

## Making a difference



By [Claire Nelson](#)

Sunday 16 December 2012

Many of us have that nagging feeling that we should be doing more to help others. There are countless issues and problems in the world that need addressing, and, as we constantly remind ourselves, we really care about the world around us and want to make a difference. So why then are we on Facebook when we could be volunteering for Oxfam? Why are we watching series two of 'The Inbetweeners' for the fourth time, when we could be devoting just a few hours a month to Cancer Research UK. However the problem with volunteering is that we don't often get the chance to do things that we can directly see as benefiting people, and so we lack motivation to get involved.

Of course the main goal of every charity is fundraising, and most charities try their best to make this a fun and exciting activity for their volunteers. They encourage people to be as extreme as they want, and, due to this encouragement, we've all been witness to young males routinely having their legs waxed 'in the name of a good cause'. I don't deny that it's rewarding to know you've raised £126 for Comic Relief, but how much more rewarding could it be if you had the chance to do something that you can see as directly helping those less fortunate than ourselves.

READ International is a fairly new charity which collects textbooks and children's literature from schools in the UK, and sorts through them in order to send the most relevant books to schools in Tanzania. A large part of working for the charity is fundraising, as the packing and sending of the books requires a lot of money, however the most important part remains the organising of the books. When doing so you feel like you're doing something to help people in a much more tangible way than simply taking part in a sponsored run. With READ, the work becomes much more direct. If we take the example of a bake sale, think of all the steps involved before the objective is achieved. You make the cakes and sell them, with the profits being used to go towards buying the things that help people. The work with READ involves packing the books and sending them to Tanzania, where they're opened and used. It is this directness that has motivated me to get involved and which, as callous as it may sound, sustains my interest in the charity.

Volunteering for any charity means you are making a difference, regardless of if the main activity of the charity is fundraising or not. I simply believe that it's easier to get motivated and get involved when you feel you are helping people in a more direct way. Chances like these however are rare. As much as many people would love the opportunity to volunteer in a school in an under-developed part of the world, it can be expensive and difficult. Yet working with READ provides an easy but meaningful way of really feeling that you are helping people and making a difference.



### One comment

[Matt Sharp](#)

17 Dec '12 at 6:18 pm

Claire, you correctly point out that not being able to see the direct benefits of charitable work/giving as a reason why people lack the motivation to do more.

But when choosing a charity to support, personal motivation should be a secondary concern to the effectiveness of the charity.

If your aim is to do as much good as possible, then it is preferable to support to one that you're 10 times less motivated by but is 100 times more effective, rather than one that you're willing to spend all your spend energy on without it achieving anywhere near as much.

I do think it's possible for charities to provide strong motivation and effectiveness. For example, the Against Malaria Foundation is currently ranked as the most effective charity by GiveWell and GivingWhatWeCan.

To help maintain motivation, they publish photos of the recipients receiving the anti-malarial nets that are paid for by individual donors. They also publish malarial 'case rate' data in the regions they work in, demonstrating the effectiveness of what they do, e.g

"Malaria incidence, compared to the same month in the prior year, is 50% lower in Mar 2012, 50% lower in Apr 2012, 45% lower in May 2012, 45% lower in Jun 2012"

<http://www.againstmalaria.com/Distribution.aspx?ProposalID=184&emailID=2012121>

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