

Maeve Monaghan

Chief Executive of NOW Group – Social Enterprise Supporting People With Learning Difficulties.

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

I started to get involved with giving at the age of six back in the housing estate I grew up in Maghera. Myself, my sister and our friends would hire out our roller boots and sell Soda Stream drinks to our friends to raise money for organisations such as the local hospital, youth club or cancer charity. For me, giving has been about community and understanding that we all have a responsibility for each other, whether it is giving your time, your talents or your money. More recently I have been introduced to the term ‘Philanthropy’ which, although a grander term, still means that you give as much as you can to those in your community or further afield who need it.



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

I work for a charitable Social Enterprise that channels corporate giving to make an impact on the lives of local people of all learning abilities. My giving is personal and includes my Church and some local and international charities close to my heart. I am also a founder member and current Chair of Give Inc, which was set up as Ireland’s first Giving Circle. We are a group of 30+ professional women who meet socially and pool our money (£1 per day) to local people in need. I see it as the perfect model of community. It is really great fun and has led to us giving away over £40,000.

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

I give my money to a number of local and international charities. I also give my time and my skills as I sit as a volunteer Director on the Boards of CO3 - a support organisation for CEOs in the third Sector - and Building Change Trust - an endowment fund set up by Big Lottery Fund NI to support the sustainability, collaboration and innovation in the third sector.

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

In Give Inc we don’t want to be too restrictive, but we regularly review the areas we are keen to fund and they tend to be causes relating to women, children, young people and education.

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

Give Inc tends to fund individuals, particularly those in crisis, so we don’t have long term relationships with recipients. Having said that, we do fund a travel kitty for a Domestic Abuse organisation that helps children in emergency accommodation to travel to and from school.

When we set up Give Inc we were keen to make it as free from process as possible. Members propose who they wish to fund and then members vote to fund or not. Some people are surprised at the lack of structure but we wanted to keep the process as fun and flexible as possible.

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

Yes. I believe we live in communities

which only thrive when we are collectively responsible for its successes and the failures. I do mourn the loss of the sense of community locally and worry that we have retreated into our homes and businesses and feel safer giving remotely and with little personal contact. I have found that when people are asked they are keen to get involved and give their time, talents or money (where possible), but in many cases they just haven’t been asked. Lots of valuable services that make a real difference to the lives of people in our community depend on you, me and companies giving. The challenge is to make sure that people are asked and, if they agree, they can clearly see what impact their giving makes in their communities.

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

Don’t sit back waiting on being asked, put your hand up and say you want to get involved! I look back to the early days of Give Inc and am so proud of our determination and bravery. We are by no means a big philanthropic giver, but what business can learn from us is that in order to make giving really work

it needs to engage people, it needs to clearly demonstrate what difference it’s making and the giving process should be fun. We are all responsible for our communities and business certainly has its role to play. Profit is good but it’s what you do with it that counts.

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?

As I said before, most people are willing to give when asked but many aren’t asked. I think Giving Northern Ireland is important as a mechanism to open up discussions about giving and philanthropy which historically might have been a much more private conversation. As our society changes, local government budgets are cut and funding dries up, individual and business giving has an amazing opportunity to lead the field in innovative giving that makes an impact. It’s still early days, but I can already see how Giving Northern Ireland is opening up conversations and changing how we think of giving back. And this can only be a good thing.