

Beyond Giving ©

Kenneth Heaton , Community Foundations of America

There's no better way to help one's favorite charity than by writing a generous check every year, right? Well not exactly. Of course, charities want their mainstay donors to keep writing those checks, but there are a number of ways people can leverage their professional and social connections to provide greater support for charity.

While the biggest philanthropists can draw high-profile donors into the fold by throwing lavish parties and dinners, many less wealthy people have found remarkable ways to become effective advocates for charity.

According to Sara Boyd, Vice President of the Omaha Community Foundation, perhaps the biggest act of advocacy donors can commit is to talk about the charity's work with their friends and associates. "Giving is personal, but it's also social," Boyd says. "It's very powerful when people tell others one on one about the work their charity is doing."

Todd S. Healy, a Principal at the Dallas-based IPS Advisors, Inc. agrees. He says there are many people who would like to give but don't know exactly how or to whom they should give. That's where the advisement community - and the charities themselves -can be better advocates for giving. "Charities, advisors and CPAs all have a professional responsibility to flush out charitable intent that they think may not exist," Healy says.

Turning Visions into Reality

Charities and donors across the country are finding new ways to carry out that responsibility. When the Omaha Foundation asked donors for ideas to promote its image in the community, one person stepped forward and offered to put up matching funds as an incentive to get new contributors to help establish new funds. While it's too early to tell just how effective this new initiative is because they are still promoting it, Boyd notes the results so far are good enough that she hopes to see more like it in the future.

Most acts of advocacy start with a simple vision. Thirty years ago in Boston, retired executive Philip Gordon felt he could do something to help fund the areas struggling public schools. He started "Facing History and Ourselves," an organization that provides teaching resources to help students apply history to today's challenges. That organization now reaches two million kids around the world with an annual budget of \$12 million.

But Gordon wanted to do more. In 2001, he helped launch EdVesters, a network of philanthropists and foundations that work to fill the public school funding gap in the Boston area. "Our biggest challenge is in getting people to invest in public education." Gordon says. "Colleges and private schools have endowments, but the amount of money given to public schools doesn't even come close to meeting

needs." In its first year, EdVesters raised \$300,000. The second year brought \$900,000. Now, Gordon is looking to break the \$1 million mark.

Becoming a Philanthropic Role Model

Dick Essey of San Francisco has been a tireless supporter of charity since about 1990 and has been invited to sit on several charitable boards. Whenever he starts with a new board, he immediately challenges his fellow members to set an example by giving. "If you're on a board of a charity, you have to give," Essey says. "If you don't give yourself, you can't ask."

Essey typically backs up his rhetoric by setting up a challenge grant for all board members. The results, he says, are immediate and impressive. Just after joining the board of the San Francisco Senior Center, he motivated members to give a total of \$281,000. He had similar success when he offered a \$25,000 matching grant to the American Academy of Neurology Foundation.

Essey estimates he has "given, but mostly raised" about \$13 million for causes ranging from education scholarships to retreats for home care providers. But the one contribution he calls his crowning jewel is his work for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Essey's wife, Sheila, died earlier this year after battling the illness for a decade. Essey says people who leave their money for a trustee to distribute after they die are missing out on all the fun. "I want to see where the money's spent," Essey says. "I want to get the pleasure out of it."

One of the more inspiring stories of advocacy comes from Philadelphia, where a seriously ill little girl opened a lemonade stand to raise money for cancer research. When she was one year old, Alex Scott was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a form of childhood cancer. Through the course of her treatments, she was moved to give back to the medical community. So, at the age of four, Alex opened a lemonade stand to fund cancer research fifty cents at a time. News of her mission spread fast at first through local newspapers, then all the way to the Today Show and Oprah Winfrey where Alex was a guest. At the time of her death on August 1, 2004, Alex had raised \$700,000 -very close to her original goal of \$1,000,000.

Phil Arkow, Marketing & Communications Officer for the Philadelphia Foundation, which accepts donations on behalf of "Alex's Lemonade Stand", says that just since May 2004, the Foundation had received over 9200 donations. "Alex's Lemonade Stand is a marvelous example of the power of one individual," says Arkow. "It's testimony to the fact that no matter what situation you're in, you can also give back to your community."

There are a number of potential donors who are waiting to be inspired or challenged to give. Donors and charities can work together to find creative, new approaches to communicating their work and motivate these would-be givers to become philanthropists in their own right.

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