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Now let's have a new golden age of giving

As the Budget makes it easier to donate, the Standard's Dispossessed appeal has gained a major contribution

Thomas Hughes-Hallett



COULD Wednesday's Budget mark the beginning of a new golden age for giving and philanthropy? I really hope so. There are real signs that the Prime Minister's personal commitment to supporting giving at every level is being honoured.

My life in March is dominated by Marie Curie's daffodils: all over Britain our wonderful volunteers shake tins to raise £5 million to fund end-of-life care for all. In the past few weeks, we have seen excellent examples of public support for good causes – including another great success for Comic Relief. I am delighted to hear of the latest donation today to the Evening Standard's Dispossessed campaign, which has already brought in more than £5 million to help our city's poorest people.

Last December a group of us came together to consider how we could achieve greater levels of giving. Never has there been more need for the safety nets that charities provide, as austerity forces the Government to cut back on important services. Our Philanthropy Review is now looking for ways of encouraging more people to give and

people to give more.

Ours is already an extremely generous nation with a rich heritage of philanthropy, outstripping all except possibly the United States. But I am concerned by the decline in the number of people giving to charity and the fact that the less well-off give more of their income than the wealthy. Martin Brookes, chief executive of New Philanthropy Capital, has said: "As the number of donors to charities falls, there is a risk that giving becomes a minority habit. This is something we should work hard to stop." Over recent years the number of households giving has fallen to 28 per cent.

At the same time, the Prime Minister has committed to supporting giving at every level of society as part of the Big Society agenda. Wednesday's Budget featured giving at every level as a particular area of focus. I cannot recall a Budget in the past decade where supporting charities has been so prominent. I was delighted to see Gift Aid now claimable on smaller gifts. This is a significant change, and for the Poppy and Daffodil appeals, as well as for thousands of other charities, could make a real difference. Sadly, economic circumstances have led the Government to cap the benefit, but let's hope this is removed in time.

The Budget included incentives to improve legacy giving. Leaving money to charities in a will is important to most of us in the sector and I salute the Government encouraging people who leave a will to give 10 per cent to charities almost as a matter of course – a real incentive

for the well-off. So a great start by the Prime Minister this week, but we hope for more during this Parliament.

Let's be clear: giving is everyone's responsibility and not just the Government's. We want to see a new surge in giving such as that launched by the far-sighted philanthropy of William Wilberforce, Dr Barnardo and others which lay behind so many of the campaigns to improve people's lives in the 19th and early 20th centuries such as abolishing slavery, protecting children, pioneering education and improving housing. But if that is to happen, then society needs to change gear again.

So what measures would we at the Philanthropy Review like to see?

The Philanthropy Review believes there is great untapped potential for increased giving. We think there are three core issues: improving the giving culture even more, particularly among

the well-off and the really wealthy; incentivising and enabling more people to give and to give more; and helping charities ask for money in a more effective way.

Let's start with charities themselves. People give when they feel connected to a cause, so charities have to show supporters how their gifts are making a difference. We need to make sure that giving is easy and pleasurable and recognises the individual. Perhaps charities have become too process-driven. Recently I was talking to James Caan, of Dragons' Den fame, and his family about the fantastic work they are doing to rebuild



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villages in Pakistan. I was invited to visit the village with my wife and to fund the rebuilding of a house. The pleasure of saying yes was great. It was different from the thank-you I received from a national charity, nearly six months after I made a gift, from their “donor processing team”. Bluntly, charities need to improve the quality of the giving experience.

Leadership by example may be key. Bill Gates, through his campaign in the United States, has demonstrated this. But here we should do it differently. I believe leadership in the workplace is

one answer. Payroll giving has been a flop. I would like to see business leaders and chief executives of organisations, both large and small, ensuring that they have a give-as-you-earn scheme in place and personally pledging to give a percentage of their own salary every year.

Let's make giving an everyday activity. Why can't we all have a bank or building society gifting account – an account for giving to charity – where all money passing through the account attracts tax relief and is then donated tax-free to charities? At the moment, there is only one UK option available, the Charities Aid Foundation Account, and only about 100,000 people have one. Imagine the impact if everyone who has a bank account was also offered a giving account.

Finally, we're pushing for a change in our culture. We want people to be proud to give, and to urge others to join them.

I'd like us to be more upfront about giving money away. Many of the pioneering philanthropists of previous centuries were successful people who saw their wealth as a means of doing good. It is a shameful fact that the lowest 10 per cent of income earners give three times more of their income than the top 10 per cent. This is a trend that as a society we must work to reverse. Wouldn't it be great if more of today's well-off and wealthy would do the same and discover the pleasure giving brings?

■ *Thomas Hughes-Hallett is chief executive of Marie Curie Cancer Care and chair of the Philanthropy Review.*

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JOHN WALTON

Cash boost: Gift Aid can now be claimed on smaller donations, which will help many charities