



Heart Wood Trustee Information Pack

*“A lot of people care, but they don’t understand.
When I come here, they understand.”*

Heart Wood is a new and developing charity based in Hexham, Northumberland, that offers person-centred group therapy work in a nature setting, in order to help people improve their mental health. We see improved mental health as enhanced contact with self, others and the shared reality.

Our small team are passionate about Heart Wood’s vision. We are looking for like-minded people to join our management committee as Trustees, to support us in fulfilling the charity’s aims in this early and exciting period of development and delivery.

Trustees provide general support to the Heart Wood team and are involved in strategic decisions. In particular we are looking for people have any of the following skills/experience:

- Growing an existing business
- Understanding of the current statutory and 3rd sector health support
- Personal experience of counselling
- An understanding of the relevance and benefit of working in a person-centred way in an outdoor context
- Other professional experience, e.g. financial management, legal practice, project management, fundraising or organisational development.

If you think you have something to offer that isn’t listed here, we would still love to hear from you.

WHAT WE DO AT HEART WOOD

Heart Wood currently has a particular focus on working with vulnerable men who are experiencing psychological distress. We offer group work, as this provides an additional opportunity for the participants to not only be offered a constructive and positive relationship with therapists, but also to contribute to, witness and learn from others’ experience.

We offer something different for people who cannot engage with other indoor services. Our work should not be confused with social prescribing, outward-bound activities, or excellent social support like Men’s Sheds. It is relational group psychotherapy which uses the therapeutic benefits of nature and woodland activities.

Our core programme includes: a men’s ecotherapy group, meeting weekly for six-months in local private woodland; projects that specifically work with fathers and sons; and we are researching and developing a programme which will engage with younger men. We offer CPD training for psychotherapists in contact-oriented person-centred therapy in a nature setting.

The work is currently facilitated by qualified and experienced person-centred counsellors / psychotherapists, Chip Ponsford and Rab Erskine, who recognise and include the therapeutic influence of the natural environment. Both have a wealth of experience working therapeutically indoors and outdoors.

Heart Wood was founded in 2019 and in early 2020 was awarded £87,712 from National Lottery Reaching Communities fund to support a three-year plan of activity. We have fundraised a further £9,500 through Trusts and Foundations, fundraising activities, and private donations. We were recently awarded additional National Lottery COVID funding which has enabled us to offer an adapted programme and maintain contact with the men who had been due to start the group project in April 2020. We have been recognised for being agile, adaptive and responsive during the coronavirus pandemic.



WHAT IS PERSON-CENTRED THERAPY?

Person-centred therapy was formulated and developed by Carl Rogers, Garry Prouty and Margaret Warner. It is regarded as being counter-cultural, in that rather than looking at what is wrong with people and trying to fix it, the therapists work with people's natural tendency to develop and grow towards their potential. This is a particularly effective way of working with people suffering with complex and enduring needs.

Research shows that of all the factors in psychotherapy and counselling, it is the relationship between the therapists and 'clients' which is the most therapeutic. Person-centred relating is based on trusting people's natural tendency to develop towards their full potential - the 'actualising tendency'. Our aim is to facilitate this natural tendency by offering a particular way of relating. This can be described as a 'potentiality model', rather than the currently more common 'deficiency' or 'medical' model.

Our trust in people's 'actualising tendency' is expressed through our attitudes:

Empathy – An ongoing process of attempting to accurately understand a person's experience as if you were that person, and continuously checking that understanding

Congruence - high degree of therapist self-awareness and open and honest expression of our own experience in the moment when relevant.

Unconditional Positive Regard - we respect people as the experts on their own lives and don't judge their experience. We respect them as being in a process.

If we can offer the above, and people experience the relational environment as safe and trustworthy, then they will more readily grow towards their potential.

The effectiveness of the three relational attitudes described above are dependent on the degree of 'psychological contact' in the encounter or relationship. Margaret Warner describes Psychological Contact as "*[A] fundamental adaptation of the human organism that allows human beings to feel that they are meaningfully present [and there are varying degrees of meaningful presence] both verbally and non-verbally to themselves and to each other.*"

Our approach is 'contact-oriented' which means that we do not assume 'psychological contact'. We sense the quality of the contact and we respect that people might need very non-intrusive relating in order to build their level of contact with self, other and reality. We can provide or point out more detailed writing about psychological contact.

Our person-centred values are expressed in the way we relate or communicate with anyone who is using, or interested in using, our services. The term person-centred is now used by other services, including the NHS. In that context, the provider is tailoring their services and resources to an individual, depending on their assessed need (external professionals are assessing an individual). In our services we are in a constant process of engaging with and responding to an individual's internal experience or ongoing *self* assessment.

WHY OUTDOORS AND WHY MEN?

- The natural environment of woodland is therapeutic. Research shows that, for example, blood pressure lowers and people relax in a nature setting – a state essential for processing or integrating traumatic experience.
- Research shows that men are much more likely to engage with outdoor therapy with activities than with indoor options. Our work combines group psychotherapy with mindful creative and fun woodland activities such as walking, bushcraft and creative / expressive activities.
- Mental health is a major issue recognised in many recent policy documents. It is no secret that this is the case – and yet men are less likely to seek help with their mental health issues.

(continued)



- Men have measurably lower access to the social support of friends, relatives and community and are isolated
- Suicide is the biggest killer of men under the age of 49. The North East had the highest national suicide rate in 2018 (ONS)
- Men are significantly less likely to access statutory indoor services, yet there are no other therapist-led outdoor mental health support services on offer.

COVID-19 adapted programme

We adapted to the Covid-19 restrictions by offering weekly 'holding connection' exercises for the men who had signed up for the 2020 group. In which men focus on their experiencing of themselves in nature, then write a paragraph about it and share that with the group. The participants saw everyone else's writings each week, and in this way got a sense of themselves and others in the group, including the therapists. This process expresses our trust in people's tendency to develop towards their potential. We are offering a 'holding connection' which recognises that these men are going out into nature at this time anyway and we can facilitate an enhanced focus on this natural process. We will offer research interviews or chats which will aim to find out how the men experienced this.

FILM

We have made a short powerful film about our work which we recommend seeing. Please contact Emma at admin@heartwoodcharity.org if you would like to watch it.

TRUSTEE REQUIREMENTS AND COMMITMENT

We are looking for reliable, communicative, and committed people who share our passion for improving the lives of vulnerable people through delivering person-centred group therapy work in the outdoors.

Requirements

Trustees are expected to work collectively to:

- Understand and uphold the vision and values of Heart Wood
- Help define the strategic direction long term direction of the charity
- Assist in the promotion of good governance, including implementing policies and activities to achieve objectives
- Ensure the charity operates efficiently and complies with legal requirements
- Provide support to and maintain good relationships with the charity's staff and volunteers
- Bring expertise, experience and contacts!

Full Charity Commission guidance can be found [here](#).

Commitment

Heart Wood Trustees positions are voluntary and unpaid. We meet 4-6 times a year in the evenings for approximately 2 hours. These meetings currently take place via zoom. There may be an occasional need for longer in-person strategic planning meetings. Travel costs are reimbursed for Trustees required to travel and who do not live locally.

It is also expected that you are available to respond answer queries or collectively with the other Trustees, make decisions, between meetings. This is particularly important as the charity is in an early phase of development.

APPLICATIONS

If you are interested in joining our small committed team as a Trustee, please contact our Chair of Trustees, Sue James, for an informal chat on 07734 414095 or email sue.james@gmail.com. Following that you will be asked to submit a written application outlining your experience and what you feel you can offer Heart Wood. Deadline for applications is Friday 4 December, 5pm.