**PERSONAL REFLECTIONS – THE VIEW FROM HERE**

I have been involved in the Charitable Sector for many years.

I helped to start two local Charities more than twenty years ago and remain involved with them as their Patron. They are Pied Piper and Winston’s Wish.

I have been a Trustee, and Chair of the Board of a Company which set up its own Trust. And I am now Chair of the Board of the Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales.

We currently support more than 700 small and medium sized locally based Charities, who in the main support people dealing with multiple disadvantage and complex problems.

For example, domestic abuse, addiction and dependency, mental illness, homelessness and vulnerably housed, learning disability, trafficking and modern slavery, preventing reoffending, prison and community, young parents, care leavers, sexual abuse and exploitation, asylum seekers and refugees.

Lloyds Bank may be found on the high street, but we aim to be on all the back streets.

Last year we granted more than 18 million pounds and additional enhanced support and mentoring.

However, I don’t pretend to be an expert just someone who has been around in a variety of roles for quite a long time. So, these are my personal observations and reflections and I hope they will be helpful as a start to today.

This morning I would like to cover five things.

1. How as Charities we may have been differently impacted by the Coronavirus.
2. The five phases of focus and activity we may go through.
3. What we now have to consider.
4. A possible County Strategy
5. Some final thoughts

My first observation is that we, that is Charities, have been affected in some similar but also some very different ways.

Some of us are able to pause, tread water and even mothball what we do. Our income may have been badly affected however we can prepare to pick up where we left off, perhaps using our time to remind people we are here, plan future fundraising activities and keep in touch with our volunteers and supporters.

Some of us are front line Charities, supporting or providing services to the most vulnerable people.

We suddenly have more new clients, as well as returning clients who had moved on to independence but are overwhelmed with today’s situation and need more help.

As well as a current cohort of clients who have been, till now, our immediate concern.

This together with a loss of income and an urgent need to redesign services and source and get to grips with new technology to help us deliver differently.

I observe, what a colleague of mine calls, reverse Darwinism. That is those of us who have worked to diversify our income stream in order to become fitter and less dependent on one source of income, have often been the hardest hit from several different directions.

But I also observe that in diversifying those same Charities have developed excellent entrepreneurial skills, data analysis and management as well as resilience. Which will stand them in good stead as they manage their way forward.

**FIVE PHASES**

I can also see five distinct phases as we are engaging with our current realities.

1. REACT – That is our first beginning as we have worked out how we keep going and how we address and manage the immediate situation. And here we have benefited from learning from one another.
2. RECOVER – That is after the initial shock we think and begin to focus and prioritise and build new ways of doing things and begin to develop practical ways of managing and providing sustainable services.
3. REFLECT – In dealing with a crisis, one of the things that rapidly emerges is where our weaknesses are. Weaknesses in the organisation, in our management, in our strategy and in our governance. So here we need to gather information and examples and focus on what needs to be addressed to make us strong and sustainable.
4. RE-IMAGINE – Here I think that we need, as a Board of Trustees together with our management, to go back to first principles
5. RENEW – Finally, I think we need consider and build our new purpose, vision, mission and organisation and reaffirm our values.

My hope is that we do the work needed to go through all five phases at a time, and in a way that suits us individually. And that we don’t just go back to the previous status quo and stop.

**SO, WHAT DO WE HAVE TO CONSIDER?**

What evidence and data gathering will be needed to Re-imagine and Renew?

I think we have to start with PURPOSE. The reason we exist. And to work through what it was, what it became and what it could be.

And then we have to address VISION. Here we are considering the impact we want to have on our world in the next five to ten years. We need to describe the long term desired change resulting from our work. We need to agree and then state what makes us distinctive. And the results of this work will be the main reference point for our strategies, our priorities, our plans and our goals. Our star to steer by.

We have to reaffirm our VALUES and seek ways to demonstrate them and evaluate them.

We also need to address governance and risk, how many of us had this on our risk registers?

We could start with our leadership, our Board of Trustees, our Executive Management and our Volunteers. We must be fit for purpose.

I have observed that a great many Charities are started by passionate pioneers.

Either they have experienced a significant life event and want to contribute or they have identified a gap which needs be addressed and filled, and in this way, make a real difference.

They have then sought to gain support from friends and fellow thinkers and with them put together a Board to build and drive their Charity and seek funding.

However, times and contexts have changed, and with all the rules and regulations which now surround the Charity

Sector, and the onus on Boards to be responsible for Strategy, Oversight of operations and Governance, it is no longer enough to be supporting and passionate.

We must respect and recognise this history and legacy, but we must diversify and build stronger and better Boards and not just from people we know.

I have always liked the HG Wells quote about leadership which says, ‘A leader must lead as far as they can and then leave. Their ashes should not choke the fires they have lit’.

**THE BIGGER PICTURE**

If I could have one wish in relation to Civil Society and particularly the Charity sector in Gloucestershire, it is this. That the partnership working and collaboration between us would continue to strengthen and grow.

That we would be able to do a Strategic Review of the challenges and needs across the County, both in terms of focus and geography.

That we volunteer to be part of an audit of where we are strong, where we are over provided and where we are weak and where there are unmet needs.

That as a result of the outcomes of this work we can choose where we can collaborate, where we can enter into partnerships, where we might join together permanently.

And where as a Charity we have succeeded, done our job, completed out task.Then we need to consider the closing of our Charity and look to finish and end well.

We would then have a strong and dynamic sector which truly meets the needs of both citizens and place.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

I think Charities in Gloucestershire have demonstrated leadership, imagination, resilience, partnership working and sacrifice.

I am daily inspired by the stories of the work you do.

We don’t get everything right but if we can learn from our mistakes, how amazing might our future be?

I leave you with the words of the poet Antonio Machado who said this,

‘Last night I dreamt, marvellous error, there was a beehive in my heart, and golden bees were making sweet honey from my old failures’.

Thank you

Rennie Fritchie

27/05/20