

CHANGE MEANS DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Grainne Walsh, Head of Consultancy at Stratagem

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

I come from a background where charitable giving was valued, it's something that we as a family did. While we were not wealthy at all - far from it, my parents gave both their money and, importantly their time and support to organisations and our community. Whether it was fundraising for the mental health charity, Aware, or acting as Treasurer for the local basketball club, both my parents were very active and that has most definitely been passed on to the next generation.

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

Both. I am very lucky to work in an organisation that advocates giving. Not only have we a comprehensive CSR programme that incorporates charitable giving, we actively encourage our team to get involved - either through sitting on boards or volunteering. Importantly, we recognise that board membership might not be for everyone, so we match individual charitable donations.

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

All three. There are times, when I am happy to donate money - that could be in response to a particular event or for a particular cause. I seem to know a lot of marathon runners and am more than happy to support them in their exertions! Currently, I am Chair of the Housing Rights Service, an organisation that has been working to improve lives by tackling homelessness and housing problems locally for 50 years now. Last year the team there dealt with nearly 41,000 housing

issues and successfully prevented 1700 individuals and families from becoming homeless. While I don't have a housing background, I bring my business and public affairs experience to a team of highly skilled specialists, working in an increasingly challenging housing and economic environment.

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

Fundamentally, women's participation in civic and political life, mental health and the arts are my three main areas of interest. Given my interests and professional background, I am a huge advocate of civic engagement and participatory democracy and firmly believe that a healthy flourishing society and state is built on the contribution of the many rather than a few. My interest in mental health is a long standing one very much shaped by personal family experience and it is great that more people and organisations are talking about positive mental health. I haven't an artistic bone in my body but value those that can raise our spirit and horizons through music, art or drama.

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

While there are a couple of charities that are particularly close to my heart, I recently joined a giving circle, Give Inc and that whilst it has a focus on women & young people as well as education, it is fundamentally very flexible in who and what it supports. Over the years Stratagem has supported a range of arts organisations engage with a range of groups - from young people to some more socially isolated in through projects that are political in nature. From our support of



Tinderbox Theatre Company's ground-breaking production "Vote Vote Vote" to Wheelwork's work with young people in Lurgan and Portadown about social and political issues affecting them, the causes Stratagem supports reflect our business interest in making the connection between people, politics and politicians.

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

It's been said that CSR is as much about how you make money as how you choose to spend it. Stratagem has a strong philanthropic track record, we are interested in pushing beyond traditional notions of duty and charity. I am not particularly comfortable with the word 'duty' when it comes to talking about helping others, because I know the personal satisfaction and experiences I have gained over the years from helping others. I have also seen colleagues flourish personally and professionally from participating in programmes such as Arts & Business NI's Young Professionals on Arts Boards.

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

Do it. Push yourself and your colleagues beyond your comfort zones and you will see the personal and business benefits.

8. Giving Northern Ireland was set up last year 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?

It is important that both businesses and individuals who have an interest in change get the support and space required to ensure that their charitable activities make the impact they envisage. Making change requires us to do things differently. Critically it requires us to act strategically - that's where Giving Northern Ireland can and does make a real difference.