

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

It promotes a sense of community and philanthropy, encourages enterprise, puts a range of cross-curricular skills into practice and is fun, too. So why leave all your school's fundraising to the PTA?

When David Cameron launched the Conservative Party's flagship 'Big Society' policy in 2010, teachers throughout the country raised their eyebrows. Encouraging people to take an active role in their communities? Reducing the reliance on centrally controlled funding? Emphasising the importance of charities, co-ops and social enterprises in times of national austerity? As far as educators were concerned, the only thing missing from this visionary approach to politics was the inclusion of compulsory egg-sucking lessons for the elderly. Because for as long as there have been schools, this has been to a greater or lesser extent how they have functioned. Whether it's a bake sale to buy a new set of speakers for the sixth form common room or a sponsored silence to raise money for the local hospice, parents, children and staff have always worked together to supplement tight budgets.

However, as pressures on secondary schools to hit challenging academic targets continue to mount, the cuts get deeper, and everyone's belts are forcibly tightened, it's understandable that 'fundraising' isn't always terribly high on the list of priorities at future planning meetings. Everyone has better, and more pressing things to do during school hours and outside of them – surely it makes sense, then, to leave the fetes and pop quizzes in the capable hands of the PTA, rather than distracting the students from their studies?

Make a change

Well, perhaps. But actually, raising money for a cause – be it an external charity, or the school itself – can be an incredibly empowering and inspiring educational experience for young people, enabling them to impact positively on the world around them and use their energy and skills to make a genuine, measurable difference. The cross-curricular benefits can include a more practical understanding of all kinds of subject areas such as economics, marketing and design; increased awareness of the implications of citizenship; improved motivation and self-esteem; and an enhanced sense of community cohesion throughout the school.

The key to maximising the effectiveness of whatever fundraising you do (in both an educational and a financial sense) is to make it meaningful. There's no point having an event or activity just because that's always what happens at a particular time of the year, for example. Of course, if it's a long-standing custom to have a summer fete/Christmas fayre/end of term disco, then it makes sense to tap into pupils' and parents' expectations and continue the tradition – but that needn't and shouldn't mean simply repeating exactly the same process that's always been used in the past (especially if the thought of it fills teachers and their classes

alike with rather more dread than delicious anticipation).

Each version of an annual fundraiser should have something different and novel about it, with ideas brought to the table by the students who are going to be directly involved. Encourage them to use their AFL skills, deconstructing the previous year's event, identifying what was successful, and what didn't really work, and coming up with improvements and refinements. Could there be a new theme? What about a Facebook page to raise awareness? Most importantly, what is the





purpose of the activity? How much money are you hoping to raise... and what for? If it's for an external charity, then how was it chosen? Is it the same every year, or could there be a chance for the young people to nominate and vote for causes that are especially significant for them? And if the idea is to generate extra funds for the school, you'll probably find a good deal more enthusiasm is generated if you give people an idea of what kind of purchase you're planning on making as a result.

Why not?

When it comes to fundraising, schools have resources of which many established charities could only dream: a targeted and engaged audience; a pool of young, creative volunteers full of fresh ideas and with both time and enthusiasm to spare; access to all kinds of useful technology; and free use of facilities such as playing fields, kitchens, sports halls and staging. Even in the middle of a double-dip recession, they are well placed to organise a successful event, with a healthy bottom line when the accounts are balanced – and enrich school life in the process. So, when you're putting together the agenda for the next future planning meeting, perhaps it's worth asking yourself... are there really that many better or more pressing things you could be doing?

PLANNING A FUNDRAISING EVENT?

DO

✓ ...make a show of what you're doing: have a display in reception; get the Y7s to construct a giant chart showing progress towards your target, mention the cause of choice when you contact parents; and ask the local media for coverage.

✓ ...consider your timing. If the parents of your Y11 cohort are being reminded about the final instalment for this year's ski trip, they're not going to appreciate a simultaneous request to help with the purchase of new whiteboards.

✓ ...ensure you are following the required rules, regulations and legal aspects of organising an event in a school setting.

DON'T

✗ ...force pupils to participate beyond the classroom, or encourage them to place pressure on their parents to donate. Philanthropy under duress teaches people nothing about the value of doing something for others.

✗ ... think very carefully indeed about the implications of offering incentives or rewards for individual efforts to raise money, as this can be a deeply sensitive issue.

✗ ...forget to ask donors to sign a Gift Aid declaration form if you are raising money for a registered charity, as this will enable the recipient of the funds to reclaim basic rate tax on the contribution.



CASE STUDY:

MARINE ACADEMY PLYMOUTH

"We have introduced a vertically arranged house system to the Academy. For the year commencing September 2011, we asked each of the four houses to choose a charity, and then take responsibility for arranging games and activities throughout non-teaching time on nominated 'charity days', to raise money for that cause.

This was our first attempt to organise this kind of voluntary work – it was fantastic, and over the year, this extremely deprived community raised £2000 for their chosen charities. The children were a little self-conscious at first, but soon got the hang of it, and grasped the element of positive competition. It worked incredibly well.

Vertical tutoring is a system of organising students into tutor groups that places their academic and pastoral care at the heart of everything we do at Marine Academy Plymouth. Pupils are in tutor groups and each has a mixture of three or four learners from every school year.

This system allows the form tutor to know every student well and enables us to mentor and monitor the development of the individual. Vertical tutoring promotes equal opportunities for all pupils; enhances the student voice and leadership; and encourages tolerance, empathy and team working – it also fosters good citizenship, as our fundraising venture demonstrated.

We will now be digging in to ensure the students can take the most from the idea of leading and organising with a philanthropic intent, showing them what it can mean to give and work for others."

