

# An approach based on anthroposophy

**Our highest endeavour must be to develop free human beings  
who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives.**

*Rudolf Steiner*

The Camphill Village Trust grew out of the spirit of anthroposophy, the philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner. Anthroposophy is a human-oriented, spiritual worldview that reflects and speaks to the basic questions of humanity and nature. Applied to social care it is transformational, displaying a fully person-centred approach rooted in individual freedom and nurturing a more humane recognition of the intrinsic value of each person. Refusing to define people because of their disability its premise that everyone carries a destiny worthy of fulfilment in body, soul and spirit continues as a major influence in the charity today.

Our approach has its roots in Rudolf Steiner's work in curative education and social therapy which began in the early 1920s and was developed by Camphill communities and many other social therapeutic communities around the world. Steiner conceived anthroposophy as a new wisdom of the spiritual, mental and physical nature of man; a wisdom that does not remain as merely abstract but kindles motivation and creativity. This reflects modern ideas of co-production. When people are never asked to contribute and when the assets they represent are ignored they atrophy. It has been a core tenet of our approach that individuals are not passive recipients of services, but active participants, who must be enabled to make their own choices and shape their own lives. We also recognise that the people who use 'services' are hidden resources of social capital expressing the reality of interdependence and emphasising the value of the quality of the relationships between us. This contributes to the development of community cohesion and a sense of belonging.

The practice of social therapy has its origins in the insights of Rudolf Steiner and his understanding of human development. This paper explores some core principles but in many respects these principles stand as ideals to which we aspire rather than strict guidelines to be followed. There is a need to be responsive to particular situations; respectful of individual choice and versatile in one's approach and attitude. Rudolf Steiner described the challenge "to become like dancers", and that image portrays the different facets of mobility, sensitivity, skill and inner discipline. It is important also to recognise that it is the genuine striving and commitment which is of real value and not the attainment of some therapeutic ideal. Better that we struggle and learn from our mistakes than that we sit back complacently reflecting on our achievements. The ideals behind our work are like a tapestry of interweaving threads which complement one another, and each contribute to the overall pattern. It can be hard to extricate one single thread and understand its significance in isolation, but this paper tries to separate out those strands in order to understand how the larger picture is made up and to provide a resource for induction, training and development within the charity.

## **Respecting adulthood**

We recognise that we are working together with adults and that our role is one of facilitator or companion, rather than teacher or parent. There is a need to accept the other person as they are and respect their individuality rather than seeking ways to change them. There may be aspects of someone's behaviour which cause concern because they cause risk to the person or to others, and other situations where we have to actively intervene, but in general we try to support an individual's own development and enable them to meet the particular challenges which they encounter in their lives and live their life as it makes sense to them.

### **Mutuality**

A central principle of our work and its origins is one of respect for the other person regardless of disability or the difficulties they may experience in meeting the world. There is an appreciation of the diverse capacities different individuals carry with them and a belief that, through the sharing of those complementary gifts and abilities, each person can be enriched. In recognising the areas where a person is lacking in skill or confidence, it is important always to reflect on their strengths and the particular quality they may bring to a group or a social situation. This attitude is one which places value on non-intellectual gifts such as intuition, sensitivity and human warmth as well as the achievements and competencies which a materialistic society tends to rate more highly. It recognises that both the person being supported and the person giving the support have the potential to benefit and grow from their encounter.

### **Attention to detail**

Care for the small detail is one of the essential hallmarks of our approach. That principle is a foundation for all aspects of the work, whether it be preparation of a meal, completion of a craft product or a conversation with another person. It is the quality of commitment to the whole process - the thoroughness and devotion to all details of the task for its own sake and not for some external reward or recognition. It is an ideal which represents integrity of purpose, and which upholds high standards and quality of work out of an intrinsic belief in their significance. The inevitable pressure to make compromises, and the daily experience of falling short of that ideal, in no way negate the value of continually re-committing oneself to caring for the fine detail of the work as well as the bigger tasks which may seem more important.

### **Value of work**

The value of meaningful work is an integral part of our approach and is linked to self-esteem. Work can provide a structure and a routine helpful for many people, but it also offers the opportunity to make a contribution in the economic or productive realm, as brothers or fellow citizens, to the community and the wider world. In producing articles of quality there is a deep sense of personal achievement, and self-confidence can grow through the realisation that one's work is valued and appreciated by other people. In the care and devotion applied to any work task there is a spiritual significance which goes beyond the task itself or the finished product. It carries with it a healing power which is not physically tangible but which nonetheless exists and has an effect in the physical world. Similarly a task carried out carelessly or with no attention to detail is detrimental to who that work affects.

### **Creativity**

Our work celebrates the potential of every individual for creativity and self-discovery. Through all the activities of art, craft, music, drama and relationship we try to encourage that unique inner world to find expression. Creativity is needed in all the activities of our daily lives. In its absence the routines and healthy rhythm will become dull and meaningless for it is only when these activities are enlivened by enthusiasm and inspiration that they can work on a therapeutic level.

### **Environment**

The quality of our physical environment is of therapeutic value. The creation of an aesthetic setting, whether in a living or a work situation, is important to an individual's well-being. We believe that caring for our environment is a vital and integral part of our task, and that attention must be paid to colour, design, the layout of a room or building; the use of natural rather than synthetic materials; the creation of order and warmth of atmosphere in a home setting or workshop; the presence of plants and flowers to bring life and inspiration into our buildings particularly when access to open, outdoor spaces may be limited; the celebration of individuals' own creative work by using it to enhance our living and working environment.

### **Respect for the Earth and for nature**

An attitude of care and respect for the earth is seen as an important aspect of the work and therapeutic in

terms of recognising the significance of healthy nutrition; the value of the natural materials which we use in producing crafts and in our working environments; and the cyclical process of life, death and renewal in the plant world throughout the changing seasons. Contemporary experience distances many people from natural sources of substance and materials which add quality and meaning to our daily lives. We try to foster an awareness and appreciation of those sources. Working and living in an urban setting can make it more difficult to sustain an active connection to nature but that separation makes it all the more important that we foster an awareness of the natural world and our dependence upon it.

### **Rhythm and balance**

The value of regular routine and structure is a basis for much of our working practice. Its purpose is to provide a degree of security and predictability within which people can gain confidence, can develop skills and can establish some sense of order and control within their daily lives. Particularly for those who have a limited awareness of time the presence of a constant and reliable rhythm can be helpful as a source of orientation and certainty within a potentially disorientating world. The rhythm of day and night, work and leisure, weekday and weekend, regular working routines and holiday periods all bring elements of consistency but also of variety into people's lives. Long periods of unstructured time can bring a dullness and monotony and place heavy demands on an individual's own will forces to initiate any activity. Rhythm and balance do not need to be a prison within which all spontaneity is excluded. There is wisdom and skill in recognising the moment when routine should be abandoned; when the occasion needs a different response and not the rigid adherence to fixed rules and structure.

### **Festivals**

The challenge is to bring elements of rhythm and balance into the days and weeks in ways which are alive and stimulating, and which have not degenerated into dull routine devoid of any inspiration. In celebrating the seasons and festivals of the year we believe these traditions are enriching to people's lives but that does not diminish the importance of finding ways to celebrate which are valued and meaningful in a contemporary context. Although it is the Christian festivals which provide the focus for many of our traditional celebrations it is important we respond to the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of people with whom we are living and working.

Participation in the festivals and other spiritual and cultural activity needs to be a voluntary activity and not one imposed on adults who have the right to make independent choices about how they wish to spend their time. Some people may welcome the repetition of familiar traditions from year to year and may gain reassurance from that deepening of their experience of the cycle of the seasons; others may be keen to talk about the significance of a particular festival in their lives and find new ways to mark that occasion. It is not the numbers of people who join in with a particular activity or celebration which matter. There is a value when even one person chooses to do something special and others are free to respond if they so choose.

### **Community**

The value of community lives in the relationships which develop between people and the qualities of trust, commitment and authenticity in those relationships. In the struggle to work creatively with the tensions and difficulties as well as the rewards of community building, there is a constant need to work on one's self as well as participate in the wider group. Without such commitment the external structure of community will have no inner strength or meaning. Traditionally our communities have been based on a shared living experience but increasingly that is changing. Most staff are paid for the work they do and have clear roles and responsibilities and have a life and home and are part of other communities as well as the community they work and in some cases live in. We aim to support people to feel part of the community and have the sense of belonging that brings, but we also recognise they too may be part of many communities as we support them to develop interests and maintain relationships with their family and friends.

There is a power relationship between staff and people we support which needs to be recognised and

understood if community is to develop in a genuine way and the equality of all community members in respect of their inherent rights is to be mutually supported and protected. There are choices and opportunities available to one group which are more restricted for the others; there is a dependency relationship which always holds the potential for exploitation or abuse, and there is the need to look at such issues openly in order to build a community which strives to empower all of its members. We now use an approach called *Learn to Lead* to empower people we support and develop their capacities for taking leading in their communities.

It is also crucial that we acknowledge the needs we all have which are met by community. Earning a living, offering service to others, participating in meaningful work are all important but so are the friendships, social activities, celebrations and sense of being valued as an individual. These needs are as vital for staff as for people we support and the well-being of the community rests upon a nurturing of the different connections and relationships which matter to people.

Of equal importance are the links and connections our communities have with the wider community round about us. The value of the work is not realised when we retreat into an isolated cocoon, but when we are actively integrated in our local neighbourhoods. Welcoming friends and visitors enriches our community life. Participating in social or working activities within the wider community offers a range of opportunities, choices and new experiences, all of which may enhance an individual's development and self-confidence.

### **Care for the whole being**

Steiner's picture of the human being informs our work and that brings an awareness that small steps in an individual's development may be of immeasurable importance for the future. It is a perspective which sees value in caring for all aspects of the human being and which strives to foster balance when there seems to be a one-sidedness in physical, emotional or intellectual development. Through colour, touch, smell, taste and other daily experiences there is the opportunity to enrich people's lives and to bring to life powers of observation, awareness and creativity. Through movement, balance, music, speech and listening individuals may develop new capacities on an inner as well as an outer level and through the constant activity of social relationships there is the recognition and affirmation of human individuality.

Eurythmy, and other therapies based on anthroposophy, work with the human being as a whole person, and which bring creative energy and balance to enhance an individual's well-being. Often on either an individual basis or within a group there are opportunities for people to work with movement, rhythm, and speech to develop and discover new capacities within themselves.

### **Individual biography and destiny**

Rudolf Steiner's perspective on the stages of human development and the significance of repeated earth lives provides rich scope for study and debate. It is not helpful to summarise those ideas in simplistic form but they are of relevance to the work we undertake. As a starting point it is perhaps sufficient to state that the events of any human life are not seen as ~~arbitrary-random~~ occurrences but as having an inherent meaning. Their significance may lie hidden throughout a lifetime but it is important nonetheless to recognise that they fit somewhere within a much bigger picture. We can not know what lies behind the destiny of another person but in the humility of not-knowing we can develop attentiveness to the different aspects of that person's being and try to be responsive to who they are and what the situation demands of us.

### **Observation and objectivity**

The significance of detail is of particular concern here again. In working together with people from a social therapeutic approach we need to pay attention to every aspect of their being - the physical, emotional and intellectual - and to study these details with a certain detachment which prevents our judgement being swayed by subjective responses. We need the clarity of objective observation if we are to understand what

is being expressed through the particular difficulties a person may be experiencing, but an objectivity imbued with compassion if it is to have any therapeutic worth. It is not an abstract scientific approach seeking to dissect in order to understand, but one where there is genuine warmth of human interest and relationship. Observation is one of the 10 facilitation skills that are essential for *Great Interactions*.

### **Self-development**

*Great Interactions* is a way to help us become more mindful of the way we meet and engage with people we support and also each other. For people to live lives that make sense to them, being able to express and communicate their needs to the people supporting them is the key first step. Understanding how communication works and becoming sensitive to understanding somebody's preferred way of communicating is a core part of the approach. Being able to reflect on our practice and to meet the person we are giving support to in a fresh, open, creative and warm way that focusses on valuing the unique qualities of each person is the kind of approach Dr Konig brought when founding the Camphill impulse in a world where tolerance, understanding and respect for people with disabilities was much less in evidence. A really great interaction can be an opportunity to be closer to the best we can be and also in that moment help the other person to take a step in their development however small that step may be. At the heart of *Great Interactions* are the 10 facilitation skills of listening, responsiveness, eye contact, touch, reflection, observation, warmth, positioning, communication and creativity. They provide a simple structured way for people to become more aware of how they interact and in a social care context what person-centred practice looks like. They inform induction and supervision. A self-reflective approach based on careful observation is encouraged.

A balance of outer and inner work is critical and the path of self-awareness will be different for each person but the commitment to personal reflection and to working on one's own development is integral to this approach.

***All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.***

*Article 1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948*

*Reflected in the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007*

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