

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Leading by Example – 10 years on

As Thera celebrates its 10-year anniversary, its vision, that people with a learning disability can be leaders in society, remains stronger than ever.

In 1998, the idea of having an executive director with a learning disability in an organisation was, at first, just that, an idea. When Thera Trust began supporting people later that year, the recruitment of its first Service Director, a paid executive director with a learning disability, began, with the first person starting work in early 1999.

Ten years later, Thera has grown into an innovative and unique group of nine companies which supports over 700 people with a learning disability across England and employs nearly 1,500 staff.

Thera now has a turnover nearing £30 million, with 40% of its paid executive directors being people with a learning disability.

In 2004, Thera Trust developed a group of companies to make sure that the people with a learning disability that it supports could continue to be fully involved in the way in which the organisation is directed and managed. This included the development of a Service Director post on each subsidiary company's Board of Directors.

As a result, Matthew Smith, Director of Quality and Involvement (Thera Trust), Helena Frewin, Service Director (Thera East Midlands), Graham Skidmore, Service Director (Thera East Anglia) and Andrew Bright, Service Director (Thera North) began working for Thera in April 2007, and have made a great contribution to the Thera Group of companies. Jackie Downer MBE began working as Managing Director of The Quality Company, the newest company within Thera Group, in February 2008.

This inspiring approach has ensured continued leadership, full representation and involvement in decision making by people with a learning disability on each Board, along with the opportunity to implement company membership of people supported by Thera, and the ability to continue to deliver and measure high quality support to people with a learning disability.

Jenny Garrigan, Director of Quality and Involvement for Thera Trust, said: "In recruiting to more director posts, the challenge was to get the best people for the job from a group of people who traditionally had not had such opportunities. We had to make recruitment information accessible and available to those who were interested, and to ensure people had the opportunity to show the best of their talents and abilities through a carefully thought through selection process."

This leadership approach brings many benefits both directly to the people that Thera supports and to Thera itself. Thera remains at the forefront in enabling people with a learning disability, through its vision, innovation and determination, to be leaders in society.

END

#### **Note to Editors:**

*Thera Trust is a charity overseeing the Thera Group of companies, which support people with a learning disability. Since its formation in 1998, the organisation has grown to its current size of over 1400 staff, supporting over 700 people across 14 local authority areas.*

*Thera Group aims to be controlled by people with a learning disability, who play a key role in the way each company is directed and managed.*

*Thera East Midlands supports people in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Derby City and Nottinghamshire.*

*Thera East Anglia supports people in Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex.*

*Thera North supports people in Cumbria, Lancashire and Durham.*

*Thera West supports people in Gloucestershire.*

*Dosh and The Quality Company work nationally.*

#### **For more information, please contact:**

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# Director Photos

For high-resolution photos, please contact Sharon Shortland on 07793 487 357 or [sharon.shortland@thera.co.uk](mailto:sharon.shortland@thera.co.uk).



**Andrew Bright**  
*Service Director*  
Thera North



**Jackie Downer MBE**  
*Managing Director*  
The Quality Company



**Helena Frewin**  
*Service Director*  
Thera East Midlands



**Graham Skidmore**  
*Service Director*  
Thera East Anglia



**Matthew Smith**  
*Director of Quality and Involvement*  
Thera Trust



**Left-Right**

**Graham Skidmore**  
*Service Director*  
Thera East Anglia

**Andrew Bright**  
*Service Director*  
Thera North

**Helena Frewin**  
*Service Director*  
Thera East Midlands