GIVING
what we can

GIVING WHAT WE CAN SIX MONTH REVIEW

Michelle Hutchinson

Andreas Mogensen

December 2013

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STAFF

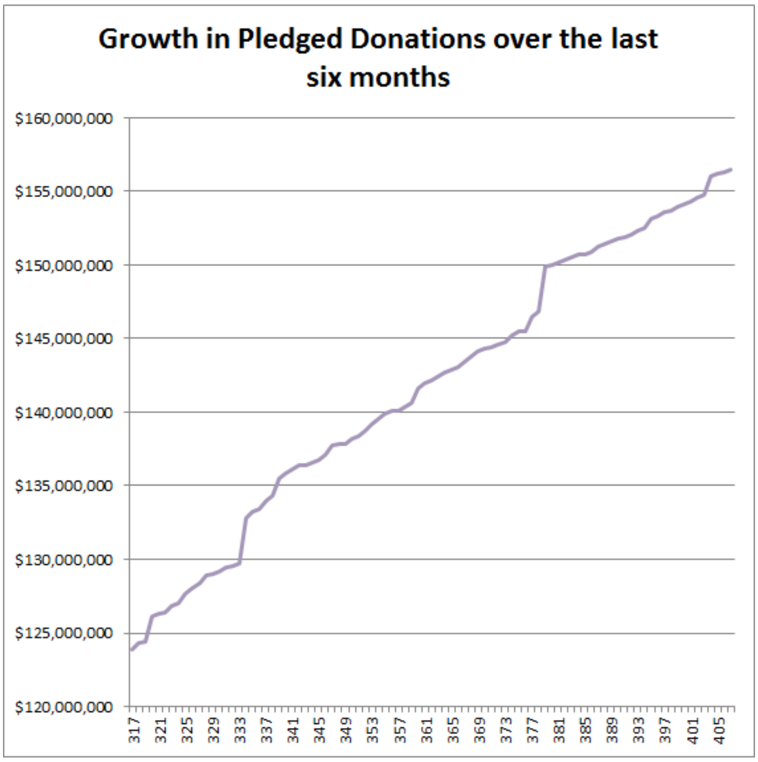
Executive Director	Michelle Hutchinson
Deputy Director	Andreas Mogensen
Director of Research	Andreas Mogensen (previously Rob Wiblin)
Director of Communication	Steph Crampin (previously Joe Mitchell)
Director of Community	Ben Clifford
Volunteers	
Blog Manager	Krisztina Csortea
Webmaster	Jacob Hilton
Social Media	Elissa Fleming
Summer Interns	Peter Hurford (Blog, Research), Michael Jarvis (Events), Nick Robinson (Events, Chapters, Research), Callum Calvert (Market Research), Thomas Clausen (CRM, Member Retention)
Centre for Effective Altruism	
Trustee	Toby Ord
Trustee	Will MacAskill
Trustee	Nick Beckstead
Executive Director	Rob Wiblin
Director of Operations	Tom Ash
Director of Development	Haydn Belfield
Office Manager	Lucas Zamprogno, followed by Holly Morgan

1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision is a world without extreme poverty - we aim to achieve this by inspiring donations to the most effective charities. We think the best way we can do that is by increasing our membership of people giving at least 10% of their income to the most effective charities. Our key metric is therefore member growth.

Progress July-December 2013

From July to December 2013, we went from **324** members to **407**. Compared with the previous six months, this gain of **83 new members** represents a doubling in our rate of new membership. This seems to support our current strategy of encouraging gradual, personal involvement with the idea of effective giving. However, we are cautious about this conclusion, as the current approach may not remain as effective forever and we want to continue to explore other options that could be more effective. As can be seen in the graph below, membership growth has increased our pledged donations by over $30 million.

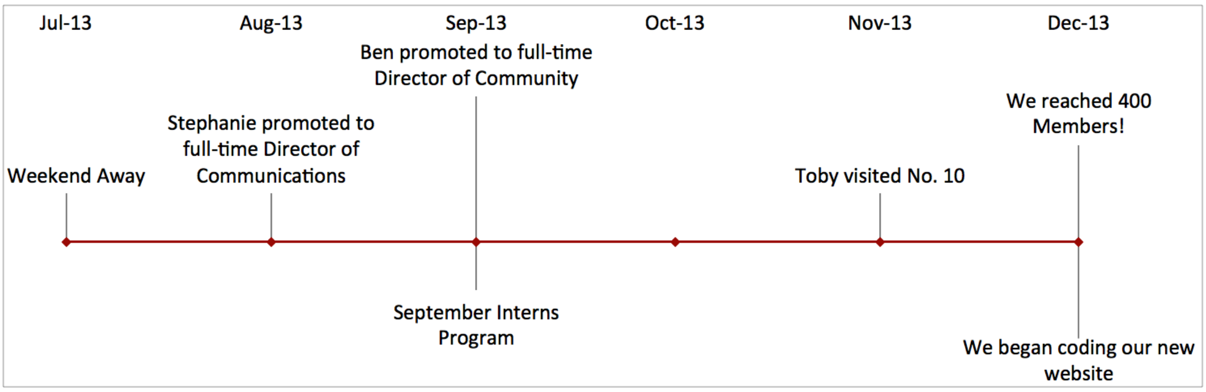


Major developments July - December 2013

- **We moved into new offices at the University of Oxford.** We share these offices with our parent organisation, the Centre for Effective Altruism (CEA), and our sister organisation 80,000 Hours. We also now work next to Oxford researchers working on big challenges faced by our world - the Future of Humanity Institute and Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics.
- **Two of our most productive interns began working for us full-time**. We now have Steph Crampin as our full-time Director of Communications, and Ben Clifford as our Director of Community.
- **We hosted a CEA Weekend Away for 60 people in July**. This was a great opportunity for Giving What We Can members to come together and refine ideas on effective giving.

- **Our ideas were introduced to high-level policy makers**. Giving What We Can Trustee Toby Ord visited No. 10 Downing Street more than once to advise on a range of policies for achieving good.
- **Our ideas are gaining momentum worldwide**. Our co-founder and Trustee Will MacAskill has signed promising book deals to write on Effective Altruism with Penguin in the US and Guardian Books in the UK. Increased recognition for our ideas could help us to reach many new members.
- **Twenty undergraduates joined our September Internship**. They produced much useful output, including a video on our front page and research into WASH charities. Seven interns have also joined as Members.
- **We learnt a lot about how to reach our target audience of young professionals**. As a result, we are now putting less effort into traditional media and press releases, and more effort into events, social media, and community building.
- **We began designing and coding a new website**. Our new website will take advantage of lessons from previous outreach efforts, offering a more gradual path to becoming a Member, and more useful tools for members to track their giving.
- **Our Director of Research Rob Wiblin was promoted to Executive Director of CEA**. Our parent organisation CEA urgently needed a proven capable manager, to oversee fundraising and other essential tasks. Though promoting Rob meant scaling back our research, we considered it the best move for the long-term.
- **Our research efforts still produced valuable discoveries**. We recommended Project Healthy Children, investigated climate change charities, and examined the Copenhagen Consensus Centre.

Timeline: Major Developments July - December 2013



Finances

We currently spend around £7,500 per month. That will likely increase to around £8,500 from the start of March, when Marek Duda is taken on by central CEA. It will increase to £9,000 from the start of April, when we employ Steph Crampin as Director of Communications. Ideally, we would also hire a Director of Community this year, but in order to do this we will need to meet our fundraising targets. Thanks to a major new supporter joining in January, we now have approximately eight months of reserves. Ideally, we would like to raise that to twelve months and certainly not less than six months, to ensure we remain financially stable. During 2013 we raised around £100,000, and spent around £70,000. To meet our modest expansion budget and build our reserves, we aim to raise £170,000 over the next 12 months. We have about £100,000 pledged to be donated this year, so need to raise an additional £70,000.

2 - OUR CURRENT STRATEGY AND PATHWAY TO MEMBERSHIP

The first step is **Attracting Interest**. We aim to do this through events, social media and our website. Over the past six months we have experimented with a range of events and conducted market research. This has shown us the main challenges we will face when putting on events, and allowed us to find some methods of advertising and hosting events which work well. We have also produced a range of online content, from posts to videos. We expect that a new version of the website will go live in March.

The next step is **Increasing Engagement**. Once people have indicated their interest in effective charity, we aim to reach out to them. Over this period, we contacted people individually from various groups, for example people signed up to our mailing list, and people who interacted with our posts on Facebook. We now have a better idea of which groups of people tend to be most receptive, and what types of messages people are most engaging.

Committing to giving away 10% of your income for life is a big decision, and it isn't one we would expect people to make immediately. We have therefore been developing more gradual ways to get involved with Giving What We Can, in particular via **Try Out Giving**. This is a system by which people essentially determine their own pledge, both in terms of time period and level of giving. This can provide a way to show themselves that giving 10% of their income makes less difference to their way of life than they expected, or a way of gradually stepping up their donations towards 10%.

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Over the past six months we have talked both to people who have done Try Out Giving, and people who are not yet involved with Giving What We Can, to learn more about how effective this is likely to be. The feedback from both groups was very positive, so we want to try out promoting it much more. People who did it tended to treat it as a stepping-stone towards becoming a member of Giving What We Can, not as an alternative to it. Try Out Giving will be a clear call to action on our new website. We have also improved our Pledge Process to make it easier for people to become Members.

We must also keep our **Existing Members** engaged. We are also keen to know where and how much our members give, in order that we can track our impact. In order to aid both these goals, we set up the Giving What We Can Trust, a charity in its own right, which people pay into and which then disburses its money to our recommended charities. Chapters allow our members to meet one another and find new prospective members, and the annual Giving Review helps us track our money moved.

The remainder of this report goes into more detail on our activities and progress over the previous six months. The order reflects the journey people take from first hearing about Giving What We Can and effective charities to being a member and fulfilling their pledge to give.

2.1 - ATTRACTING INTEREST

This is the first stage in which we raise awareness of effective giving among new people, and try to interest them in it. Ideally, we do that in a way which is personal – that makes it salient both that there are real people behind this, and that it is relevant to the audience. Ideally, this method also allows us to follow up, which provides an opportunity to increase interest, and to measure the impact we're having. Our current strategy for attracting interest can be split into Events, Social Media and our Website.

Events

Events are a good way to reach people since they show that there are real people behind the movement, it shows that the speaker can answer questions and therefore is credible, and we can typically get people to fill in feedback forms and therefore stay in touch with them. In the long term, events should be scalable. Events have been largely aimed at our target audience of young professionals.

Metrics

We aimed to put on 3 events over this period. We put on 4. We aimed to get 250 people to events we spoke at. We got 210.

Branding

We developed a 'brand-book', to make sure that our branding is all consistent. We have produced slide shows for all our presentations in this branding, as well as banners and collateral for events.

Research into young professional events

The Student Consultants produced a report, using a survey and focus groups we organised with young professionals. It mostly backed up our hypotheses about the group. For example, they mostly hear about the events they go to through via word of mouth or social media. One exception was that we were worried young professionals weren't particularly interested in speaker events, but they did seem to be.

We collected a list of different groups whose events we might be able to speak at, or with whom we might be able to hold joint events. We also learned from other groups. For example, we worked with TFN on holding an event. They have found it particularly difficult to get young professionals to events, and have concluded that in order to do so, they need to provide reasons to go to the events other than giving to charity (for example, an event starring celebrities). TFN are good at providing this, and are therefore a sensible organisation for us to collaborate with. Global Hand likewise provides interestingly different events from usual charity ones (poverty simulations), and is another organisation we are planning to work with.

Events we held

Jane Street: We were invited to speak at Jane Street in London. Rob Wiblin spoke. 17 people attended, which was fewer than we hoped, but the room was smaller than we expected. The talk was mostly about our research, but also included a section on why people should donate to charity, and why to pledge. The audience seemed engaged, and asked good questions. Everyone took the materials we provided away.

Youth Funding Network (YTFN) and Student Hubs joint event: There were a number of different speakers. Each of our recommended charities was introduced, after a short introduction about Giving What We Can itself. Around 40 people attended. £3,000 was raised on the night. One person signed up to Try Out Giving. Feedback forms were provided but not widely filled in. It was useful in building a relationship with The Funding Network that will allow us to run further joint events with them in the future, including one we are planning in London.

John Radcliffe Hospital: We organised an event at the JR hospital aimed at medical students and doctors. Amir Musayev (a health economist) spoke, giving an introduction to our research. Attendance was poor – only 4 people aside from our team. One of these volunteered afterwards to help our research team. The reason for the poor attendance was insufficient publicity, although there had been some publicity for it. This event highlighted the general problem of getting people to events. The talk was relatively short and basic. The questions were excellently dealt with by Nick Robinson.

London Giving Game: Brenton Mayer spoke on Give Directly, AMF and Shelter. 17 people came. The venue worked well. Feedback forms were provided, though only 3 people filled them in.

Events we spoke at

Global Hand: Global Hand run 'poverty simulation' events, to try to give people some insight into the lives of the poor. This simulation was organised jointly by Global Hand, Giving What We Can and 80,000 Hours. Approximately 17 people attended. The cost was £400 in total, of which Giving What We Can paid a third. The audience was not their usual target audience, since most people there already knew quite a lot about global poverty. We plan to collaborate with them in future to put on events.

Young & Connected: Nick Robinson spoke at an event of theirs, introducing Giving What We Can. The audience was large, but unfortunately there was no opportunity offered for follow up.

Cambridge International Development Conference: Rob Wiblin presented on Giving What We Can's research to undergraduates interested in economic development. About a third of people took our materials. There were about 50 people in the audience.

Challenges

The biggest challenge we have faced is how to get enough people to events we organise. We therefore need to work on publicity. Personal contacts have seemed to be very valuable so far. Collaborating to put on joint events with other organisations has also been successful.

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Events in workplaces, like the one at Jane Street, seem to work well because young professionals are busy and it is convenient having one in their office. However, it has proven difficult to set these up – few offices are used to having events like this, and staff may be wary of suggesting them.

Following up has been tricky – even when we have feedback forms to give out, it's difficult to get people to fill them in. In future, we will try to provide a specified time for people to fill them in during the presentation.

Finding good speakers has also been harder than we expected. Having a really thorough understanding of effective giving is very important, but even with that understanding it is difficult to compellingly convey the differences in effectiveness. Therefore, it's important to trial different people presenting as well as to help people to improve their presentations.

Social media

Our market research indicated that social media is the main way young professionals hear about events they go to.

Facebook

Our primary focus in social media has been Facebook. The posts which were most seen were overwhelmingly the ones which we paid to promote, followed by ones we asked people to share, followed by shout-outs, personal blog posts and videos. The posts which received the most 'likes' were announcements, shout-outs and good news, for example announcing our 350th member, announcing our fourth birthday, and thanking Gibran for his new video.

The posts which received the most clicks were photos and infographics. However, it is unclear how much we care about clicks – we could not contact someone on the basis of these, and they are not encouraging new people to get involved (though it probably makes them feel more engaged with the organisation).

Twitter

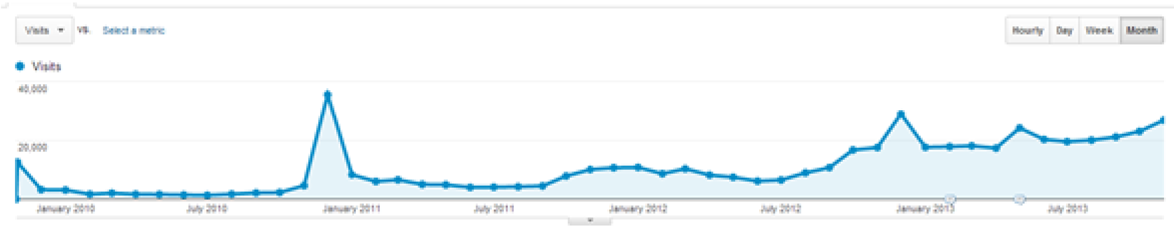
We posted regularly on Twitter in the past in order to build up a following, but we have not tested which posts work best. Twitter requires more regular updating than Facebook to work well but is also more public. In the New Year, Ben will test out contacting people on Twitter via tagging and private messages.

Website

The website is the key way of encouraging people to go from being interested in effective giving to actually putting it into practice. It needs to be informative, but also clear and understandable throughout. It needs to be easy to navigate, with clear next actions on each page. In order to make that the case, we've been producing a fresh version of the website.

Metrics

412 people signed up to the newsletter through the website in the last six months. In late 2012 and until May this year, there were an average of 17,000 visits to the website per month. In May 2013, due to Peter Singer's TED talk, we had a spike to 24,000 visitors. Since May 2013 visits have been gradually increasing from around 20,000 (June) to nearly 27,000 (November).



Building a new website

We wanted to make the website look more professional, be more consistent in style and tone, and be easier to navigate. The aim is for there to be a clear path through it for new visitors, such that we can work out at which points we lose people, and therefore how we can encourage more people to get involved. We wanted to make it more suited to our target audience, young professionals, who are used to a high standard in websites. We also wanted to focus the website on getting people involved, and on allowing people to get gradually involved, rather than immediately asking people to take the 10% pledge.

An important new feature is having user dashboards. All members and people on Try Out Giving will be automatically given dashboards, and people on neither will also have the opportunity to set these up in order to keep track of their donations and see how much impact they are having. This can replace the Giving Review for members, and will be more convenient for both them and us. We also hope it will be motivational, encouraging people to reach their targets.

We finished writing the new copy in September, and the design in November. We are now coding the website, and expect it to go live in March.

Blog

The main purposes of the blog are to show that the website and organisation as a whole are active, and to generate interest in effective giving. The blog was updated approximately twice per week for over the whole of this period, which we think is about the right amount of activity.

The most viewed blog posts were:

- ‘We’re Hiring’ -This blog post was very heavily promoted on social media e.t.c., not just by Giving What We Can, but also by CEA as a whole.
- ‘General Concerns About GiveWell’ - this is in line with our finding that posts about well-known organisations are popular (we found the same with a post on Oxfam).
- ‘Less Burn for Your Buck’ - a post on comparing climate change charities. This is in line with our finding that posts with specific actionable information about where to donate are popular.

The posts which got the most ‘shares’ (predominantly on Facebook) were personal ones – personal member stories, and a discussion of the internship from people who were on it.

2.2 - INCREASING ENGAGEMENT

Personal connection is important in a person being willing to join Giving What We Can: pledging is a big commitment, and you are joining a community. In order to be willing to join and particularly to donate to charities we recommend, people need to really trust our research and our commitment. Having a personal, gradual process by which people join also allows us to track our impact, by seeing which parts of our recruitment process are successful and which are less so.

After someone shows interest in effective giving by coming to one of our events or by engaging with us on social media, we aim to start a conversation with them and answer questions they might have. We then aim for them to sign up for Try Out Giving. An alternative path would be to come across the Giving What We Can website, which we hope will provide a clear path through to getting involved. If Try Out Giving goes well, we hope they would increase their giving to 10%, and eventually take the pledge.

Individual Outreach

In the past, we have had a large number of people join who are in Oxford, and actually know other people in Giving What We Can personally. Therefore, we believe that reaching out to people individually is likely to be an effective strategy for increasing membership. We have started doing this in a systematic way over the last six months, reaching out to people who have shown interest in effective giving in various different ways.

Metrics

We aimed to contact 500 people. We ended up contacting 431. From that group, 7 did Try Out Giving, and 2 became members.

Overall lessons

People who had done Try Out Giving, and those who had engaged with Facebook posts (a ‘like’, ‘share’ or comment on a post), were particularly receptive and likely to respond to messages. People who were on our non-member newsletter, and who had been volunteers for us in the past, both of which we expected to be responsive groups, turned out not to be.

People were happier to be reminded about pledging than we expected. People typically felt it was a useful prompt rather than an imposition. We were surprised to find that people fairly often didn’t realise there was a way of joining Giving What We Can.

Initially, Ben suggested to people that he chat with them via Skype. We have found in the past that face to face conversations are particularly good for engaging people. However, very few people wanted to Skype, and in fact messages suggesting Skype calls seemed to get lower responses than ones which didn’t. Therefore, Ben ceased suggesting this. On the other hand, people were more willing to discuss joining via email than we expected.

Conversations took longer than we expected – it seems typical to have an email conversation over a period of weeks or even months as to whether someone will join. Getting to a point when we can evaluate this strategy, therefore, will take longer than we initially expected.

Try Out Giving

In addition to ‘Try Out Giving’, we have also had a ‘Give More Tomorrow’ pledge in the past. Neither of these had had much uptake (approximately 15 and 5 respectively). Because media attention had gotten far fewer members than we might have expected, and members reported finding giving 10% easier than they thought they would, we decided in our previous six month plan that we should have a more gradual process of getting involved. In this context, it made sense to more heavily promote Try Out Giving or Give More Tomorrow. The former was the more flexible, popular, and simple (and in fact, the latter is in a way a subset of the former). Therefore we decided to further test Try Out Giving, with the aim of increasing promotion of that and gradually dropping Give More Tomorrow.

We first talked to all the people currently doing Try Out Giving. The reaction of those who replied (most) was uniformly positive – they were pleased to have done it. They were also pleased to be contacted – we will keep in touch with Try Out Giving people more in the future. Of those who responded, two took the 10% pledge and eight wanted to do Try Out Giving again. Only two did not want to continue with either. We had previously been worried that Try Out Giving might prevent some people from joining, because it allows them to do something less instead. The fact that two people joined after doing Try Out Giving seems to be a good sign that this isn’t so much of a worry – that people see this as a preliminary to joining, not just an alternative.

The Student Consultants, who performed market research for us, concluded that Try Out Giving was a good idea for young professionals, who would be unlikely to immediately take the 10% pledge.

Over the last six months, ten new people signed onto Try Out Giving. This is a fairly low number, but it was not heavily promoted at events, and hardly at all on the website. We were over-optimistic in the number of people we aimed to sign up to Try Out Giving. For example, our initial target for one month was to contact 28 people via Facebook, and for 10 of them to sign up to Try Out Giving. We actually contacted 45 people on Facebook that month (because Facebook seemed to be working well), but only three signed up. However, one in nine is still a good figure. We are unconcerned that our initial estimates turned out not to be correct, since at the time we made them they were simply guesses.

Pledge process

Following requests for it to be possible to complete the full Giving What We Can joining process online, we worked on making that possible. We first made a page which collects the information the paper form currently does, which we can send to people who ask for it, or we think would find it easier. This page has gone down well. Therefore, on the new website this will be a standard option. The new form will have the information going straight into the CRM, which will also make the process easier for our membership administrator.

We have made the process of reminding people who have requested a pledge form but not returned it more standard – we now remind people twice, with the first reminder being between 10 and 16 days after we send the form. People have been positive about these reminders. We thought people might consider them to be an imposition, but that does not seem to be the case.

2.3 - MEMBERS

As well as attracting new members, we need to ensure existing members remain engaged.

The Giving What We Can Trust

The Trust takes donations, which then go to anti-poverty charities. It provides a way for people to give easily to many of our recommended charities in one go, and to give to whichever charities are currently our recommended ones without needing to keep changing their direct debit. It is also a way for people to Gift Aid donations to Deworm the World and PHC, since donors can claim Gift Aid when they pay into the Trust, and the Trust can give to charities which are not registered in the UK. It is beneficial for us because it provides a way for us to track our money moved. We also hope it will encourage people who are just signing up to Try Out Giving to get started right away.

The Trust took longer to set up than we hoped, in large part because the HMRC took a long time to get back to us. Now that they have, people can get Gift Aid on their donations to it. We are in the process of registering it with the Charities Commission.

So far, £16,500 has gone into the Trust. There are 26 people registered with it, of which 19 have paid money in. Of new members since it was set up, 11% signed up to it and 9% have paid into it. Therefore, it does seem to appeal to at least some people who join and then get sent to a page about it. On the new website, the Trust will be more obvious to people when they join.

Giving Review

Over the last period we have received and looked over the results of the Giving Review for 2012. The headline figures are as follows:

- 68% of people who were members in 2013 filled in the Giving Review. Of those, between 86 and 91% fulfilled the pledge.
- In total, these members gave $1,109,000 to charity over 2012.
- $519,000 of this went to charities we think are effective (charities recommended by Giving What We Can or GiveWell).

On the new website, people will have dashboards, on which they report how much they've donated. They can do this at the time they donate, or later on, making it more convenient than the Giving Review. It also tells people how much impact they've had if they gave to one of our recommended charities, in terms of how many NTD treatments or malaria nets provided. We hope this will make it more motivating for people to report their giving, and thereby make tracking our impact easier.

3 - ONGOING PROJECTS

Chapters

We currently have 15 chapters. Whereas in the past we have not counted meet-up groups as chapters unless they have had official launch events, we are trying a more flexible model now, with some chapters primarily being dinner meet-up groups. We have been supporting chapters in the same way we have previously, but not trying to actively scale up the number of them, while we concentrate on improving our model for getting people involved.

One particularly impressive activity was that the ‘Big Match’ model which AMF uses, where a donor (or group of donors) agree to match donations by others, was put into practice by our Warwick chapter, who raised £22,000, and then the Oxford Chapter, who raised £24,000.

Research

In order to inspire people to give to the most effective charities, we need to know which those are, and be able to justify those claims with in-depth information about those charities and about how they compare to other ones. We also need to know information which will interest people in effectiveness – for example, about areas people are already interested in, and how those compare to the most effective organisations.

In the last six months, we finished our in-depth investigations into the Copenhagen Consensus Centre and Project Healthy Children. We decided to continue recommending PHC, but not CCC.

We researched two areas in particular – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Climate Change. In both cases, we identified one promising charity – Dispensers for Safe Water and Cool Earth, respectively. We are continuing to investigate these, although currently we do not think either are likely to be more effective than AMF. However we do think they are sufficiently effective that it is worth recommending them within the specific areas of WASH and Climate Change.

Overall, we have found it challenging to produce research which takes a large enough area (for example, the whole of climate change) to be relevant to donation and yet goes into enough depth to be reliable. It is particularly difficult given that most of our research is done by volunteers, who often bring very different perspectives and interests, which (although producing interesting and varied blog posts) makes it difficult to compare across areas.

September Internship

We hosted 20 interns for a fortnight in September. They worked in our office, on a range of different projects, suited to their individual skills. The organisation and running of it took around 390 hours in total, most of which was by Steph. We had approximately 90 applicants for the 20 places, and the calibre of interns was very high.

Of the 20 interns, six became members at some point following the internship (two had previously been considering it), two more are expected to, and two are doing Try Out Giving. Overall, the feeling was that most of the people had heard of Giving What We Can before coming, and had some contact with it, but left feeling very much part of it. The work the volunteers did was overall useful. For example, one person made a video, which is now on our homepage. The research on WASH went on the website as a welcome update to that page, and has led to our investigating Dispensers for Safe Water. About 10 of the volunteers want to stay volunteering – for example, 2 of the 3 researchers are now on our research team, and the person who made the video for us is planning to make more videos for us on different topics.

We think the internship was worth repeating. We think that since Steph ran it this time, and it went well enough that what we want to produce for next year is essentially the same again, we should be able to find a way to do it again with much less time-cost.