

Sweet charity

Rethinking the way your school approaches fundraising could have major benefits for students, as well as the causes they support..

So, what did your school do for Red Nose Day this year? Will everyone be wearing jeans on September 20th to raise money for children with genetic disorders? And what about Children in Need – surely there'll be a bake sale or non-uniform day in November?

Charities and schools have always made a natural partnership, and ever since Live Aid changed the landscape of fundraising back in 1985, there has been a constantly increasing number of big, national campaigns – often tied to a specific 'appeal day' – with which students and staff can get involved. Indeed, it's almost become expected that they will; parents are used to being asked to supply crazy hair accessories, neon socks, or homemade buns once or twice a term, and happily contribute a few quid here and there as suggested, sometime without even being fully aware of which charity is currently in the spotlight. It's all in a good cause, after all.

There's nothing wrong with tapping into such major fundraising drives, of course – however, from an educational point of view, if you never encourage students to engage more proactively with the charitable process, then you really are missing a trick. Fundraising offers a whole range of opportunities for valuable, cross curricular experiences, as well as helping to counterbalance the 'classroom bubble' that can so often envelop our young people as their school career moves closer towards testing at 16. Good teaching and learning needs to place skills and knowledge in a real, global, contemporary context – and understanding about *what* charities actually do, as well as

how and *why*, can give pupils a healthy perspective on all kinds of important issues, from personal, national and international finance, to inequality, sustainability, responsibility and more.

So, without abandoning the familiar and fun dress-up days and talent shows that certainly have a valuable role to play as part of school life, why not see if you can find space in the curriculum to approach the issue of charities and their work in a more focused and analytical way, too – encouraging learners to think more deeply about why their donation is needed, where it's going, how it's being used, and whether there is anything that could or should be done in order to help society progress towards a point where such contributions are no longer a necessity?

Dig deeper

One of the main advantages of getting involved with big, national charity campaigns is that it avoids the issue of having to make tough decisions about the direction in which fundraising efforts should be aimed. Choosing one or more causes to support, out of the hundreds and thousands of options out there, can be a fraught and somewhat emotional process – however, encouraging young people to get involved can really help them put their efforts in context. Try setting a research challenge for home learning, through which students are charged with finding out as much as they can about three different charitable organisations – their history, aims, work, and financial records. The Charity Commission website (charitycommission.gov.uk) is an immensely useful resource, and it may surprise learners just how much





£37bn

COMBINED INCOME OF
GENERAL CHARITIES IN THE
UK, OF WHICH THERE ARE
AROUND 160, 000

Keep it real

If you are able to establish a meaningful link between your school and the charity or charities it supports, then any fundraising you do will naturally have a more educational aspect than if you are simply doing what everyone else does. Perhaps there is a local cause that might appeal to your students' imaginations, or, if you have pupils who have moved to the UK from troubled areas, it could help with integration to consider together ways that the whole school might be able to help make a difference for those left behind. Sometimes learners' personal experiences can inspire support for a particular organisation – if they or a close family member has suffered an illness or developed a condition, for example; or it may be that there is a geographical or historical connection between your school and a specific charity. Be open to suggestions, and encourage a culture of responding positively to issues as they arise, rather than insisting that all charitable activity is planned well in advance.

Talk it over

Is it right to assume that charity is always a good thing? Many people argue that in fact, well meaning but misguided help in this form can do more harm than healing – encouraging dependency, for example; absolving individuals from personal responsibility; or putting a sticking plaster on the surface of a problem that actually runs much deeper and really needs addressing in terms of causes, rather than symptoms. And what about those who feel that sending money overseas is not practical or wise for a country in the grip of harsh economic times? Planning a debate on this issue, either within a single class, a year group, or even as part of a whole school assembly, can force young people to question their own assumptions and challenge stereotypes regarding 'those who give' and 'those who receive' (for example, are your students aware that Oxford University is a charity... and that Amnesty International isn't?)

information is available. Can they then make an informed and dispassionate decision as to which of the three would most benefit from the school's support, and explain why?

Make connections

Most charities, whatever the scale on which they are working, understand the mutual benefits that are to be had from reaching out to schools. After all, 'education' is generally an essential aspect of any charity's remit, as raising awareness tends to be as important as raising funds. Getting in touch with a charity you intend to support and starting a genuine dialogue about how best to develop a relationship between your respective organisations can result in immensely useful collaboration, with expert advice and experience from the charity helping to shape philanthropic activity that is perhaps more meaningful and long term than that which arises from a standard 'schools' fundraising pack' (useful though such resources undoubtedly are). Bring workers from the charity into the school to answer questions from students; and if possible, get students out to see the charity in action, or even producing educational resources of their own, which could be shared with other schools.



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