

Releasing the Power Within

Background

Brenda Bingham is one of four original founders of HG Psychological Services. All were established psychotherapists with successful practices. “In the first instance, we wanted to form a social enterprise because we share a set of ideals that go far beyond simply running a standard business,” she explains.

Their aim is to extend the reach of the Human Givens approach to psychology, which its practitioners believe has life-transforming potential. At the core of the approach is a belief that all healthy people are born with essential physical and emotional needs and are simultaneously born with the innate resources to meet them – if these are properly channeled. This is a common biological inheritance that humanity has developed over millions of years.

The group recognised that, as individuals, their scope to extend understanding and accessibility of their chosen field of psychology was limited. Whilst GP practices, for example, will contract with individual practitioners, larger commissioning bodies require a geographical reach or a range of skills that cannot be delivered by a single person acting alone. With limited knowledge of the legal structures that social enterprises can adopt, the group nevertheless believed the CIC model was appropriate to their needs. The Guild was initially approached for help with the formalities of registration.

Structuring the Enterprise

“After listening to the group talk about their aims and objectives, it was immediately apparent that the CIC model was not their best option and in fact had several serious drawbacks,” says Sally Kelly, Principal Consultant at The Guild. “Individually, each member of the group had their own personal practice which they wanted to retain. They also wanted the flexibility to be able to pursue their own personal specialisms. But their distinct practices and the ability to take independent action would have been subsumed had they adopted the CIC model.”

“We recommended the co-operative consortium model which allows members to retain and develop their own individual practices,” she continued. “Meanwhile, the creation of a standard company limited by guarantee means that they can also bid for much larger contracts with statutory agencies. Therapists can move in and out of the co-operative as necessary. It is a very flexible model which allows collective action to carry on regardless of individual activity.”

Co-operatives^{UK}, with which The Guild has a long-standing relationship, helped HG Psychological Services to incorporate using this model. As the national organisation that promotes the interests of co-operatives, Co-operatives^{UK} works to increase awareness and understanding of co-operative values and principles, and supports the development and growth of new and existing co-operatives. Their Legal Services section also offers a specialist registration service to the co-operative, community and voluntary sectors. HG Psychological Services was able to take advantage of this support to obtain a co-operative model which reflected their business needs, along with advice on the wording of the objects clause and registration with the Registrar of Companies. HG Psychological Services has now been invited into membership of Co-operatives^{UK}, which means that the new enterprise will benefit from ongoing support and networking opportunities with other co-operatives.

Brenda believes that structuring HG Psychological Services as a co-operative is a perfect match for the way its members work together. “Human Givens as an approach is inherently democratic,” she explains. “Working as a co-operative fits totally with our philosophy and style of working. Yet none of us would have had the knowledge or experience to come up with this solution without expert advice.” She also points out that, as a co-operative, the taxation burden is far less than it would have been as a CIC.

New Opportunities

Several months after its formation, the co-operative is now investigating new contracting opportunities at several levels. It is in talks with several PCTs in Norfolk about structuring a mental health programme and also expects to be involved in using the Human Givens approach to deliver parenting programmes. “As a legally constituted co-operative we immediately have a level of professional credibility that we could never have attained as individuals,” says Brenda.

Collectivisation and formalising the group’s structure has also meant that it can leverage the influence of the Human Givens Institute at the national strategic level. For example, a senior policy-maker from the Institute is coming to Norfolk to talk with Primary Care Trusts. “As individual practitioners, this would never have happened,” she adds.

Other psychotherapists have been inspired by the vision and philosophy of the co-operative and it has quickly increased in size to ten members. As each member brings their own unique skill set, this means the co-operative can meet an ever wider range of requirements and discover even more suitable tenders.

Brenda believes that over time, many other opportunities for the Human Givens philosophy will become apparent. For example, offering stress management services to industry and within children’s services, which is her own area of specialism.

Social Impact

HG Psychological Services believes that its approach is a springboard for achieving lasting and permanent positive change in the lives of the people it works with. Now, it anticipates that a far larger and more diverse group of recipients will be able to benefit from its services and the approach will become embedded in mainstream service delivery. “As a co-operative with limited liability, we can offer services to a whole group of people that we would not have been able to reach otherwise,” says Brenda.

The co-operative has created a supportive foundation for its members, enabling them to continue with their own professional development in new and stimulating working environments that would not otherwise have been accessible.

In future, the co-operative also anticipates being able to provide employment opportunities for people training in the approach. Part of Brenda’s personal motivation is to create a lasting legacy of opportunity for emerging psychotherapists. “Many practitioners, who have trained in the Human Givens approach, then find they are unable to apply that learning. Over time, we think we can provide a new route to employment,” she concludes.