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“The NVQ standards have become essential in my own path of lifelong learning as I am able to measure myself against the requirements of the standards to ensure my personal and professional development”



CHARISCONSULTANCY

Michele Groves established Charis Consultancy Services in 1999. This leap into the world of the entrepreneur has only become possible through her own commitment and enthusiasm for lifelong learning and development.

Charis is now a successful training and consultancy business. How did you become involved in training?

I first became involved with NVQs in 1991 when I was a part-time tutor and mentor with the Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association (NIPPA). During this time the NVQ standards in Child Care and Education were being updated and I was contracted to review the underpinning knowledge requirements. This gave me not only a thorough knowledge of the standards, but also an appreciation of their application in practice. It was at this stage that I became committed to the principles and ethos of NVQs in relation to their use for standard setting within the workplace.

As well as becoming involved in teaching the underpinning knowledge and assessing to the standards I decided to continue my own personal development through the NVQ level 4 Further and Adult Education Teaching Certificate. After

completion of this award I took on the post of Training Officer with the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA), where my role was to set up the training policy and training team in relation to the Early Years NVQs.

During my employment with NIPPA and NICMA I continued my own professional development by completing the assessor, internal verifier and external verifier awards. I was then appointed by City & Guilds as external verifier in the learning and development sector in the North and South of Ireland.

In 1997 I joined a small consultancy and training organisation and it was at this stage that the possibility of establishing myself within training and consultancy started to formulate.

You established your own company in 1999, how did you come up with the name Charis?

I studied Latin in school and had a very interesting teacher who also taught us some Greek history and language on the side. When thinking of the business name I wanted something that reflected the core values of consultancy and training. “Charis” pronounced “Karis” means to empower, give strength and support. I designed a



MICHELEGROVES
MANAGING DIRECTOR



simple logo using an equilateral triangle – the three corners depicting partnership and equality containing the letters CCS in the middle. As well as the letters symbolising the abbreviation of Charis Consultancy Services, it also stands for



Client
Centred
Services.

Has there been a particular philosophy that has shaped your own learning and the way you run your consultancy?

As a consultant and trainer I work *with* an organisation, enabling both it and its staff to reach their full potential. This is reflected in my mission statement and the values of the business. However, I also believe that sometimes individuals or organisations need a “*helping hand*” and I have been particularly involved in enabling the more long serving, mature candidates, to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and evidence to help them achieve their award and take their first step back into lifelong learning.

I also believe it is vital that I develop myself so that I can continue to provide a quality service to my clients. Lifelong learning is an important feature in my own development. In 1998 I was the only Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) student in Northern Ireland to be awarded a Distinction in the Personnel and Development qualifications. In 2001 I was successful in achieving the Advanced Professional Diploma in Mentoring and as a result of gaining this qualification I have produced a *Good Practice Toolkit for use by Mentors*. I have also achieved a Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Training and Development as well as CIPD Graduateship qualifications, and I was awarded Membership status (MCIPD) in 2001.

You work extensively with NVQs. Do your clients value these qualifications?

Yes my clients do value NVQs, and not only because they offer recognition in the form of a qualification. Organisations and individuals can quickly identify how beneficial the national standards are for establishing best practice and benchmarks for procedures, systems and training. I have used the NVQ standards myself within Charis Consultancy Services as the benchmark for the preparation of training materials and consultancy services to clients and I've worked with numerous clients who've gained NVQ level 3 and 4 in Training and Development.

On a personal level I feel I have gained through working with and developing NVQs over the years. My own NVQ level 4 in the Further and Adult Education Teaching Certificate was an important step in my professional development.

What are your lifelong learning aspirations for the future?

Learning happens every minute of every day, independent of any formal course of study or qualification. In this respect, I aim to continue to



develop the business in size and services. I am also researching the opportunities for further study, possibly an MBA or other qualification relevant to my area of work.

On a wider basis I am involved in providing voluntary training and consultancy services to non-governmental organisations and families within the country of Moldova. This has been a steep learning curve for me, providing training and consultancy in a different culture, with a language barrier and where resources and systems are not so readily available. My long-term aim would be to continue and develop my involvement in this voluntary activity and therefore take lifelong learning for all to another stage of my career.

You've had many lifelong learning achievements in your professional life. What are you most proud of?

This is an extremely difficult question as every step along the road of lifelong learning is a proud

achievement. Some key events have been the City and Guilds Silver Medal of Excellence Award presented by Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace in 1996. This was very special because I gained the award while working with women-returned from a socially disadvantaged area of Northern Ireland.

Winning a Regional Training Award as an individual and sole trader within the National Training Awards in 2001 was also a tremendous accolade. This was awarded to me for my personal and professional commitment to training and lifelong learning. The event was like an Oscar's ceremony and extremely prestigious but the achievement meant more than that. Having been told in school at sixteen that the best thing I could do was *"go on a typing course and get married"*, to be presented with such an award silenced many *"ghosts"* in my own self-esteem.

