



## **Heart Wood Certificate Level Training Course 2026 and 2027**

**Delivered by Rab Erskine and Chip Ponsford**

**Three residential weekends each year in May, June and July, totalling 100 CPD hours.**

In 2024, Heart Wood began offering a CPD training course for qualified (humanistic in orientation) practitioners who were keen to gain experience and knowledge of working with individuals and groups, including those with complex and enduring poor mental health, outside the counselling room, based in natural surroundings.

Any course offering this level of training, needs to be robust enough and sufficiently professional in its depth and breadth to be valuable. In 2024 we believed we were ready to offer such a course and began offering it to counsellors and therapists.

### **Background**

Heart Wood charity has learned an enormous amount from working with individuals and groups since 2018. There are two main components to Heart Wood's approach:

1. Working to offer a 'receiving climate' through contact-orientated, person-centred group facilitation to men fitting into stages one and two of Roger's tentative 7 stage process conception.
2. Working with individuals and/or groups outside the therapy room in a nature setting.

Rab has been developing this approach since the mid 1980's and is a certified trainer and coordinator with the Pre-Therapy International Network. Chip has been working outside the counselling room in natural settings with clients experiencing levels of contact impairment, since 2010 and is a Trainer in Training with the Pre-Therapy International Network. Both Chip and Rab are very keen to share their experiences and learnings through this training. (More information about Chip and Rab is available on [heartwoodcharity.org](http://heartwoodcharity.org))

In 2021, Heart Wood offered a series of three CPD weekends for qualified practitioners who were based geographically close enough and interested in working for Heart Wood. Five practitioners attended and three completed those weekends and have since worked alongside Chip and Rab in the men's groups.

This initial phase of training development offered us an opportunity to gain a better understanding of:

- the extra training needed
- the experience and support required
- the additional learning input that is necessary to work competently in a natural outdoor environment with individuals and groups

Following further training offered in 2022 and 2023, we now support a team of five facilitators.



**Through this process we have been able to further clarify:**

- levels of energy and commitment required
- how complicated it has felt for facilitators to develop the necessary level of competence and confidence
- a recognition of the enormity of differences in terms of exposure, different ways of contracting
- the different ways of holding and engaging that working in this way demands compared to the one hour per week, one to one, indoor model of offering therapeutic engagement
- the time needed to pick up the basics of the approach and begin to orientate to the 'way of being'
- the extent of the difference of this working context.

**There are several primary areas of learning which will be offered during this training:**

- introducing the practical skills and physical experiences of working in a natural context
- holding the wider and much more exposing therapeutic connection
- learning the necessary tasks and ways of responding within an activity-orientated group
- working in a very non-directive, contact orientated way

**Pre-Therapy Extended Certificate**

Working with 'Contact' is something that the Pre-Therapy International Network (PTIN) has been developing and publishing material on, for over forty years and recently has begun to create dialogues which begin to describe how this model works with clients who benefit from an environment in which there is a focus on strengthening contact.

The Training Certificate has the capacity to incorporate a minimum of six days of input in Contact work, that will deepen the learning of the participants, by implementing the "Extended Certificate in Pre-Therapy (Contact Reflections)".

**Introductory Reading List**

The Contact Work Primer. Edited by Pete Saunders. PCCS Books, 2007

Relationship at the centre (healing in a troubled world). Godfrey T. Barrett-Lennard. Whurr Publishers, 2005

Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Dave Mearns and Mick Cooper. Sage, 2005