

PLANNING THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE GIVING

David Watters, Managing Partner, RSM McClure Watters

1. What are your thoughts, in general, on charitable giving?

I believe it is a fundamental aspect of human nature that those more fortunate try to help those in need of it (provided health and safety does not intercede). People often just need to be shown how to help so the biggest challenge is to educate the givers on charitable giving. Just being asked to give is not enough as modern philanthropic behaviour needs to see and feel the impacts.

2. Is your giving personal or corporate or a combination of both?

Looking at my behaviours in this area I and several of the businesses I am associated with are keen to achieve a societal impact. On a personal basis that means board level involvement with the Belfast Charitable Society and previously the Extern Organisation. Both organisations have a focus on disadvantage and exclusion. I would also give to different organisations but again tend to focus on younger people's health and education.

Corporately there is more focus on health charities and the homeless. The Belfast Charitable Society recently awarded £250,000 to the NI Hospice. At RSM McClure Watters we hold regular fund raising events for charities such as Action Duchene and Action Cancer.

3. How do you give to charity: monetarily, your own time as a volunteer or your specialist skills?

Whilst I would give monetarily every year to various causes I find myself in recent years devoting an element of every week to the provision of advice and governance support to a range of charities with which I have direct involvement or those where informal advice is sought.

With over 12,000 charities in NI there is an overwhelming need for consolidation and I am working hard to promote and support that behaviour within the charities themselves. It is a major challenge as a lot of these charities are too small to enable appropriate governance to prevail and strategic decisions to be made.

4. What types of causes do you favour and why?

I favour those charities that can clearly demonstrate the impacts of their existence and have the appropriate governance in place to give me assurances on the integrity of their delivery systems.

Project orientated charities that are low on capital overhead and high on spend at the service end are of great interest to me.

5. Are there specific charities or causes that you give to regularly? How do you choose which to support?

I favour charities related to children's health, welfare and education. I believe that has a longer legacy and impact. I feel that some parents need the help which can stop problems becoming generational.

I am a supporter of Integrated Education in that Northern Ireland's young people should be moved on from the indoctrinated and entrenched views that sections of our community still hold. Sadly we still lack the thought leadership we need as a society to realise the great potential we have here in Northern Ireland.

6. Do you believe that companies and individuals have a duty to help others? If yes, why?

I don't feel that duty is the right word to use in that it suggests an obligation which does not exist. In this modern world, where disadvantage and poverty is the basis of most television news stories, people are being constantly reminded of those less fortunate.

The issue is whether people want to help or not and how they can feel that help is valued. This requires those who ask for money to record and articulate clearly the impacts and benefits of such help for those who need it.



7. What is your message to business people who may be thinking about becoming more involved in strategic philanthropy?

My message would be to keep things simple and in designing a philanthropic strategy, they should have a clear view of what outcomes align with their own strategy. That could focus on poverty, health, education or just social inclusion. Regardless of what area of focus is chosen, the visibility of the impact of the giving is essential to the process. Satisfaction is derived from knowing that the philanthropic behaviour has changed lives both now and in the future.

8. Giving Northern Ireland was set up to champion Philanthropy. Why do you think it is important that there is an organisation that helps businesses and individuals think more strategically about giving?

I believe there is a need for an organisation or body to galvanise philanthropic behaviour by putting people in touch with peers, funders and innovators. With too many charities in Northern Ireland, strategic partnership and mergers are the way forward. For the benefit of Northern Irish society a greater degree of collaboration and group think is essential at every level of our community. I live in hope!