a book which connected me deeply with compassion and humaneness, which uses the spirit of solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) rather than using it as a fixed technique. In terms of form, the book comprises five comprehensive chapters. The first chapter introduces us to the spirit of solution-focus. The second chapter discusses the importance of having a measurement (rather than an

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‘assessment’) to accompany the progress of clients. In the third chapter, they share their worksheets in detail, as well as how to make best use of the measurements. The fourth chapter proposes how to accompany the therapists in their professional development. Finally, in the fifth chapter, they share examples from their practice.

From a formal perspective, the book largely delivers on its promise of helping us to look at situations which challenge the life and health of many people around the world, providing us with useful forms of solution-focused interventions, and offering possibilities for the joint recovery work of people who want to improve their relationship with the world. Also, the book is written with simplicity. Therefore, I highly recommend it for psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, physicians, lawyers, social workers, educators, occupational therapists, and even families of people affected by situations involving mental distress.

The core proposal of the book centres around the Solution Focused Measure of Occupational Function (hereinafter, SFMOOF), a valuable development to record and accompany the progress in the life of the clients, observing every achievement and how they came to it with curiosity, in detail and with appreciation. One key lies in the design of the SFMOOF: the order of the questions intends to strengthen the resources, as do the response scales: ‘not at all’, ‘sometimes’, ‘mostly’, ‘definitely’. It contains inspiring examples of the shared use of the SFMOOF with the clients, for example the details provided by ‘Jamie’ about signs of progress (p. 109-111).

Notwithstanding the latter, I believe that a later edition could consider a couple of details which could be more in line with the spirit of the book. For instance, the presuppositional approach almost always embedded in the questions, except for p. 99 (“have you ever found yourself...” vs “*when* you have found yourself...”) or including “never” on the scale, instead of “not at all”, on p. 105.

I consider the chapter on continuing professional development of therapists to be especially valuable; it is a subject often overlooked in the books which aim at transferring technology. In addition to questions and self-reflection templates, it includes supervision as a solution-focused space of care and learning.

I found the final chapter, where the authors share three cases, to be inspiring; I have appreciated the technique and the art of conversation in using the SFMOOF. The first case reminded me of the experience of the “Peña Carlos Gardel” in an Argentine psychiatric hospital (Moffatt, 1997) and the possibilities of returning to society through work. The second case, an example of coming from a space of curiosity and finding the point where change starts to be a strong desire. The third case describes how to return to the world through friendship.

In summary, the contributions of this book are generous, enriching, encouraging and very practical. I recommend reading it even if the topics discussed are not directly related to your professional activity.

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