

*Roatch Global Lecture Series on Social Policy and Practice*

2002

*The Pain, the Gain and the Strain:  
Twenty Years in the  
Voluntary Sector in an English County*

Presented by  
Stephen W. Wright

May 3, 2002

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*In Opening*



*With gratitude  
to Mary Roatch  
The Future*



*The John F. Roatch Endowment was created by gifts made to the university by John and Mary Roatch. The endowment provides support for the Global Lecture Series on Social Policy and Practice, organized through the Office of the John F. Roatch Distinguished Community Service Scholar. We thank Mary for her continued support and her son David for his enthusiastic participation in the endowment's activities.*



Celebrating  
*The memory*  
John F. Roatch's  
Legacy



The University Club of Phoenix

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

The John F. Roatch Lectures on Social Policy and Practice have become an intrinsic part of our ASU scholarly discussions. Through the years, we have hosted a number of renowned international academics and practitioners who, in the spirit of the John F. Roatch lectures, generously partake in the development of a richer and better informed Phoenix community. This year, I was pleased to welcome Stephen Wright, from the Gloucestershire Community Council in England, who shared with us his experiences working in the voluntary sector in various English counties for more than two decades.

Once again, our lecture program was a wonderful success. At this 2002 event, community philanthropists, agency leaders, administrators, volunteers and social workers had the opportunity to visit with Stephen and hear his presentation on "The Pain, the Gain and the Strain" of voluntary work, while identifying with the struggle. Stephen's presentation resounded with echoes of similar experiences for many in our audience.

Our panel of respondents did a magnificent job helping the audience make the connections between what goes on across the ocean and in our own situation in Arizona. It was inspirational to hear how, in spite of the struggle, those who work in the voluntary sector are energized by the joy of what they do.

In memory of John F. Roatch, and celebrating the ongoing support of Mary Roatch and her son David, a reception was hosted after the lecture. All participants were invited to join the speaker and the Roatch family as we remembered Mr. Roatch's 81st birthday, which would have coincided with this year's lecture.

We want to take this opportunity for thanking, again, John and Mary Roatch for making all this possible. We also want to express our gratitude to Stephen Wright and to our respondents, Pam Betz, Paul Luna and Jackie Taylor, for their valuable contributions.

We are pleased to offer this published version of this year's lecture to our friends and community. Disseminating the ideas presented by our guest lecturers is an important part of the Office of the Distinguished Community Service Scholar and of the College of Extended Education.

With best wishes,

Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley  
John F. Roatch Distinguished  
Community Service Scholar  
College of Extended Education



Above: Stephen Wright at the lectern.

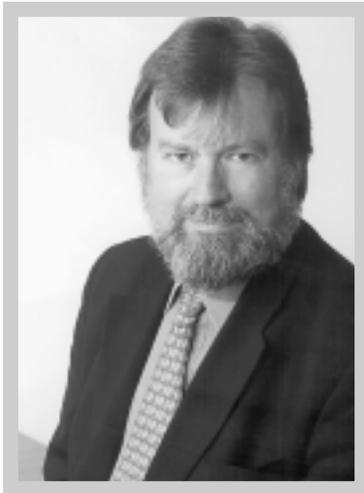


Left: Mary Roatch and Emilia Martinez-Brawley.

Below: Participants register at the entrance.



Stephen Wright conversing with participants at the reception.



*“As the New Testament says,  
‘Faith, hope and charity ...  
the greatest of these is charity.’  
Through charity, in its purest form,  
people regain their self-respect,  
they become independent and  
they return to contributing to,  
rather than taking from, society.”*

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**Stephen W. Wright, MBE**

Director of the  
Gloucestershire Rural  
Community Council

STEPHEN WHELDON WRIGHT has built a successful career focusing on issues that affect communities, particularly those in the English countryside. In recognition of his services to parish and town councils and rural communities in Gloucestershire, he was awarded Membership to the British Empire (MBE) at Her Majesty’s Birthday Honours in 1999.

Currently the director of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, Wright also was the chief executive of the Community Council of Staffordshire, honorary secretary to the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils and honorary fellow of the Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education (now University of Gloucestershire).

From October 1991 to December 2001, he presented a Sunday morning program on BBC Radio Gloucestershire. The program was a mixture of live and recorded interviews of national and local politicians, bureaucrats and local residents on issues affecting the countryside, its people, its government, its work and its conservation.

Trained originally as an actor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, Wright worked professionally for five years in repertory theatres around the country. In 1975, he retrained in arboriculture at the Merrist Wood Agricultural College, Surrey, and then went to Seale Hayne College of Agriculture, Devon, to study for a diploma in management studies.



Above: Emilia Martinez-Brawley thanks Mary Roatch with flowers.

Left: Stephen Wright and respondents.



Above: A moment during the lecture.



Above: Emilia Martinez-Brawley and Mary Roatch present an Arizona memento to Stephen Wright.

Right: Stephen Wright chats with a participant.



Below: Mary Roatch presents plaque to Stephen Wright.

Below: Enjoying the reception.



# *The Pain, the Gain and the Strain:*

## *Twenty Years in the Voluntary Sector in an English County*

May 3, 2002

### IMAGINE THE SCENE ...

A cold, dark, damp Victorian "financial institution." Over the door, a sign: "Scrooge and Marley," though Marley had long since departed this mortal coil. Scrooge in his office, at his desk; Bob Cratchett, his clerk, in the outer office, struggling to keep his fingers working in the intense cold. Scrooge's nephew is just leaving the offices, having come to wish his uncle "a Happy Christmas" and, for his pains, received in return nothing but abuse and a series of "Humbug..." Two other gentlemen came through the door.

*"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list.  
"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?"*

*"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," replied Scrooge.  
"He died seven years ago, this very night."*

*"We have no doubt that his liberality is well represented by his  
surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.*

*It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word  
"liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.<sup>1</sup>*

Does this sound familiar? Does it ring a bell to those who, at this very moment, are seeking funds? Does the contemporary sound of this dialogue bring feelings of trepidation in the new millennium? But, returning to our Christmas scene ...

*"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking  
up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight  
provision for the Poor and Destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time.  
Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands  
are in want of common comforts, sir."*

*"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.*

*"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.*

*"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge.*

*"Are they still in operation?"*

*"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say  
they were not."*

*"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?"  
said Scrooge.*

*"Both very busy, sir."*

*"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something  
had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge.  
"I'm very glad to hear it."*

*"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind and  
body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are in endeavour-  
ing to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink and means of warmth.  
We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt,  
and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"<sup>2</sup>*

In my last negotiations for funds, I clearly recall the hesitation of coming forward with a specific request. Would the sum be too large? Or perhaps too small? Oh, the fear of rejection. Oh, how we wish it were different.

*"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.*

*"You wish to remain anonymous?"*

*"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentle-  
men, that is my answer! I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't  
afford to make idle people merry. I help to maintain the establishments I have  
mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."*

*"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."*

*"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it and decrease the  
surplus population."<sup>3</sup>*

The pain of being a charity collector! I suspect we all share in it, because we've all done it at some time!

*“We can change  
the world —  
and there are plenty of  
examples of this —  
but we have to  
do it by example,  
by negotiation and  
by persuasion.”*

That, of course, was an extract from *A Christmas Carol*, by the quintessentially English author Charles Dickens. He was not only a successful author, but also a great commentator on Victorian England and its social inequalities—much beloved by your forefathers, as indeed he was by our own.

But I promised this audience more than Dickens. Today’s lecture, “The Pain, the Gain and the Strain: Twenty Years in the Voluntary Sector in an English County,” will draw from my experiences working in England, but I am sure they will translate to your local setting.

## **WHAT IS CHARITY?**

For a definition, we have to look back into history to the 17th century, when Parliament first captured the concept of charity law.

Prior to that time, the poor, whether deserving or undeserving, were looked after by the parish under the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Under the law, every parish—in those days, ecclesiastical rather than civil—was obliged to raise a tax on the local businesses and private individuals in order to maintain a poor house (or work house). Here, the destitute would be sent to be cared for in, very often, very uncaring situations.

In essence, there are four categories of charity, or at least four types of activity that are deemed “charitable”: the advancement of education; the relief of poverty; the advancement of religion; and the provision of facilities for recreation and leisure time occupation (but only if this is done in order to improve the condition of the lives of the intended beneficiaries). These concepts, as I say, encapsulated in law in the 17th century, still form the foundation of charity law in England today. In reality, therefore, any charity in England has to fit under one or more of these headings and, however worthy your cause, if you don’t “fit,” you don’t become charitable.

Indeed, there is a huge argument and discussion taking place currently about self-help groups (especially those working in the unemployment arena) not being eligible for charitable registration. Individuals forming or running a charity cannot, and must not, benefit directly from the services of that charity. By definition, self-help groups are just that—groups formed by individuals with a common cause to help each other.

In England, the guardians of the concept of “charity” are the charity commissioners, appointed by government and charged with overseeing and regulating the several hundred thousand charities that exist. Every so often, they introduce new rules or persuade Parliament to enact new legislation governing the way charities operate. Overall, rules are getting stricter, because with the thousands and thousands of charities that exist, the opportunities to defraud and embezzle increase. To be a trustee of a charity in today’s climate is very different than in the past. There is now a recently introduced “Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP),” which, beginning this year, imposes even more stringent regulations on trustees. These newest regulations attempt to address how some charity trustees operated, and is, in effect, a controlling mechanism to ensure full probity.

No wonder it is becoming ever more difficult to recruit new trustees. The charity commissioners—particularly for the very large national charities—are even beginning to relax the rule that no trustee can receive remuneration for their work on behalf of the charity. I am quite sure that before long, just like company directors, so charity trustees will be paid. This will have many repercussions, particularly on our ability to raise funds.

So, has life really changed in the last two decades—let alone the last four centuries? Yes. Emphatically yes. Recalling the aims of charities, the relief of poverty still stands. However, we have developed more complex and haunting questions: What is poverty? Is it just relative to the median wage or is it more fundamental? And, what is religion? There are so many sects, denominations and so-called religions that there is almost utter confusion in most peoples’ minds. What constitutes education, in charitable terms, when many of the non-state schools and colleges are among the most expensive establishments to which one can send one’s offspring! In today’s climate of increasing professionalism in sport and leisure, is that still a charitable concept? Does it matter?

Well, yes, it does, because establishing yourself as a “registered charity”<sup>\*</sup> brings with it many fiscal benefits, such as relief from Corporation Tax and relief from Uniform Business Property Rates.<sup>4</sup> Not that many of us at the county level need worry about Corporation Tax, although some major national charities—particularly those engaged in animal welfare—might have a different view. The relief from business rates is another matter. Much of the energy of the charity commissioners is now taken up monitoring all these issues, and it is becoming harder and harder to register a new charity, and perhaps rightly so as, corporately, it is a huge business.

<sup>\*</sup> In England, a “registered charity” is equivalent to a U.S. 501(c)(3) nonprofit organisation, and in this context, the term refers to the four charitable categories listed above.

*“The pain is that we want to help, but are so often hampered by lack of resources. This, in turn, makes us resourceful in surmounting the barriers, but also means that all too often we feel hopeless in the face of adversity and incompetence in others.”*

Take, for example, the organisation for which I work, the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council. By coincidence, it was established on 3 May, 1923, exactly 79 years ago today. We are a medium-sized organisation that employs 14 people, and anticipates a turnover of about £550,000 this year (I think that translates to about \$800,000). We are a registered charity, and a company limited by guarantee. My colleagues are all, or virtually all, professionally qualified, with at least a first degree, and two or three have master’s degrees. I appreciate that our name sounds rather old-fashioned and as though it were part of local government, but “council” is a word that means bringing people together for a common interest—in our case, rural Gloucestershire and its people. We were the third Rural Community Council (RCC), as we are known generically in England, to be created, and there are 38 RCCs in all. We have a national organisation that we collectively created some 15 years ago called ACRE, Action with Communities in Rural England.

Although we are all independent organisations, differing in the detail of what we do, we are all united in our collective objectives of assisting people in the rural areas of our counties. In the main, we do this by working with them as individuals or groups through their local parish councils—the first tier of local government in England—to assess their own needs. Once that is done, we help them address potential answers to those needs, be it low-cost, affordable housing, saving their school or shop, providing public transportation or engaging with their teenage population. Never easy; only last week I was asked to speak at a public meeting in one of our parishes, King’s Stanley. The clerk to the council had spent weeks trying to encourage the local youth to attend. On this night, fifty turned up—brilliant! What did they want? A skateboard park! It was a start, and their interest was engaged. It is now up to the adults to continue that engagement.

The fact that we are registered under the Charities Act, and have the charity commissioners to whom we are accountable, does make life interesting and challenging. I will talk more of this, but, as independent and autonomous organisations, we are answerable to our own board of trustees.

In our instance, we have 16 trustees: the president who is an ex-officio board member, and a minimum of 10 and maximum of 15 trustees elected at the annual general meeting. We also have four appointed trustees: one appointed by our county council, one by the four rural district councils in Gloucestershire, another appointed by the County Association of Parish and Town Councils, and the fourth appointed by the Gloucestershire Federation of Women’s Institutes, with whom we have had a very long-standing relationship. (Interesting that the Women’s Institute movement was imported by England from Canada around the time of the first World War. That’s the beauty of networking and learning from each other.)

So why do we have charities? Is it to assuage the conscience of the rich? Is it altruism personified? Is it a stepping-stone for those of us who acknowledge “there but for the grace of God go I?” Is it that we are a cheap option? Or is it, perhaps, that we are often willing to help regardless of resources? This brings us to the pain of helping.

### **The Pain**

Those of us who do work in this so-called voluntary sector believe in trying to improve the lot of our fellow human beings, be they cancer sufferers, starving children or land mine victims. Wherever there is suffering or exclusion, we wish to help. That there are too many charities is a given truth! But wherever you have altruism you also, surely, have the conceit that we can do better.

I often say that the charitable or voluntary sector in England has its greatest strength in its independence—but it is also its greatest weakness. We are all too “bloody minded” for our own good. No wonder governments are confused!

The pain is that we want to help, but are so often hampered by lack of resources. This, in turn, makes us resourceful in surmounting the barriers, but also means that all too often we feel hopeless in the face of adversity and incompetence in others.

Yet, we are competent; we have to be! Charity, voluntary or even amateur, does not equate with incompetence, although too often it is interpreted as being so. “You must be more professional!” we are told.

The pain can also come from a feeling of great frustration caused by the fact that we do not have executive power. We can change the world—and there are plenty of examples of this—but we have to do it by example, by negotiation and by persuasion, and we all know how tiring that can be! We cannot dictate! Oh, that we could; by God, we would set the world to rights! Well, we would if you agreed with me, that is!

How many examples can you think of where a charity, or a voluntary or nongovernment organisation, has come up with an idea, run a pilot programme for two or three years, excited the interest of government, and had the programme taken over, only to find a few years down the line that it has become a total, bureaucratic disaster.

*“The gain comes because we work with people, and people are so very rewarding.”*

The pain is also because we are regarded as a cheap option. The charitable, or voluntary, sector is a misnomer! Many of us working for charities today are paid. I have chosen to work in the charitable sector; it is my livelihood. We work with volunteers, sometimes coordinating their activity, sometimes, as often is the case of my own organisation, responding to requests for assistance from volunteers and groups in their own communities. That’s why we need a new definition for the sector—but what? Nongovernmental organisations sounds too bureaucratic! Not for profit? We must make a profit, or surplus, because we have to exist. The difference is we reinvest in the organisation rather than distributing it amongst “shareholders!”

We are not free, nor cheap; we are cost effective, and there is a difference. We are innovative, flexible and resourceful.

I was talking to a senior politician in my home county recently, and, during the course of discussion, we touched upon the terrible financial plight of the Social Services Department. This year, on top of all the other years in recent times, it is £4 million overspent! (I’m not surprised. They are seriously underfunded by central government through grants and constraints on how much tax can be raised locally—but that is another, and very long, story). “What we should be doing is making much greater use of the voluntary sector,” stated the politician. “They can do so much more with their volunteers at no charge!”

Even our own Socialist Government\*—and if you believe that, then I could sell you anything—seems to have a total misconception of what life in the voluntary sector is all about. Every new initiative that arises, every new funding opportunity, involves partnership—partnership between government (local or central), business and the voluntary sector. Recognition, you might think. No, they want us because we are cheap!

In the new concept of compacts (codes of working conduct for the government and voluntary sectors to work together; statements of recognition and equality) there is nothing about finance. I know, to my cost, because one of our local authorities with which we have a service level agreement—no, sorry, at their request, a *partnership* agreement—also has a *compact* with the voluntary sector organisations that work with it. In this compact, there is nothing, nothing about finance. I am still waiting, as I write this in mid-April, for the result of their “meeting” held eight weeks ago, at which they cut our funding—without any consultation—by 12 percent! Partnership? “Humbug,” said Scrooge! Yet government, commerce and industry tell us we have to be more professional!

Yes, the pain is there because we care. We try to make a difference and, frankly, government and others don’t give a damn! The pain is there because in a rapidly changing world we are having to change ourselves, and very often having to face direct challenges to the very objectives that made us charitable in the first place. We are caught, as they say, between a rock and a hard place.

Oh. I do sound ungrateful. I work for a charity; I should be overwhelmed at the munificence of the recognition bestowed upon us!

### **The Gain**

There is gain, however. At least politicians talk to us now, even if maybe it is for the wrong reasons, and that is an advance! Normally it was only at election time that they would deign to come calling in the hope that some of the sector’s altruism would rub off on them.

Partnerships are not all bad, even if I do sound cynical about them, but they must be founded on trust. Too often they are vehicles of convenience created in order to draw down a particular stream of funding. However, where they are created to meet a need, and then they tackle the funding opportunities, they are more likely to be solid, meaningful and positive, because they are dynamic and creative—arising out of need rather than greed.

That is where we in our sector can really come into our own, where we can contribute on equal terms. It is in these partnerships where we are wanted, not for our money, but for our networks, our creativity and our independence. One of the most successful partnerships we have experienced was a regional partnership involving my organisation and our six counterparts in Southwest England, a business-related charity, a charitable training organisation and a representative of a further group of charities called Councils of Voluntary Service. Together, we created a charitable operating company to administer a £1.2 million scheme funded by government to create social enterprise in the region. We leveraged into the partnership another £1.5 million. This has been one of the most successful projects. Why? Because we were working for a common cause to benefit people. We did not have the pressure created and tensions generated by the additional layer of local authorities. We were businesslike, professional and we delivered.

\* The reference here is to the current Labour Party government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, which the author implied was functioning, in many ways, like a conservative government.

*“The real gain, however, comes from those magical moments when occasionally, just occasionally, some of those with whom we work score a triumph and we can allow ourselves that warm glow brought from the knowledge that perhaps, just perhaps, we did make a difference.”*

The project I refer to here is the Community Regeneration in the Southwest Partnership (CRISP). This was a project within a central government scheme unifying some 40 different grant streams. Its principle objectives were job creation, job safeguarding and training for employment or higher employability. The groundbreaking aspect of CRISP was that it was totally operated by the voluntary sector, with no statutory partners at the regional level. The seven counties in the Southwest, through the rural community councils, delivered the scheme within their own counties with a fair degree of flexibility in order to meet local need. Through the scheme, we achieved virtually all the targets set, creating new social enterprises such as crèche facilities, farmers’ markets and the creation of PROHELP, an organisation comprised of professionals within the business community—such as accountants, solicitors, surveyors, architects and marketing experts who work *pro bono* on projects with charities and voluntary groups.

The gain comes from the ability to work with all sorts at all levels, and particularly through being given the chance to act as advocates for the cause in which we are engaged. In these partnerships, if we are not constantly being patronised or downgraded, we can flourish and shine.

The real gain, however, comes from those magical moments when occasionally, just occasionally, some of those with whom we work score a triumph and we can allow ourselves that warm glow brought from the knowledge that perhaps, just perhaps, we did make a difference.

As I mentioned, we are a registered charity and a registered company limited by guarantee. Four years ago, for our 75th anniversary, the chairman of the Gloucestershire Local History Committee, which comes under our umbrella, wrote a history of the GRCC. It is a catalogue of exciting gains, challenges and innovative solutions. In the interwar years, the GRCC was at the cutting edge, nationally, of social community development. As the current incumbent, I am proud to be associated with the triumphs of the GRCC.

In my 18 years as director I can recall some wonderful moments, such as the rescuing from a bankrupt colleague organisation of a Children’s Play Resource Centre which acts as “scrapstore” for recycled waste from industry that is safe to use in creative play for children! It’s just like an Aladdin’s cave, and has been an absolute godsend for numerous small, self-help mother and toddler groups, nurseries and schools who would never have been able to afford to buy such resources.

Another wonderful moment was the creation of a charitable organisation which was outside the legislated Right to Buy provision for tenants in rented accommodation.<sup>5</sup> (Charities are not allowed to sell their assets except with the permission of the Charity Commissioners.) We responded to a need, establishing the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association working closely with communities, many of which are in the Cotswolds in eastern Gloucestershire.

In the mid-1980s, land for house building in that area was selling at prices near a million pounds an acre! No young people could afford to live there and the villages were rapidly becoming dormitories for commuters to the big conurbations of London, Birmingham and Bristol. Did you hear me say £1,000,000 per acre? You did? Good, because through this association (remember, charitable and therefore outside the Right to Buy Legislation), the properties which we could build were for fair rent and for local need, and landowners were giving us half an acre or selling, at the most, at twice the agricultural value—then around £3,000 per acre. Why? Because we had created a vehicle that met the needs of young, local people, and by doing that it meant they could stay in the community where they were born, thus strengthening that community and providing continuity. We created it to build houses for fair rent in small rural communities—two here, six there, maybe four over in this village—on a scale that larger associations just could not contemplate working down to. They normally deal in “tens,” at least.

The Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association is still very much in existence, although now it is managed by another housing association that has the personnel and resources to find their way through the minefield of government dictates and legislation.

We were accused by some of social engineering, but the people who moved into the houses didn’t care and the communities were delighted as the majority were young couples with children poised and ready to go the local school, thereby safeguarding that resource into the bargain. Yes, there are some joyous moments.

The gain comes because we work with people, and people are so very rewarding.

The gain is also coming through changing attitudes. If I depressed you earlier, I apologise, but I do get so terribly frustrated by bureaucracy! Today, in some respects, it is almost legitimate to admit you work in the voluntary sector (that dreaded term again!). It is easier to transfer in career progressions between voluntary, and certainly government, service. Perhaps it is still not quite so easy to transfer into industry or commerce, although the reverse is a piece of cake—particularly at the national level where major charities only ever seem to recruit senior staff from the private sector.

*“We must, as a sector ... be true to our objectives ... Yes, we have to adapt and we have to change with the times ... but, at the same time, we must stick to our principles for the sake of those whom we assist.”*

This greater transferability means that more and more people in some civil service roles have, themselves, worked for voluntary sector organisations. The current chief executive of the National Health Executive, for example, is a former colleague of mine from the Cambridgeshire Rural Community Council. Gosh! Where did I go wrong?

The gain, however, is not only of a personal nature. I have mentioned that times are changing, and with international communications so much easier, and exchanges, scholarships, even memorial lectures given by someone from another country... Well, it all adds to the generation and exchange of good practice. One such recently (well, in 1986) was the importing from the United States of the concept of payroll tax, where workers can give regular sums to nominated charities and social welfare organisations prior to taxation kicking in, thereby also gaining a fiscal advantage themselves. The then-Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the concept in his budget speech, amid great excitement from the world of charity. “Was this to be the new revolution in charity giving?” Many were concerned that it might kill personal giving in street and house-to-house collections. In the end, it was all a bit of a damp squib, and has never really taken off. We English don’t like money being deducted from our pay packets!

A more recent import is that of “time dollars” or, as we now call it, “fair shares.” The concept is simple. You encourage people to volunteer by paying them in transferable tokens, which, in turn, they can use to purchase services they require from others. It is a non-money-based trading system. A friend of mine from Gloucestershire came over to the States on a Churchill Travelling Scholarship. He came across the concept in a rural U.S. community and introduced it back into England. Although slow to start, it is gaining momentum. It creates a greater degree of self worth in the unemployed and unwaged, and gives them an opportunity to fully use their talents in exchange for something they want.

Yes, we can gain a great deal from talking to each other, whether internationally, nationally or even locally. Sharing experience and practice is one of the most valuable learning tools there is, and often it is a least-cost option, but nonetheless, priceless.

### **The Strain**

Where does that leave us? The strain...is it showing yet?

In my mind, the strain derives from the very fact that we, as a sector, have perhaps become too successful! We are being recognised. All right, maybe not always for the right reasons, but recognition is coming our way. This brings its own problems. If you become recognised, you perhaps, inexorably, start to become, how shall I put it? ...Mainstream? ...Establishment? Perhaps we lose our edge, our pioneering verve and our role in advocacy! We get sucked into an endless round of consultations and focus groups! God save us from focus groups!

There is a new breed of “every man’s” politician who look you in the eye, hold your arm and call you by your first name. They convince you they are listening to your every word, every syllable, and then go and do the same to the next person, and so on. They are almost like automata. You get hooked on the drug of being “in.” They are castrating us by their very attention and we think we have their ear! But do we? Do our words make one jot of difference? No. All too often not a jot!

So, the frustration breeds strain.

Then, there is the business of multiple funding. A wonderful ploy by governments is to diversify funding streams. Then you have to start applying to more than one to put together a package of funding to do the work you want to do. This is a most successful ruse by those in authority because it doubles, triples, even quadruples the amount of time you spend raising cash.

Also, have you noticed that none of them ask compatible questions? All have different time scales for making decisions and all want copies of your annual reports and latest financial statements! Oh, and the Lottery. Great idea again; was it yours? Thank you. But what’s happened to it? I well remember John Major as Prime Minister introducing it in a blaze of publicity, tinged with some anxiety in our sector about manipulation by government. “The Lottery will never be used by government to replace what otherwise government should be spending money on,” said Major. Oh well, he was Prime Minister; he must be speaking the truth. Well maybe he was for himself, but, since then, more and more of the National Lottery has come under direct governmental dictate, and more and more is being used to replace government spending on mainline government programmes, including hospitals, schools, welfare-to-work, etc. So there is a multiplicity of funding streams, all with their separate objectives, priorities and targets.

Ah, targets... We have what is known as the IMD, the Index of Multiple Deprivation. All the statistics are pushed into a computer and out comes a list, in order of greatest deprivation, of all the district council ward areas in the country. It’s a wonderful idea, and much applauded, except that it does have some fairly fundamental flaws, particularly for rural areas. The issue is that every funding body seems to want to target the worst eighty

wards in the land, and government appears to be encouraging them—they would, wouldn't they? Lovely for them; they will be so rich that the other three hundred or so, with no funding opportunities at all, will all be "boracic lint!" (Sorry, cockney rhyming slang for skint, broke, impecunious!).<sup>6</sup>

So the strain is now about spending more and more time raising funds to do the work which you actually no longer have time to do because you are spending more and more time raising the funds to do the work which you no longer ... Yes, you get the picture!

So where do we go from here. Well, for a start, we must not descend into the slough of despond like a poor old pilgrim in his progress. We must maintain a sense of humour, and we must not get sucked into the whirl of acceptable success to the detriment of the cause for which we work. The charity/voluntary sector's greatest strength is its independence, and that we must preserve. The compacts to which I referred to earlier, between statutory and voluntary, are supposed to preserve this and, given time, we will shake that one down.

What is perhaps more concerning is this notion of charities involving themselves in contract to others to undertake services. This is causing an enormous amount of heartache back home. Should we be tying ourselves so closely to a funder in this way? Through these contracts, or the slightly more "polite" service level agreements, we are being dictated by funders to deliver that which the funder wants. Does this always accord with our own stated charitable objectives? We do need to be very, very careful not to be lured by the golden guinea, or in your case the silver dollar. We must stay true to our cause. The closer we are to our paymasters, the more the tune will not only be dictated to us, but be written for us—it's an old adage, but it is still true today.

We must, as a sector (call us what you will), be true to our objectives. Our charitable status is our protection from the onslaught of commercialism and governmentalism. Yes, we have to adapt and we have to change with the times. I am not advocating that we stagnate or retreat into a time warp, but, at the same time, we must stick to our principles for the sake of those whom we assist.

There is nothing wrong in being voluntary, amateur or even charitable. Indeed, as the New Testament says, "Faith, hope and charity ... the greatest of these is charity." Through charity, in its purest form, people regain their self-respect, they become independent and they return to contributing to, rather than taking from, society.

The pain, the gain and the strain? Yes, but, ladies and gentlemen, the joy. Don't let us ever forget the joy!

— Stephen W. Wright

*"The pain,  
the gain and  
the strain?  
Yes, but, ... the joy.  
Don't let us  
ever forget the joy!"*

#### ENDNOTES

1,2,3. Excerpted from "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, published by Hazel, Watson & Viney Ltd of London and Aylesbury." (No year of publication available, pp. 349-350).

4. Corporation Tax is the tax levied on business by central government and paid to Inland Revenue. The tax is applied on a sliding scale, depending upon the profit a company earns. Uniform Business Rate (UBR) is a tax on the property owned or leased by a company, and is set centrally by government but collected locally through the district councils. This money is then transferred to the government's Exchequer and is recycled back to the county, unitary and district councils in the form of central government grants to defray expenditure on statutory services (such as social services). The UBR tax is based on the rentable value of a business premises. Registered charities are eligible for a statutory discount of 80% on UBR. The district council, at its discretion, can award further discounts, up to an additional 20%. Therefore, a charity in an area with a sympathetic district council can receive a 100% discount and not pay any UBR.

5. The Right to Buy Act was passed by Parliament in 1981, in the second year of the Thatcher administration. It was based on the political ideology that wanted to increase home ownership. The problem, in my opinion, was that it emasculated the powers of the district councils (which were the housing authority in the U.K.) and provided social housing. It enabled a tenant of any landlord to be able to buy the property. Thousands of local authority houses were sold off, often at enormous discounts. The local authority was also obliged, under the legislation, to provide a mortgage up to approximately 95%! Additionally, any capital receipts—if there were any after the discount and the mortgage—were then "frozen" in the authority's bank account and not usable to build new houses to replace the sold-off stock. The only landlords exempted were charitable house associations, because, under our charity laws, we cannot sell off our assets. Hence, GRCC created the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association in 1986 to build housing in small rural communities for fair rent. Roughly speaking, a fair rent is deemed to be one that consumes less than one-third of disposable weekly income.

6. Literally, a dressing used on wounds for soldiers during World War I and used here as a rhyme. Among the cockneys, rhyming is a popular mode of expression.

## Respondent Pam Betz



### **Pam Betz**

*Volunteer Center of Maricopa County  
Director of Fund Development and Marketing*

As a twenty-year career veteran of the nonprofit sector, it was encouraging to have Stephen Wright acknowledge that our professional arena is finally coming of age. We are being recognized as “professionals” and being invited to the table as credible, competent and resourceful community leaders. Of course, we, the seven of us in the American workforce who are passionately dedicated to this sector, have long known the intrinsic rewards of improving the lot of our fellow man regardless of the multiple challenges we encounter in our work each day. We have emerged stronger and smarter in spite of these obstacles—and yet new issues present themselves with this newly earned acceptance.

The pain associated with this evolution—

- Ongoing inadequate funding for salaries and benefits of those employed in the nonprofit sector;
- Misleading job titles that imply we are “only volunteers;”
- The perception that we are jacks-of-all-trades and not professionals when, in fact, we are masters of them all! Cross-training and multitasking were invented in our sector!
- We may be the “cheap option,” but better still, we are cost effective and ethical in managing the resources and the donations with which we have been entrusted.

All these may be true, but, as professionals, we must examine whether, in fact, we are responsible for perpetuating these perceptions through the ‘poor me’ syndrome and the frustration that leads to burnout—a prevalent by-product of this profession. With increased credibility comes accountability. It is incumbent upon us to be secure in the knowledge that we have indeed earned our place at the community leadership table.

In response to the gains, Wright candidly remarks, “It is almost legitimate to admit you work in the voluntary sector.” In the last eight to ten years, we have seen a proliferation of undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in nonprofit management and public policy, offered at major academic institutions, along with certification programs in volunteer management and fund development.

In addition, the increased focus on workplace volunteerism has seen the corporate world offer training opportunities to its employees to enhance partnerships with community nonprofit organizations they support. The personal rewards of working in the nonprofit sector have not gone unnoticed by corporate employees. Combined with the September 11 World Trade Center tragedy, significant downsizing, and mounting workplace stress and uncertainty, the nonprofit professional has emerged as a valued mentoring resource for those seeking a career transition.

The American public has validated the ability of nonprofit organizations to motivate, mobilize and engage massive numbers of volunteers to respond to critical community needs—on a dime and with a dime! Hence, leadership representation from our sector is becoming a reality.

The pain and gain now lead to impending strain on our sector. As professionals, we must seriously reflect on some central questions:

- Will we be expected and/or “dumped on” to do more with less by the business and government sectors?
- As an equal member of the “mainstream” community now, will we be forced to surrender our independence and innovation that have been trademarks of our professions?
- Will conformity breed mediocrity and complacency or diminish our passion for ‘the cause’ of changing the world?
- And ... as we become less and less unique in our modus operandi, will a fourth sector emerge to fill the shoes left empty by ours?

Let us rejoice, but also be aware of the potential perils of our own success.



## Respondent Paul Luna



**Paul Luna**  
 President  
 Valley of the Sun United Way

I thoroughly enjoyed Stephen W. Wright's interesting and eloquent account of the pain, the gain and the strain associated with working in the nonprofit sector. Clearly charities in Arizona have much in common with our counterparts in England. We, too, feel the pain, the strain and the gain.

The pain is real because those who work in the nonprofit sector believe in the greater good. We are driven by the desire to make a difference. We are committed to improving the lives of individuals. I think Stephen captured it best when he said, "We feel pain because we care so much."

And with the pain comes the strain. The strain is evident in the stress associated with meeting the increased demands placed on the nonprofit sector. We are challenged to perform at maximum efficiency, with complete accountability yet limited resources.

There is, however, gain. The gain comes with meeting the critical needs of the community and having an impact. It was this section of Stephen's comments that intrigued me the most, especially when he openly questioned the value of partnerships, in particular those mandated by funders. While I understand the context in which he expresses the frustrations associated with forced partnerships, I believe, however, that the nonprofit sector must embrace partnerships and collaborations. Future gain will be predicated on our sector's ability to embrace partnerships. Through strategic partnerships we are able to leverage the resources in our community and magnify our collective impact. And in many respects, only through partnerships and collaborations will community success be achieved.

I do agree with Stephen that too often partnerships are formed in the interest of pursuing money, without true commitment to a common goal or, more importantly, trust. They are, as Stephen describes, "vehicles of convenience." They are entities frantically organized and loosely aligned, chasing a vague, somewhat undefined goal. They are similar to the posses formed in the old western movies chasing the bad guys in the desert without a real understanding of why.

True partnerships are, in fact, formed when there is clear agreement and understanding as to why differing interests are better served by joining forces. Where the partnership is based on commitment to the greater good, and the recognition that no one can do it alone. If our goal remains having greater community impact and making the community stronger, it is only through partnerships that this can

be achieved. It is also important to note that partnerships are not exclusive to the nonprofit service providers. True partnerships include both funders and providers, each contributing on equal terms. They require representation from all sectors, including government, businesses and nonprofits, if the greater good is to be realized.



## Respondent Jacki Taylor



### **Jacki Taylor**

*Executive Director*

*United Methodist Outreach Ministries (UMOM)*

First, I want to respond to Stephen's observation that government, for the most part, holds little regard for the volunteer sector. As I heard him iterate that concept, it dawned on me that this should come as no surprise. For if we examine the decisions of our policy-making bodies, it becomes apparent that they, for the most part, hold very little regard for the poor and disenfranchised—the population that is at the heart of the voluntary sector's services. If a sector of society can be cordoned off and regarded as insignificant, is it any wonder that the agencies that provide for the needs of this sector are disregarded as well?

The second point to which I wish to respond is the dependence of the volunteer sector on government funding. As Stephen pointed out, it is often tempting to chase the meager funds that are available. There is, however, an inherent danger in doing so. I believe that it is vital that the organization's mission statement and established strategic plan serve as its road map in discerning which funding sources are most appropriate to pursue. To select funding sources any other way poses the danger of compromising the integrity of the organization, consequently diluting the effective delivery of the services that are currently in place.

Lastly, I want to respond to Stephen's final point regarding the inherent joy of working in the voluntary sector. In spite of the pain and the strain that we all face in this field of work, it is the joy that fuels and sustains us, affording us the stamina to face and overcome the pain and the strain day in and day out. It is the joy of witnessing the success of someone we have helped, of creating a new service to meet an emerging need, of acquiring the necessary funding to sustain a program, of creative and energizing discussion with fellow colleagues, of learning new and more effective techniques of successfully working with those we serve.

Our challenge in the volunteer sector is to more frequently lift up and celebrate these moments of joy that are unique to our field. We must share these with one another as colleagues, with our staff and perhaps even with those whom we serve. There is potential joy in every encounter. For, whether or not a client achieves the degree of success that we would desire, more often than not, a positive impact has been created through the encounter.



Both the client and those who serve are impacted and forever changed with each interaction. Too many times we forget the small successes we achieve together.

Yes, Stephen, we won't forget the pain, the gain or the strain... But, more importantly, we will keep the joy clearly in mind. Thank you, Stephen.