

# The role advisers played in my donor journey

Interview with **Grant Gordon**. Interviewed by **Tanya Pepin** ([www.wsale.co.uk](http://www.wsale.co.uk))

## **TP** Can you describe your philanthropic journey so far?

**GG** My personal journey into philanthropy has been gradual. I come from a business family background. As a family, we are aware that we have wealth and are therefore privileged. Consequently, we have the opportunity to give something back to the community from which our business was founded and operates. This is part of our DNA.

My personal giving has become increasingly more structured over the last 30 years but this has been an evolution rather than a plan. I see this as a learning journey and this will continue for me and, I am sure, my children and wider family.

Initially, while working within William Grant, our family business, I became involved with our local community foundation. Through the company partnering with the community foundation, we established some local grant programmes and I ultimately became Chair of the SW London Community Foundation, which merged with other similar charities to become the London Community Foundation.

With the help of the community foundation, we set up a charitable fund and this got my family involved in agreeing its remit and focus. This proved to be an ideal vehicle for involving the next generation – my daughters – in discussions about society and how we as a family could help. Today, my daughters are responsible for the grant-making decisions and are engaged with tackling existing issues such as the lack of social capital and barriers to social mobility.

My work as a trustee with our community foundation also led to the belief that we should create a fund to focus on supporting issues around youth opportunity. Through this development, I felt that I could make a difference by focussing on alleviating the impact of poverty on children and young people. I established the Children's Trust, a fundraising charity that provides support to grassroots charities that offer practical, emotional and inspirational support

to children affected by poverty, with the aim of improving their life experience.

Coming full circle and returning to my roots, I was recently elected chair of the William Grant Foundation. We set up the foundation, which is funded by our family company, partly to apply a more planned and structured mechanism for giving but also to ensure that family members can play an active role in shaping our giving. I am also focussing time on establishing an organisation – the Cabrach Trust – to promote rural regeneration in a small community in the north east of Scotland. Once more, this interest stems from my family's connections with this part of the country.

And last but not least, Philanthropy Impact. I became aware of Philanthropy Impact through my contacts at the community foundation. Its mission really resonated with me. Philanthropy Impact encourages and promotes the role that advisers play with existing or potential philanthropists. I was fortunate to get great support and advice as I embarked on my philanthropic journey and my experience has been very positive. Therefore I felt strongly that I wanted to be involved with an organisation that was established to help others to have the same experience.

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## **TP** What is your experience with advisers?

**GG** As I have mentioned, I have had a very positive experience securing advice regarding my own and our family's philanthropy. I have always felt that advice is close to hand as and when we have needed it.

My family and I have been able to call on a range of advisers including our accountants, wealth managers,



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trustees and specialist consultants. All of them have raised useful questions about our approach to philanthropy offering their assistance and support in this area. Each of our advisers has been pro-active with regard to philanthropy and ensured that, as a topic, it is on the agenda.

At each step change in my philanthropic journey I have generally sought external, expert advice. That has included attending education events, networking with other philanthropists as well as using consultants. This continual process has helped to frame and shape our thinking. Also, in my experience, philanthropy is emotional and it can be really worthwhile to have an independent mind to challenge your thinking. This might be in the form of facilitation, for example when agreeing on your mission and area of focus, or it might be practical advice, such as choosing the most appropriate vehicle for giving or setting up a fund that is fit for purpose and built on best practice.

Although we have incurred a cost for some of the advice we have received, as a family we have rarely questioned the value of that advice. In fact we have found that the advice has more than re-paid itself. Being secure in the knowledge that we have put the most appropriate structures in place has been worthwhile and helps to give us comfort that our giving is hopefully delivering some real impact.

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I have the utmost admiration for Philanthropy Impact's corporate members, and I have observed that, as a group of organisations, they have a hunger to learn and are dedicated to promoting knowledge-sharing and best practice. I believe that for any families or individuals who are wanting to start on their own giving journey, the best place to start is to talk with their advisers and, of course, with their peers.

#### **TP What do you think the future will look like for philanthropy?**

**GG** I am excited about what lies ahead within the world of philanthropy. I observe that there is a new generation emerging with a greater consciousness of society and social justice than our own 'baby boomer' generation.

For example, younger people are questioning corporations about their approach to environmental,

employment and other issues. They recognise the wider impacts of migration on society and the longer-term issues communities face with regard to health and social care. Furthermore, this generation is not only identifying issues and holding people accountable, they are being more vocal, more demanding and have the real potential to create a positive change in society.

Evidence suggests that the emerging group of younger philanthropists will perhaps challenge the status quo and may be more innovative in their approach to philanthropy. We are already seeing this with the growth in social enterprise as well as the emergence of socially responsible investing, both of which are being driven and demanded by the next generation.

The next generation are moving towards a new type of philanthropy, which is about more than just giving – it is about enabling positive change. The new generation understands that profit and purpose can go together, and this will lead to exciting models and potentially stronger outcomes. Whilst it is my role as a philanthropist to support this evolution, I believe, as does Philanthropy Impact, that there is a huge role for professional advisers in facilitating this positive evolution.

**Grant Gordon** is a philanthropist and social entrepreneur. His charitable roles include chairing Philanthropy Impact, campaigning to grow modern philanthropy. His other principal charitable activities include the Childhood Trust, which he founded and which is helping to alleviate the impact of child poverty in London. In Scotland, he chairs the Cabrach Trust promoting rural regeneration in a remote community in Moray, and the William Grant Foundation, which focuses on creating opportunities for people to thrive.

Grant is married to Brigitte and they have three daughters and two grandchildren.

**Tanya Pepin** is a serial entrepreneur, and Founder and Director of the Whole Sale Company. It operates within the UK grocery wholesale channel enabling suppliers and wholesalers to achieve data-led sales by mining their EPOS data. Prior to this, Tanya was a Partner in JPA (Europe) Limited, a management consultancy that worked with for-profit and not-for-profit organisations. JPA also provided outsourced data management services. While at JPA, Tanya gained extensive experience working with charities, specialising in strategic and business planning and major donor fundraising.