

# Exploring My Co-operative Motivation

**Peter Duncan**

I have always been angered by inequality and injustice and have been driven to making a positive difference to people's lives. With no desire to be a politician and a lack of resilience to sit on committees, I have had to find alternative paths to help people find the tools to improve themselves, their place in the world and their relationships with each other. Underlying all of my practice are values supporting co-operation, and life lived this way can be transforming.

As a trainer I have worked with a number of worker and consumer co-operatives and in co-operative education since the mid 1980s. I was a founder member of Dynamix, a workers' co-operative that aims to put co-operative values and principles into practice, both in the work it does and the way it operates. As the organisation grew and the workers grew with it, we moved from classrooms, through whole schools and local government to working with the Welsh Assembly; challenging thinking and practice.

Seeing the need for integrated leisure provision I become a founder member of Circus Eruption in Swansea. I now work directly with young people and those who support them, to talk about self-help, social responsibility, solidarity, honesty and openness. We use circus in a social setting to promote confidence, robustness and resilience and help young people to reflect on their skills and achievements, which build the foundations for becoming active co-operative citizens.

I am interested in learning and constantly strive to design innovative and creative ways of taking learning beyond the written word, to help people frame complex ideas by creating activities, models, metaphors and games. Activities designed to explore co-operation and co-operatives include a simulation based around a parachute manufacturing co-operative. Another popular activity looks at the difference between equity and equality - using two packs of cards and several blocks of fair trade chocolate! Learning in this way takes more of the group to a higher level of engagement and understanding, often proving that complex topics can be made attainable by using simple accessible techniques in shared learning situations.

In moving forward my own thinking and practice, I would like CLADA, the co-operative that I am a director of, to be able to become part of a national think tank of co-operative educators/trainers and facilitators to create a bank of activities that would help people to explore co-operation and reveal underpinning values, and perhaps explore where there may be dissonance with policies and practice.

On thinking and practice on a national level, I believe the co-operative movement needs to be in the centre of the current debate about localism and 'the big society'; not just about definitions in an academic or political sense, but in generating creative or engaging ways that spark a debate introducing embedded co-operative values.

## The Author

Peter Duncan is a passionate and committed co-operator with a reputation for innovative and empowering training. He has been involved in the founding of two training co-operatives Dynamix Ltd and CLADA (Co-operative Learning and Development Associates) and a 'Social Circus'. Peter has contributed to two books, *Participation - Spice It Up!* and *Not Just for Profit*, both with Dynamix. Peter is based in Swansea.

