



## Welcome to the Winter 2025 newsletter

Hey there philanthropoids,

Happy New Year to all of you, if it isn't too late to say that? (It certainly wasn't when I started writing this newsletter, so I'm going to stick with it). I hope that you all managed to have a decent break over the festive period and that 2026 hasn't been too much of a shock to the system yet. (Although it does have to be said that the news agenda since the start of the year does tend to suggest that global geopolitics isn't going to slow down or get significantly less nuts any time soon...)

I decided to expend my final pre-Christmas vestiges of energy on putting out a [2026 trends and predictions podcast](#) plus [accompanying article](#) (of which more in a bit) – hence this is coming to you slightly the wrong side of the changing of the year. There are certainly some big and interesting philanthropy stories to cover though, so I thought I would get this edition out now rather than wait until the end of the month and risk being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content to get through.

As ever at this time of year, I've been doing a bit of thinking about the longer term and what comes next – particularly because 2026 looks set to be a year in which the balance of stuff in my portfolio of work shifts quite a bit. (In part because my role as a Research Fellow at the University of Kent, which I have done one day a week for the last 4

years, has come to an end). In the immediate short term, I'm going to be pretty busy with the stories of philanthropy project I told you all about in the last newsletter (as well putting out future editions of said newsletter, doing the podcast etc). But later on this year, from about April or so, I will probably have a bit more capacity for taking on other bits of work, so if that is of any interest or use to any of you, feel free to get in touch.

Right, that's enough with the sales pitch. On with the show.

Rhodri

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## PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

### **Giving a Good Account: The Dells' big philanthropic move**

The biggest piece of philanthropy news in December was undoubtedly the announcement that [billionaire tech mogul Michael Dell and his wife Susan are planning to give \\$6.25 billion to support children from lower income families in the US.](#)





(Image credit: [Oracle PR](#), [CC BY 2.0](#). NB: I should say that I am not being a misogynist and trying to elide Susan Dell - I just couldn't find a usable photo of her.)

As one of the largest philanthropic gifts in US history, this would clearly be a major piece of news simply by virtue of its scale, but there are other aspects of this story that make it even more interesting and thought-provoking. The first is that the money is not being used to set up new programs or fund existing ones but will instead be given out in the form of \$250 individual grants to eligible children. The second is that these grants will not go directly to the children in the form of cash (as tends to happen with most direct giving or cash transfer initiatives), but will instead take the form of a \$250 into one of the newly-launched "Trump Accounts".

These are tax-advantaged savings vehicles for children under 18 that families can access from this year, which allow investments to be made in certain approved US stock market-linked funds. (For UK readers, they are basically a bit like a cross between a Junior ISA and a Child Trust Fund). The US govt is offering an additional incentive for the parents of children born between Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 and Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 2028 to set up a Trump Account, in the form of a grant of \$1000 directly into the account when it is opened. Of course, there are many children under 18 in the US who were born before 2025 and are thus eligible for a Trump account but

not for the additional \$1000 grant – and this is where the Dells come in. Their plan is to offer one-off gifts of \$250 directly into Trump Accounts set up for kids who aren't eligible for the additional government grant *and* who live in areas where the median income annual income is below \$150,000.

One thing worth pointing out is that the way in which these gifts are structured means that the \$6.25 billion figure is really a projected maximum rather than a fixed amount, since it is contingent on the take-up of Trump Accounts among the target group being sufficiently high. Which is not to pour cold water on the whole thing - as the Dells will undoubtedly end up giving a very large amount of money whatever happens – but merely to highlight the fact that there is a difference between a pledge or intention to give a certain sum of money away and actually doing so.

The more important question is why the Dells have chosen to align themselves so closely with a government policy initiative that is emblazoned with the name of a divisive and controversial US President, and what some of the implications of that decision might be. Let's start with the why: one interpretation is that the Dells wanted to do something big to address poverty, and perhaps were particularly keen to use some form of direct giving, but realised that it would be extremely difficult (if not impossible) to do that at the sort of scale they wanted through traditional nonprofit structures. The introduction of Trump Accounts therefore provided them with an opportunity to do something they might otherwise not have been able to do. (Which might have been a happy accident, or the Dells might have been involved in pushing for these accounts to be introduced in the first place – I don't know). A more cynical interpretation (and, unsurprisingly, [the one that the Guardian went for](#)) would be to suggest that the choice to link this big philanthropic gesture to a policy initiative bearing Donald Trump's name is not at all accidental, and that the Dell's intention is very much to flatter the President in order to get in his good books and increase their own influence. (A strategy that, it has to be said, has already been adopted by various world leaders to pretty good effect...)

But whilst aligning philanthropy with government policy in this way may well bring benefits for the donor (whether those are incidental or the

whole point), I would argue that it also brings significant risks. For one thing, it ties the success of the philanthropy and public perceptions of it to the policy initiative, and in the case of Trump Accounts not everyone is particularly sold on them. Various experts have argued that certain aspects of the way the policy has been designed are likely to undermine its potential impact and to result in children from wealthier families benefitting significantly more. (E.g. [the Urban Institute has compared Trump Accounts unfavourably to the available evidence from other existing early wealth building initiatives](#), and the [Tax Law Center has even more pointedly criticised them for “serving no real purpose” and “excluding vulnerable children”](#)). More broadly, some might take issue with the unabashedly capitalist nature of the idea that the best way to help poor kids is to make them invest their savings in the stock market; and might take further issue with the fact that the policy dictates investments have to be made into US corporate equities funds, as these are relatively high-risk and might not be the most suitable kinds of investments for those on low incomes. (This then raises the further question of whether the real primary purpose of the policy is to lift people out of poverty or to boost investment in US companies...)

For another thing, even if the policy does prove to be successful, who's to say that a future Democrat administration would stick with it? Or even a future Republican administration that might want to distance itself from Trump's name and legacy? And if future policy changes are made that undermine the value of Trump Accounts, what will this mean for the Dell's philanthropic goals?

There is also an important counterfactual to consider, which to some extent always applies to philanthropy, but feels particularly pertinent in this case; namely, could this money be better spent on something else? \$6.25 billion is a lot of cash by anyone's reckoning, and could clearly do a lot of good in the world, so is this the best and most effective way of giving it away? On the assumption that they are both broadly down with capitalism, I'm not sure I would expect Michael and Susan Dell to start funding radical wealth redistribution initiatives or campaigns to introduce wealth taxes, but even within the parameters of accepting the status quo, could they be using their money differently to address poverty in more fundamental and meaningful ways?

Of course, in some ways this question is entirely theoretical as the Dells have already made their choice, but it still feels important to ask as part of the process of holding them to account and in terms of determining what other donors might do in the future.

## **Great Scott! (Again...)**

The Dell's \$6.25 billion gift is a big deal in anyone's estimation, even taking into account the caveats outlined above. And in most months, it would undoubtedly have been the most eye-catching figure in any philanthropy story. One can imagine that it was therefore mildly annoying for Michael and Susan Dell month also saw news that [MacKenzie Scott has significantly ramped up her philanthropy in 2025, and has given away \\$7.1 billion over the course of the year.](#)

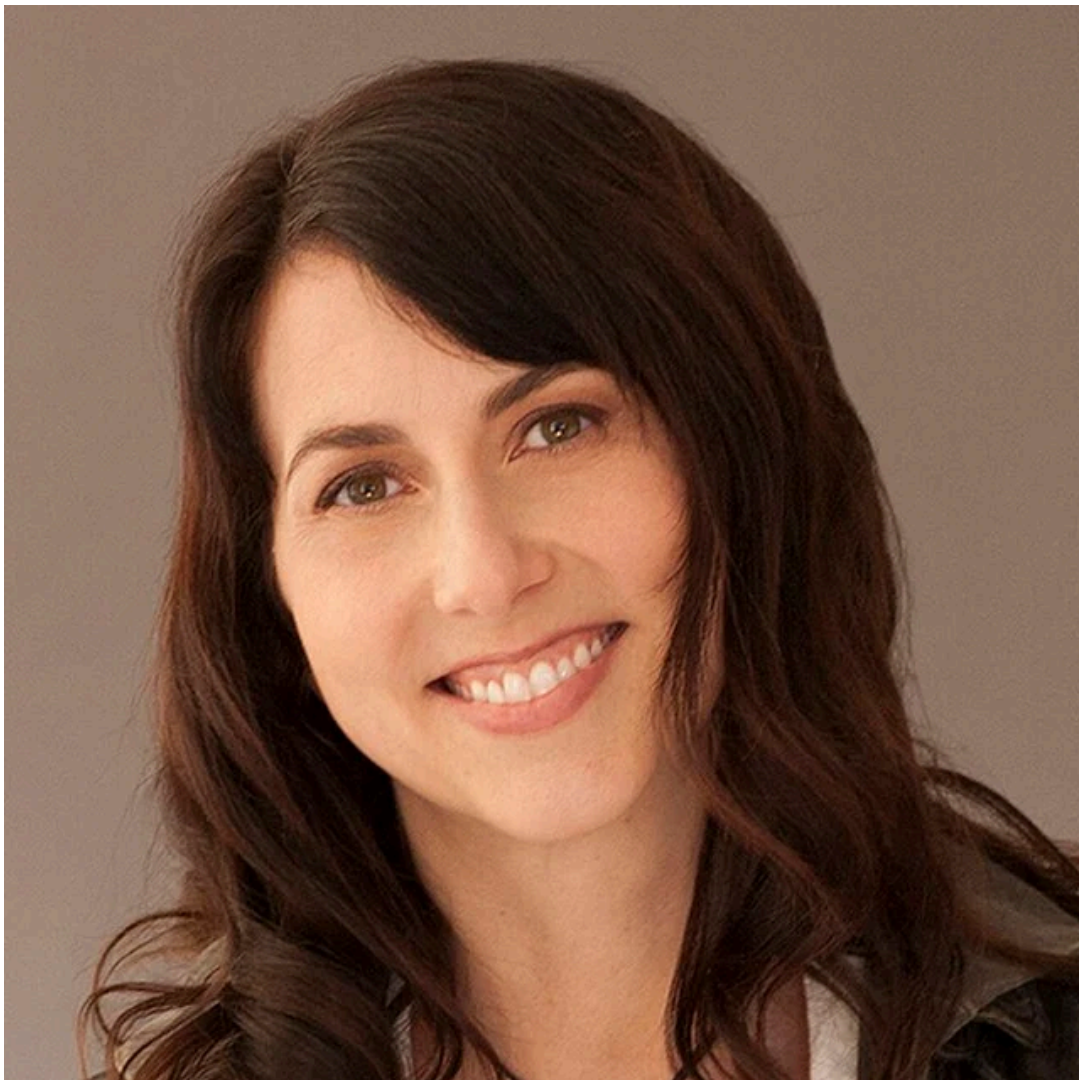


Image Credit: [MacKenzie Scott on X](#)



Now I know that at this point “MacKenzie Scott gives a lot of money away” barely even qualifies as news, but let me just repeat that: \$7.1 billion. *7.1 billion dollars*. Even by Scott’s standards this is a lot of money, and marks a big increase from the \$2.6 billion she gave away in 2024 and the \$2.1 billion in 2023 (which, let’s be honest, was already quite a lot). This means that her total giving since she struck out on her philanthropy journey in 2019 now stands at \$26.3bn. Which is almost a week’s pay for Elon Musk.

It’s worth point out again that one of the particularly compelling things about MacKenzie Scott’s regular philanthropy updates is that she is not talking about “things I would like to give to at some point” or “stuff I am definitely pledging to do one day”, but about amounts of money that she has actually given away already. Which is not to say that making pledges is a bad thing, but criticism of the Giving Pledge in recent years has highlighted the fact that there can often be a gap between the rhetoric of good intentions and the reality of cold hard cash when it comes to big money philanthropy; and no-one can accuse Scott of that.

Scott also continues to offer a challenge to the status quo of elite philanthropy in terms of the way she does her giving – with her focus on proactive support for organisations through large, unrestricted, long-term grants. Which doesn’t yet seem to have led to a huge wave of other big money donors following suit, but with the ongoing transfer of wealth taking place globally, and the emergence of a new generation of philanthropists who seem to be keenly aware of power imbalances in philanthropy and want to do something about it, maybe we can remain hopeful that more donors will start following Scott’s lead soon.

## Musk Try Harder

In case we all needed a reminder of why MacKenzie Scott is such an important corrective to some of the received wisdom on philanthropy, the world’s richest Man [Elon Musk helpfully gave an interview this month bemoaning how difficult it is to give money away.](#)



Image credit: [Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Musk appeared on the *WTF* podcast (no, not the good one with Marc Maron, but the one where tech bro Nikhil Kamath invites on other tech bros for “casual yet intellectually stimulating conversations” <shudder>), where he said:

*“I agree with love of humanity, and I think we should try to do things that help our fellow human beings... But it’s very hard.”*

It’s tempting to say that when you have a reputed net worth of over \$700 billion, as Musk does, it shouldn’t actually be that hard to “do

things that help your fellow human beings”, but Musk has consistently maintained that it is extremely difficult. Which presumably is one of the reasons that he doesn’t give very much as a percentage of his wealth; and that when he does, he gives it to his own DAFs or to organisations he controls in some way...

Snarkiness aside, Musk is far from the first big money philanthropist to put forward the idea that giving money away effectively is hard. Andrew Carnegie is often cited for his comment that “it is harder to give money away intelligently than to earn it in the first place”, and plenty of others have agreed with him. This all rests, of course, on what you mean by “intelligent” or “effective”. Since Carnegie and others established the temple of institutionalised ‘scientific’ philanthropy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has tended to be equated with a top-down process in which the donor identifies a means of achieving desired outcomes and funds in a program-based way, where success is defined according to measures which reflect the structures that have been created. If you move away from this paradigm, however, and embrace a different, more trust-based approach to giving (as the aforementioned Mackenzie Scott has done), then effectiveness potentially starts to look very different. Since a large part of the point is to empower organisations to continue doing their work, a trust-based donation is arguably effective at the moment it is made. (Although it should be said that [independent analysis by the Center for Effective Philanthropy over a number of years has concluded that Scott’s giving actually scores well on more traditional metrics of effectiveness as well](#). So there isn’t necessarily even a trade-off).

Anyway, whilst I would love it if this was the last time I wrote about Elon Musk in 2026, I very much suspect that it won’t be given the scale of his wealth and his unfortunate ongoing prominence in world events.

## **Giving Hope? GivingTuesday results in**

Moving away now from big money giving (or big money not-giving, in Elon Musk’s case), early December also saw a celebration of everyday giving and generosity in the form of Giving Tuesday. And despite the challenging economic and political climate, the results from this year’s

day of giving brought some positive news, with [\\$4bn being given in the US \(an increase from \\$3.6 billion in 2024\)](#) and an [estimated 38.1 million participants](#).



Given how much discussion there has been in the last few years about the apparent decline in giving (not least from me...) this might be an encouraging sign that things are be stabilising. Or perhaps it shows that we are getting better at measuring the forms of giving that people actually engage in, so the apparent decline in generosity starts to look less of an issue? Either way, this seems like a piece of good news and certainly something to track closely across the coming year.

The figures released so far for Giving Tuesday focus pretty much exclusively on the US, but as [Giving Tuesday CEO Asha Curran explained when I spoke to her for the Philanthropisms podcast back in November](#), that doesn't give anything like the full picture of the impact of day as a whole – both because it is now truly global in nature (in over 100 countries worldwide), and because plenty of work take place throughout the year as well as the single day of giving on the Tuesday after US Thanksgiving. So it will be really interesting to keep an eye out for further data that gives a sense of some of this wider impact as the year progresses. (And in the meantime, if you are interested (and have access) you can read [my entry on Giving Tuesday for the International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society](#)).



## Making Good Company: India's CSR law and environmental responsibility

For a total change of topic, I spotted an interesting article in *Alliance* magazine this month about how [India's Supreme Court has just ruled that corporate social responsibility must "inherently include environmental responsibility" and therefore that companies in India have a duty "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures."](#)



Image credit: [PJenganathan, CC-BY 4.0](#)

For those unfamiliar with the Indian context it might seem a bit weird for the government to be getting involved in defining CSR, as this doesn't necessarily seem like a question that governments get to decide. However, back in 2013 India became the first country in the world to introduce a law mandating that [all companies registered in India over a certain size have to spend a minimum of 2% of its net profits each year in pursuit of a defined CSR policy](#). Which obviously makes the definition of CSR a matter of great interest to the Indian government.

The Indian mandatory CSR law is a really interesting example within global philanthropy, although as far as I am aware it has not yet spawned similar legislation anywhere else in the world. It has certainly proven to be a sure-fire debate starter with students on the Global Philanthropy module of the University of Kent Masters in Philanthropic Studies course that I have taught on for the last 4 years, however, raising questions such as: is this law effective as a way of getting more money to good causes? Is there a risk that companies simply redefine other activities in order to meet the requirements? If you set a requirement of 2%, does that immediately become a ceiling rather than a floor (i.e. companies that otherwise might spend more on CSR round down to the minimum)? And if this is mandatory, can it meaningfully be called corporate philanthropy or is it essentially a new tax?

Whatever the answers to those questions, as someone with a particular interest in biodiversity and environmental issues, and given that still only a tiny portion of overall philanthropic funding goes to these causes (it's usually cited as being around 2%), I have to say that I'm quite pleased that the Indian government has taken this step.

## **National Treasure: The NT gets its biggest ever donation**

Sticking on a broadly environmental theme but coming back to the UK, it was announced just this week that [the National Trust - the UK's largest heritage and conservation charity- has just received a £10m philanthropic donation from the Venture Capital millionaire Humphrey Battock; the largest single gift in its history.](#)



Image credit: [Simon Burchell, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

There are a few aspects of this story worth noting. This first is that it is quite surprising (to me at least) that this is the biggest gift in the NT's history. The UK is, of course, not the US, and multimillion pound donations are still not the norm (although they do appear to be on the rise); but given that the NT has been around now for more than 125 years I would have guessed that it had managed to secure at least some massive donations throughout the years. (Particularly if you count the many stately homes that have been passed into the NT's ownership over the years, but I suspect those haven't been counted as donations). Perhaps the fact that the NT hasn't received any donations of this scale before is a reflection of the fact that it is a mass membership organisation, relying on the support through membership and volunteering of its more than 5 million members, rather than on a handful of wealthier supporters. As has been noted many times before, this membership dwarfs that of all mainstream UK political parties put together – which I find is always a fun point to bring up whenever questions are raised about the legitimacy of charities getting involved in quote/unquote 'political' issues, as the NT itself has often been in recent years.



Which brings me to the second interesting thing about this story: that the donation comes at a particularly welcome time for the NT, as things have not exactly been easy for the organisation over the past few years. In addition to [weathering ongoing culture war attacks from politicians and commentators outside the organisation](#), the NT has also had to fend off repeated attempts to bring those attacks into the organisation by groups such as Restore Trust – which [has tried a number of times to get its entryist candidates elected to the NT's Council](#) (so far unsuccessfully). At the same time [the NT has had to face sharply rising costs](#). As, of course, have many other UK charities - but when you manage a large number of poorly insulated old houses and massive tracts of land, massive increases in the cost of things like gas, electricity, petrol and fertiliser have a particularly profound effect. As a result, the NT announced last year that it was having to cut 500 jobs. Against that backdrop, a gift of £10m will surely be more welcome than ever.

The third and (for now) final thing about this story that I thought was particularly noteworthy is that the gift is unrestricted, and this was something that the donor -Humphrey Battock – wanted to be particularly clear about, explaining that:

*“In making this donation, I want to emphasise that it is unrestricted; I will have no say over how the charity spends it – and that is because I trust the National Trust to know how best this money can be used.”*

Which seems like another encouraging data point in the shift towards trust-based and unrestricted funding among UK philanthropists.

## **Roman Ruins: Abramovich's philanthropic foot dragging**

In “Less Enthusiastic Philanthropy” news, [the UK government has issued a final warning to Billionaire Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich to donate more than £2.5 billion he received as part of the sale of Chelsea FC](#).



Image Credit: [Marina Lystseva](#), [GNU Free Documentation License 1.2](#)

Abramovich sold the club back in 2022, when he was under intense scrutiny following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, thanks to his close links to Vladimir Putin. To head off the threat of being sanctioned and having his assets (including Chelsea FC) seized, Abramovich announced that he was going to sell the football club and use the profits to create a new foundation that would initially support humanitarian causes in Ukraine to the tune of £2.5 billion (and would subsequently be able to branch out into supporting other causes). Yet, in a development that really shouldn't come as a shock to any organism with even rudimentary cognitive functions, Abramovich has not actually done anything to make this happen so far, and thus the money is currently languishing in a frozen UK bank account.

The UK government's latest announcement that [it is issuing Abramovich with a licence to transfer the £2.5 billion as originally agreed](#) is very much framed as a final warning, and the last step before court action is

initiated to allow the government to take control of the funds in question. Presumably Abramovich can afford some fairly decent (if highly ethically compromised) lawyers, however, so I suspect that this process would be fairly drawn out and complicated. Hence it would be far better if he just handed the money over willingly at this juncture. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like there is anything in his actions so far to suggest that he is likely to go down this route, so I suspect it might still be a while before the people of Ukraine see anyone of his ill-gotten gains.

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## WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

This is the section where I provide a bit of an update on what WPM has been up to over the last month or so.

### **Philanthropisms Podcast**

The Philanthropisms podcast took a short break over the festive period, but thanks to me deciding to cram in an extra episode in December there are still three new episodes to update you on.

First off, we had a great interview with Philippa Charles OBE (CEO of the DFN Foundation, and former CEO of the Garfield Weston Foundation) about her experiences as a grantmaker and the insights it had given her. Next up we had the annual trends and predictions episode of the podcast, giving my thoughts about what to watch out for in philanthropy and civil society in 2026. And then straight away after New Year (because there's no rest for the wicked), we had the 12<sup>th</sup> in our partnership series with ERNOP (this time featuring interviews with Peter Vandor, Jo Bacon & Claire Routley, and Michaela Neumayr).



## Philanthropisms

Philippa Charles: Foundations and Grantmaking



## Philanthropisms

What Next? 2026 Trends and Predictions for Philanthropy & Civil Society



## Artist name

ERNOP: Connecting Philanthropy Academia & Practice #12



Listen to the episode with Philippa

Listen to the 2026 trends and predictions episode

Listen to the ERNOP episode

### Esquire Middle East:

I was featured this month offering up some thoughts for an article in Esquire Middle East asking “[Will the Millennial mindset approach save the future of philanthropy?](#)” (At least, I *think* I offered up these thoughts – this is one of those where the actual conversation with the journalist was so long ago that the whole thing slightly has the air of a fever dream. But the comments do *sound* like me, so let’s assume I said them...)

Read the article

### **Der Spiegel:**

I also popped up briefly *auf Deutsch* this month [in the pages of \*Der Spiegel\*](#), commenting on MrBeast's philanthropy once again. I'm sure my mum, who is a former German teacher, will be delighted – and if she asks any of you, I *definitely* did the interview in German rather than it having to be translated from English, OK?

Read the article

### **Devex:**

It was in fact a double whammy of MrBeast comment this month, as I also [graced the pages of \*Devex\* offering some slightly more detailed thoughts on his philanthropy](#), in light of the announcement about his new partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation (which we covered in the last newsletter).

I think that article is behind a paywall, although the shareable link below will give a lucky few of you access (until it runs out). If you miss out on that though, there was also [a summary piece which carried a few of my comments](#).

Read the original article (limited link)

Read the summary piece

### **ARTE documentary:**

At the end of my first week back at work after New Year, I spent a very enjoyable day out at Port Sunlight (the model workers' village not far from Liverpool built by the philanthropist and soap magnate William Hesketh Lever), recording footage for a forthcoming documentary for the French/German public service broadcaster ARTE about the history of philanthropy.



The documentary itself (which is part of their “Is it true that...?” history series) probably won’t be out until the summer, but here’s a little sneak preview of my day pretending to be a Telly Don.



## **Oxford Community Foundation Event**

Back at the start of December I was lucky enough to give the keynote speech for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, at a great event in the Randolph Hotel. This was particularly exciting for me, as I went to university just round the corner from there, and the Randolph was always the place that you hoped you could convince your parents to take you for lunch when they visited. Sadly, I never managed to make it there during my time as an undergraduate, so it was nice to remedy that 25 years later. (In addition, of course, to offering some thoughts on the value of community philanthropy and meeting some lovely people...)



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## OTHER GOOD STUFF

This is the bit where I share other philanthropy-related things I have come across that might not quite count as news but are definitely worth checking out.

### **RIP Sir Alec Reed:**

The start of December saw the news that well-known businessman and philanthropist Sir Alec Reed had died at the age of 91. Reed was involved in launching a number of charities, including Womankind Worldwide and Ethiopiaid, but was perhaps best known for creating the Big Give – the matching initiative that was incubated in the Reed Foundation and has gone on to become a major part of the UK fundraising landscape (including its annual Big Give Xmas Challenge, which offers everyday donors the opportunity to double their donations to a wide range of charitable projects every December).



Image credit: [Oiona](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

[Read the article](#)

### **Craig Newmark joins the Giving Pledge:**

Hot on the heels of OpenAI founder Sam Altman's announcement back in November that he is joining the Giving Pledge, December saw Craigslist founder Craig Newmark also sign up for the initiative. Newmark has long been known for his philanthropy, so tbh I was slightly surprised to discover that he wasn't already a Giving Pledge signatory (as he definitely seems the type), but it is great that he has signed up now. (Especially if he swells the ranks of GP signatories who look like



they are actually in danger of making good on their promise to give away more than half of their wealth...)



Image credit: [Jennifer 8. Lee, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

[Read the article](#)

**GoFundMe in the news:**

There were a couple of bits of interesting news from the crowdfunding platform GoFundMe over the last month. First of all was the launch of their annual “Year in Help” report, detailing trends in how people have used the platform. [This found that there was a steep rise in the number of people fundraising for the cost of essentials](#) such as rent, groceries and utility bills – up 20% from the year before (which had already seen a quadrupling from 2023).

The second GoFundMe-related nugget that caught my eye this month was an interview with CEO Tim Cadogan in the FT. This was for the “Aesthete” column, so it was primarily about Cadogan’s taste (I, for one, was grateful to learn about how much he loves his orange hydro flask), but there were also a few more substantive bits sprinkled throughout the piece. The most notable, to my eyes, was the mention of how GoFundMe is “using generative AI to remove friction in both asking and giving – suggesting titles and social copy and tailoring suggested donation amounts to each donor’s behaviour.” As [I have outlined elsewhere](#), I have quite a lot of questions and concerns about the use of AI to shape giving choices, so I was intrigued to read this and will definitely be keeping a close eye on it.



[Read the article about the Year in Help report](#)

[Read the FT profile piece](#)

### **Phoebe Gates:**

While we are talking about faintly nauseating profile pieces that also contain some genuinely interesting insights, it is also worth mentioning the [FT interview this month with Phoebe Gates](#) (Daughter of Bill Gates

and Melinda French Gates). I have to admit to a certain amount of eye-rolling at the mention of the “AI-powered shopping app” that is her primary focus at the moment, but once you get past that and into the philanthropy bit of the article, there is some worthwhile stuff about why she is focussing on reproductive rights (which is obviously not an uncontroversial issue right now) and how she is deliberately leveraging the fame that inevitably comes with her name to engage in “influencer philanthropy” as well as doing her own giving.

[Read the article](#)

### **Green Brothers Vlog philanthropy:**

Another influencer philanthropy related piece in the FT also caught my eye this past month – this time about the brothers John and Hank Green. John is an author who wrote the best-selling teen novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, while Hank is a science communicator and entrepreneur, and they have over the years collaborated on a range of YouTube channels including CrashCourse, SciShow and Vlogbrothers, which have a combined subscriber base of nearly 30 million people. They have also long been active supporters of a range of charitable organisations and initiatives and have used their internet profile to encourage other to get involved too (including the annual Project for Awesome, which has raised over \$20m in total). They clearly aren’t operating on the same scale as MrBeast (with his 460 million subscribers), but in the context of growing debates about the merits or otherwise of influencer philanthropy, it is really interesting to know about them as something of a counterpoint.





Image credit: [John Green & Hank Green, CC BY 3.0](#)

[Read the article](#)

### **Save the Children bitcoin fund:**

There was a really interesting article back in December about [Save the Children's creation of a new Bitcoin Fund](#). The charity has been experimenting with cryptocurrency for over a decade now, so this has not come out of nowhere. I was surprised to read, however, that Save the Children has designed their new fund with the intention of holding crypto for up to 4 years, rather than converting it immediately to fiat money, which is what the vast majority of other nonprofits which accept crypto donations tend to do. (And which [I have suggested in the past is the best route for nonprofits to take](#)). Apparently Save the Children is doing this because they have found that some crypto donors would rather they held on to donations in the form of crypto, rather than converting it (presumably in the hope that the value might go up?) Which could be interpreted as a canny bit of pragmatism (i.e. if that's what certain donors want and they are more likely to give if their preferences are met, then does it make sense to go with the flow), but equally could be seen as a slightly uncomfortable new form of donor control over an organisation they are giving to.

The other noteworthy thing about this story is that Save the Children is not just positioning its interest in cryptocurrency as a way of tapping into a new source of income, but is also arguing that there might be

benefits in terms of moving money around the world more effectively and getting money into areas where that might otherwise be difficult. Which was always a big part of the conversation when I was doing a lot of work on cryptophilanthropy and blockchain back in the latter half of the 2010s, but isn't something I have heard very much recently, so it is interesting to hear this angle being raised again in the context of an increasingly challenging global political climate and the post-USAID development landscape.



[Read the article](#)

### **US anti-rights groups take advantage of aid cuts:**

Speaking of the post-USAID world, there was a deeply worrying piece in the *Guardian* recently detailing a trend in which [ultra-conservative US Christian organisations are attempting to step into some of the many gaps left by the withdrawal of US government funding around the world](#) to allow them to push an anti-reproductive rights agenda. This is a stark reminder that one of the most important roles for philanthropy and civil



society over coming years will not necessarily be to fight for new rights, but to protect and defend the many hard-fought rights we already have.

[Read the article](#)

### Protests work:

There was a nice piece in the Guardian over Christmas [outlining the evidence from various fields such as history and political science that protest is an effective mechanism for driving social change](#). The article highlights a couple of important ideas: for instance the “3.5% rule” i.e. that if 3.5% of a country’s population protests against a regime, history suggests that regime will fall; and also that nonviolent protest is critical if a movement is to engage the support of the wider public. These aren’t new ideas by any means, but in the midst of ongoing protests in places like Iran and new threats to the right to protest in many countries that purport to be democratic (the UK and the US in particular), it feels like a good time to be reminded of them.



[Read the article](#)

### **Perceiving generosity:**

I spotted an interesting blog from Giving Tuesday this month, detailing the findings of some polling they have done on civic engagement and community involvement. One key finding of their research is that [people are more like to behave in a community-minded way when they believe that others around them are community-minded](#). And this goes for both people who are already somewhat community-minded (who seem to become more so if they are surrounded by others who are community-minded), and for those who are more ingroup-focussed (who are more likely to be driven to some community-minded behaviour if they believe others in their community are that way inclined). So as with a lot of other aspects of giving behaviour and social action, what we see others do and the beliefs we form about them as a result is an important factor in how we behave.

[Read the article](#)

### **DAFs and political giving:**

An interesting recent piece in *The Conversation* by Brian Mittendorf and Helen Flannery outlined new findings that [the rate of giving to 'politically engaged' organisations \(i.e. those that do lobbying or have related organisations that participate in political campaigning\) from Donor Advised Funds \(DAFs\) is significantly higher than for other forms of giving](#). Which is not to say that all giving to politically engaged organisations comes from DAFs by any means, but there does seem to be something about the DAF model that particularly lends itself to this kind of giving. (Presumably the ability for donors to remain anonymous is a large part of it, although it may also reflect the fact that politically engaged organisations have been quicker to get good at fundraising from DAFs as well).



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### **Giving in Spain and Portugal:**

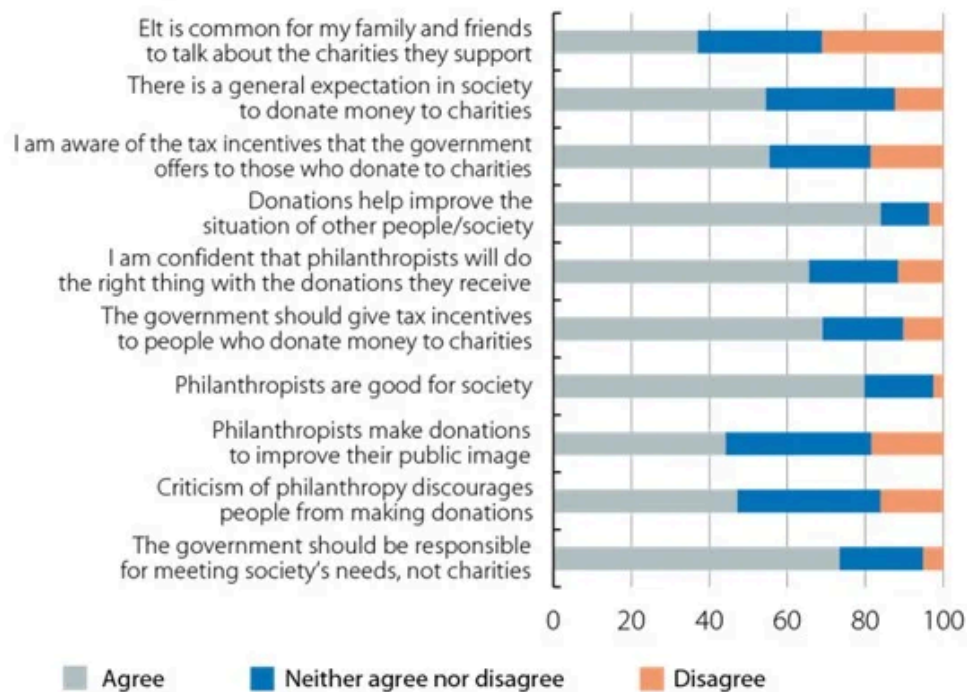
Regular readers will know that I try to take as global a view of philanthropy as possible, so my little eyes always light up when I come across research that gives insights into giving in other country contexts that I might not be so familiar with. I was delighted, therefore, to come across some really interesting findings this month about philanthropy in Spain and Portugal, from La Caixa Foundation (helpfully translated by my former colleague and co-author Beth Breeze- hello Beth if you are reading this!) I was particularly intrigued because alongside the findings on how people give, there are also findings on how people view philanthropy more broadly (which is something that always really interests me). The research found that there was a broadly positive view (with 80% of people agreeing with the statement that “philanthropists are good for society”), but at the same time there was also plenty of scepticism (nearly 45% of people said that “philanthropists make donations to improve their public image”).

There are lots of other interesting findings, so I would definitely recommend digging into the research. (I’m also off to Portugal later this



year for my holidays, so I will make sure to accost some random Portuguese people in the street to find out what they think about philanthropy, and will report back...)

### **Opinions about philanthropy** (% of the total responses to each statement)



**Source:** «Philanthropy in Spain and Portugal. Knowledge, social attitudes and behaviours», published by the Social Observatory of the "la Caixa" Foundation (2025).

[Read the article](#)

### **Liverpool most generous city in UK:**

Since it is my adopted home city, I can't resist mentioning that [Liverpool was declared the most generous city in the UK for the second year running back at the end of 2025](#). It should be noted that this is based on figures from the crowdfunding platform GoFundMe, so it doesn't necessarily reflect the full spread of giving. However, I will note two things based on my experience of living in the city. The first is that it has an undoubted sense of identity – probably more so than any other city I have ever visited (and certainly more so than any others I have lived in). The second thing is that Liverpool does seem to suffer a particularly high rate of tragic or damaging events and incidents – historically one

can think of the Toxteth Riots of the 1980s, the Hillsborough football stadium disaster and its long-running aftermath, or the murder of the toddler Jamie Bulger in the 1990s; but even just in the last year we have had the tragic murder of a group of children in Southport and the incident where a man drove a car into a crowd of people celebrating Liverpool FC's Premier League win. The sense of collective grief sparked by events like these has undoubtedly strengthened Liverpool's sense of its own shared identity; and on a more immediate practical level these kinds of events are often the catalyst for public fundraising events that raise large sums of money (and are arguably particularly likely to be the sort of campaigns that take place via crowdfunding platforms rather than traditional charities), which might help to explain why Liverpool has topped GoFundMe's rankings for 2 years in a row.

I would be fascinated to see how other cities elsewhere in the world do on similar rankings, and how this relates to their own sense of identity and the shared experiences of their inhabitants.

(Also, on a slightly cheeky note, if you are inspired by this story to take an interest in philanthropy in Liverpool, then one very small thing you could do is support the dawn walk to raise money for the Whitechapel Homeless Centre that my family and I are doing in early February at my 10 year old daughter's insistence. ([JustGiving page link here](#)). Obviously, there is absolutely no compunction to do so, but she really cares very deeply about homelessness and would undoubtedly appreciate the support if you do have even a few pounds to spare for what is a great cause).



[Read the article](#)

## AND FINALLY...

This is a bit of a cheat because the story appeared at the end of November, but it just missed my last newsletter so I couldn't resist including it anyway. The Newcastle stoner metal band Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs (aka Pigsx7, who I saw play at FutureYard in Birkenhead last year and very much enjoyed) [issued a call for people to donate musical instruments and equipment that could be donated to families who otherwise might not be able to afford it in time for Christmas](#). The band highlighted the increasing challenges for those from less affluent backgrounds when it comes to being able to get into the music industry, and the long-term risk that this will result in less diverse viewpoints being expressed through the music we are able to listen to.

To hammer home the potential impact that access to the right musical equipment can have, the band's guitarist Adam Sykes made that even a distortion pedal can make a vital difference, "because god forbid a kid's trying to learn Reign in Blood through a clean guitar."

Amen to that. Never a truer word was spoken in jest.



Image Credit: [Mike Shaw, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

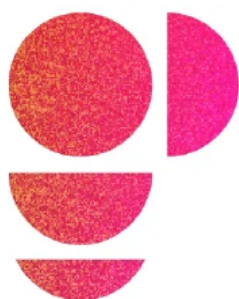
[Read the article](#)

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Right, that's it for the winter round up. The next newsletter will probably come at the end of Feb (as doing a Jan one seems a bit pointless), and we'll then be back on a monthly schedule.

Best,

Rhodri



**Why  
Philanthropy  
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