

ON THE CSR FRONT LINE...

Mary Trainor-Nagele, Chief Executive of Arts & Business NI (A&B NI)

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

I would see giving being much broader than a monetary gift. Giving time, support and skills can be just as valuable, particularly to the charity sector at this time. In NI we are a very generous nation in relation to unplanned one-off gifts however we don't have a culture of sustained strategic giving. In A&B NI our focus is on encouraging increased cultural philanthropy. We need to build confidence and skill with the arts in terms of asking for that philanthropic support, and indeed raise the profile of the value of the arts in terms of the economy, Foreign Direct Investment, health and well-being and community cohesion.

2. Is your giving personal or corporate or a combination of both? How do you give to charity: monetarily, your own time as a volunteer or your specialist skills?

It would definitely be a combination of both. On a personal level my passion is very much with the arts and a desire to sustain and grow the rich cultural offer that we have. I am also a member of a women's Giving Circle which seeks to support women in need. From an A&B NI perspective we do a lot of work in supporting cultural organisations via our own advice and skills development in fundraising and governance but also in supporting private sector individuals to give their time and skills to the arts.

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

In my experience people give to things that they are personally passionate about or have real meaning and value to them. For myself that is the arts and some health charities that have made a real difference within my own family. However I have also seen the value in stepping outside your



circle of interest. As part of my own leadership development I have been doing some coaching training which has required me to work with leaders within a different sector. This has been a really rich experience for me as it has widened my network and encouraged me to think differently within my own role and sector. This cross sector collaboration and skills exchange is something we could encourage and develop further within NI.

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

Yes absolutely, I think we all have a responsibility to support the communities in which we work and live. I feel we need to do more to encourage a culture of increased philanthropy. It has mutual benefits, for example the business people A&B NI engage with who give their time by joining a cultural board speak of the value they too gain from the experience. They bring the creativity and freshness of ideas

they see in the arts back into their own organisations. At a time when all businesses need to think innovatively, this has real value.

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

Making a regular donation, which can also be gift aided by the charity, allows the organisation more assured stability and longer term planning. It doesn't always have to be a large donation, small regular donations can also make a huge difference.

I would encourage business people to think how they could support arts charities by giving services in-kind or sharing skills. At A&B NI, through our Board Bank and Young Professionals programmes, we match business people who have valuable skills and expertise, with a cultural organisation that has a specific skills gap on their board. Skills Bank facilitates a shorter term skills exchange between a private sector individual and a cultural organisation.

6. 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?

I think Giving NI has an important role in championing and encouraging an increased culture of philanthropy. Giving is a very private and personal issue here and for fundraisers it is therefore very difficult to access donors and understand motivations for giving and potential barriers. Giving NI creates a safe space for philanthropists to discuss their giving and these issues. At A&B NI we are working with Giving NI and the local investment management firm Cunningham Coates Stockbrokers on increasing Cultural Philanthropy. There are already some major gifts to cultural organisations however we do need to inspire others to give to the Arts and help sustain the rich cultural heritage that we can be proud of in NI.