

WHAT HAVE CHARITIES EVER DONE FOR US?

THE STORIES
BEHIND THE
HEADLINES



Stephen Cook and Tania Mason



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The stories behind the headlines

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Charities are the eyes, ears and conscience of society. They mobilise, they provide, they inspire, they advocate and they unite. From small local organisations run entirely by volunteers to major global organisations with turnover in the hundreds of millions, their work touches almost every facet of British civic life.

(House of Lords Select Committee on Charities,
Stronger Charities for a Stronger Society, March 2017)

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| Acevo | Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations |
| AMRC | Association of Medical Research Charities |
| ASH | Action on Smoking and Health |
| BAME | Black and minority ethnic people |
| BHF | British Heart Foundation |
| BL | British Land Company |
| BRAC | Building Resources Across Communities |
| CAF | Charities Aid Foundation |
| CAMI | Community Attitudes to Mental Illness |
| CASC | community amateur sports club |
| CEO | chief executive officer |
| CIC | community interest company |
| CIO | charitable incorporated organisation |
| CQC | Care Quality Commission |
| CRC | Community Rehabilitation Company |
| CRE | Commission for Racial Equality |
| CRUK | Cancer Research UK |
| CSW | #CharitySoWhite |
| CVS | Council for Voluntary Service |
| DCMS | Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport |
| DfID | Department for International Development |
| DHSC | Department of Health and Social Care |
| ESFA | Education and Skills Funding Agency |
| GLF | Gay Liberation Front |
| HHA | Hope Health Action |
| IEA | Institute of Economic Affairs |
| IFAW | International Fund for Animal Welfare |
| IOPPN | Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience |
| IPS | industrial and provident society |

What Have Charities Ever Done for Us?

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|--------|---|
| IRW | Islamic Relief Worldwide |
| ISC | Independent Schools Council |
| ITT | invitation to tender |
| JCWI | Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants |
| LAE | London Academy of Excellence |
| LGBT | lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| NABB | National Association of Blood Bikes |
| NAO | National Audit Office |
| Navca | National Association for Voluntary and Community Action |
| NCVO | National Council for Voluntary Organisations |
| NDPR | non-departmental public body |
| NGO | non-governmental organisation |
| NHS | National Health Service |
| NICE | National Institute for Health and Care Excellence |
| NSPCC | National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children |
| OCS | Office for Civil Society |
| PAC | public accounts committee |
| PEP | Political and Economic Planning |
| PTSD | post-traumatic stress disorder |
| PQQ | pre-qualifying questionnaire |
| RNIB | Royal National Institute of Blind People |
| RNID | Royal National Institute for Deaf People |
| RNLI | Royal National Lifeboat Institution |
| Rospa | Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents |
| RSPB | Royal Society for the Protection of Birds |
| RSPCA | Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals |
| SARI | Stand Against Racism and Inequality |
| SAS | Surfers Against Sewage |
| SEUK | Social Enterprise UK |
| TB | tuberculosis |
| TfL | Transport for London |
| TR | Transforming Rehabilitation |
| Unicef | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VAT | value added tax |

List of abbreviations

| | |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| VCS | voluntary and community sector |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |
| XR | Extinction Rebellion |

Introduction

When the coronavirus pandemic took hold in the United Kingdom early in 2020, charities were among the first to draw attention to the resulting social distress and to take action. Foodbanks reported growing demand and did their best to meet it. Domestic abuse charities responded to a 50% increase in calls as successive lockdowns wore on. Calls to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) went up from an average of 600 a month to more than 900. The mental health charity Mind stepped up its advice and advocacy services, and 750,000 people joined a Royal Voluntary Service network of volunteers to support those who were self-isolating.

This was nothing new. It was, rather, a fresh illustration of the role charities play at times of national and international crisis. Many of them are experts in their field, close enough to people and communities to see where the need is, and flexible enough to respond swiftly. They were active in the two world wars; they joined the relief effort in the disastrous floods in eastern England in 1953; they played a leading role in tackling AIDS. During the war in Afghanistan, Help for Heroes was established and expanded rapidly to care for injured veterans. Charities respond continually to natural disasters abroad and at home.

They are also an integral part of society in normal times, best known for their work from day to day with those who are poor, sick, homeless or living with disability. But their role is not confined to the relief of individual need. They also play an essential part in education, medical research, the democratic process, the advancement of rights, the guardianship of culture and heritage, the stability and development of local communities, leisure, the protection of the environment and the delivery of public services. This complex proliferation of organisations and their role in promoting social and economic progress is not always well understood or recognised.

The purpose of this book is to make the breadth and depth of the work of charities more visible and better appreciated by categorising what they do and bringing it to life through case studies and interviews, including examples of their response to the coronavirus emergency. It also sets the historical context, examines recent scandals and criticisms and looks at the case for improvements in the governance, transparency and independence of charities.

Our starting point was almost two decades as journalists writing about the charity world. We went out to discover more about organisations we thought would provide vivid illustrations of particular causes. In some cases, these are large and well known; in others, not: we wanted to showcase charities of all shapes and sizes. We have tried to include the main areas where charities play a significant part, but in this wide and varied landscape there will inevitably be some omissions. We are presenting a sample rather than an inventory. Where we refer to the interviews we conducted for the book, these are distinguished from other sources by use of the present tense.

The demand for the services of charities in the coronavirus emergency increased by 42%, according to an early survey by the Charity Finance Group, while overall income was down by a third. Fundraising events such as the London Marathon were cancelled or scaled down, charity shops were closed for months and donations from individuals fell back. The government responded with a £750 million grant fund, but warned that this would not save every charity. The shape, size and profile of the charity world began to change as, for example, National Health Service (NHS) charities expanded and international development charities came under pressure. One survey by Pro Bono Economics indicated that one in ten charities expected to close by the end of 2020.

The record of charities indicates, however, that they will adapt to the huge economic and social disruptions and play a key role in the long-term recovery. Despite reduced resources and extra demand, they will continue to flag up important questions, raise money from the public and philanthropists, mobilise volunteers and community action, devise new ways of meeting social need, prop up state provision and confirm their essential role in what the welfare state pioneer William Beveridge, writing about the future of voluntary action in 1948, called ‘the good society’.