



***“A lot of people care, but they don’t understand.
When I come here, they understand.”***
Group Member 2019

Trustee Recruitment Notes for Applicants

Heart Wood is a trauma-informed mental health charity founded in 2019, based in Hexham, Northumberland. We currently offer men person-centred group therapy sessions in a nature setting, facilitated by our team of trauma-informed therapists. We offer men an alternative to traditional therapy and our work has saved lives.

Person-centred in this context is the approach formulated by Carl Rogers in the 1940s and 1950s and developed by him, Warner M, Mearns D and Thorne B, Sanders P, Prouty G, Van Werde D and many others since then. It is radical and counter-cultural and based on thoroughly researched evidence which shows that in particular relational conditions, people can find enormous capacities for personal growth or healing. Our person-centred approach sees improved mental health as enhanced contact with self, others and the shared reality.

Our small team are passionate about Heart Wood’s vision which is “to nurture and develop the Heart Wood therapeutic model and to share it with the world”. We are looking for like-minded people to join our management committee as Trustees to support us in fulfilling the charity’s aims. Trustees oversee the development and delivery of Heart Wood’s strategy and provide support to the Heart Wood team.

For more information about Heart Wood and our team, please visit our website www.heartwoodcharity.org

***“I don’t think I
could have
ever found
anywhere
better to
recover from
what
happened to
me.”***
Participant
2024

***“What they do up here
is unlike anything I’ve
been on. Even it’s just a
case of sitting around a
fire and having a bit of
soup and having a chat,
it’s just totally not like
anything you know.
When I’ve gone to
therapists before it’s
been sort of one on one
in an office, or it’s in a
classroom and it’s... the
vibe isn’t there.”***
Participant 2023

WHAT WE DO AT HEART WOOD

Our current programme offers free - weekly (April to August) and fortnightly (Sept – March) - sessions around the fire in local woodland within the Minsteracres estate in Northumberland.

The majority of the men we work with have lived through early trauma and all identify as living with long term poor mental health. They generally cannot engage with existing services.

What we offer is truly radical and counter-cultural in how it recognises people as the experts on their own experiencing. We offer an open-ended, high quality relational intervention with small manageable group sizes, that gives the men agency to find their own way forward.

Chip Ponsford (Founder and Lead Therapist) and Rab Erskine (Mentor to Heart Wood and former Lead Therapist) have developed this way of working in a way that is driven by Pre-Therapy and Contact work. They are both members of the Pre Therapy International Network www.pre-therapy.com

This way of working is very much focused on the here and now. It’s a non-interpretive way of relating which is proven to provide a safe environment in which people can re-connect with enormous resources within themselves.

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.



Chip and Rab are supported by qualified and experienced co-facilitators: person-centred counsellors / psychotherapists: Blossie Pearce Lawson, Richard Thomas and Carolin Blaske; and Kirsty Daley Sapiain Torres, a dramatherapist who embraces the person-centred approach.

We are working towards becoming a Centre of Excellence by publishing about our work and we run CPD residential training courses in our approach of working therapeutically in nature for qualified therapists .

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.
- 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 has the highest suicide rates in the country and 75% are male (ONS 2021)
- Men are significantly less likely to access statutory indoor services, yet there are no other therapist-led outdoor mental health support services on offer.

FUNDING

Heart Wood is funded through grants and fundraising initiatives. Currently we have three main funders - National Lottery, Ballinger Trust, David and Ruth Lewis Family Charitable Trust – and seek funding annually from a number of smaller Trusts and Foundations. We raise additional funding through fundraising events.

FILM

We have made a short powerful film about our work which we recommend seeing. Please contact us if you'd like to watch it.

***“It was all I had at one point in my life, was coming here every Friday.
It was literally all I had.
It was my only social thing, it was the only time I left the house,
it was the only time I would actually eat.”
Participant 2025***



TRUSTEE APPLICATION

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

A full list of the skills and experiences we would like across the whole team in Heart Wood are detailed below. We do not expect applicants to have experience in all of these and we can offer training to develop experience in several areas.

We are looking for people who can bring:

- Empathy for the lives of our target beneficiaries and a passion for improving the lives of vulnerable people.
- A commitment to Heart Wood's therapeutic approach
- The skills and experience to contribute to the delivery of Heart Wood's aims and purpose, and to ensure it operates effectively

All trustees to have - or to be working towards – understanding and experience of the following:

- Insight into the impact of complex trauma and/ or social isolation on a person's emotional well-being
- Understanding of and personal commitment to Heart Wood's therapeutic approach
- Understanding of the role of a trustee and basic knowledge of charity governance and law
- Basic knowledge of charity finances
- Team working, listening skills, empathy, communication
- Managing conflicts of interest, judgement and decision making
- Organisational skills and flexibility

Skills and experiences required **amongst the trustees:**

- Lived experience of the issues facing our target beneficiaries
- Deep knowledge of relevant therapeutic approaches
- Good knowledge of mental health/ therapy sectors
- Significant experience of finance/ accounting
- Significant experience of governance/ accountability frameworks and reporting
- Significant experience of fundraising and grant applications
- Experience of setting vision and developing strategic plan
- Experience of overseeing delivery of strategic plan and outcome evaluation
- Capacity to act as an ambassador for the charity with stakeholders, at external events etc
- Access to local / national networks
- Experience of safeguarding
- Experience in risk management
- Knowledge/ experience in HR practice
- Leadership capability
- Experience of acting as Board Chair



Other knowledge and experience useful to Heart Wood:

- woodland/ nature engagement activities
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies
- stakeholder management
- communications/ PR / social media
- Health and Safety policies
- IT/ data protection etc
- contracts, procurement, estates
- legal skills

***“I'll tell you man,
without being too
dramatic, I don't
think I'd still be
alive if it wasn't for
this place.
That's the truth
man.”
Participant 2025***

REQUIREMENTS

Trustees are expected to work collectively to:

- Understand and uphold the vision, purpose and values of Heart Wood
- Help define the strategic direction of the charity
- Promote 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](#).

TIME COMMITMENT

- A minimum of four Committee Meetings per year (usually Wednesday evenings via Zoom)
- One or two in-person meetings per year (in local woodland)
- Occasional individual meetings with Heart Wood staff or Chair
- Availability to meet more frequently to contribute to sub-committees, offer opinions and support, or answer queries.

Heart Wood Trustees positions are voluntary and unpaid.

Travel costs are reimbursed for Trustees required to travel and who do not live locally.

APPLICATIONS

If you are interested in joining our small, committed team, please complete this short form:

[Expression of Interest](#)

If you would like an informal conversation with the Heart Wood Chair before applying, please contact Emma who can arrange this.

Emma Ponsford (Manager)

07813 814644

emma@heartwoodcharity.org