

Becoming a Trustee — Why Some Do It

Nitin Shrotri, 2nd September, 2026

I start as a new trustee with the Kent Community Foundation. The thought itself is exciting, and it made me reflect on all that is to come, but also why was I doing it. So, firstly, it might be worth knowing how do we define a trustee?

“Trustee” is a legal term which in its broadest sense, refers to anyone in a position of trust and so it can refer to any individual who holds property, authority, or a position of trust or responsibility for the benefit of another. A trustee can also be a person who is allowed to do certain tasks but not able to gain income. This was good old Wikipedia to my rescue of course. For those who wish to know more in detail, this is the best link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do-cc3>

I already am a trustee with another organisation, Age UK in Canterbury (<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/canterbury>). They were kind enough to take me on board, and are a reasonable sized organisation, very relevant to our local community. I had heard about them from a friend who worked with them as a volunteer. This led to my mother attending the venue occasionally, a few years ago. During this time, I remember that she enjoyed spending time there. When I retired and was looking for something to occupy myself, another friend suggested that I should consider becoming a trustee in one of the local organisations. I also heard about the Kent Community Foundation from a very similar, and

closer source. (This shows the value of communication, how knowing people and talking to them, ie social interaction, helps us learn about so much in our society. I say this for the benefit of a few of us who hide ourselves away, as I for one, would have been sitting on my front sofa sipping my Nth cuppa.)

So I became a trustee at Age UK Canterbury, and I did it because I wished to do something for myself during my retirement, give back to the local community and meanwhile, also do some good. It also gave me a sense of identity, which matters to many of us after retirement. Moving from a working life with a role, an income and title, to one without all of those, can take some adjusting to. I found that change harder than I expected, but I hope I have managed to turn it around in constructive fashion. Some people manage the transition easily, and are perfectly content with coffee, holidays, golf, and time with friends and family. Others us look for a bit more structure and purpose, and that search is often what leads us toward activities like this. Good to reasonable health is an important part of it, because as one gets older, there are more trips to the GP and the hospital as things start to need attention. Still, in between those visits, we need something to occupy us, and this is one good way to do it.

This brings me back to my starting as a trustee with Kent Community Foundation (<https://kentcf.org.uk/>). This is a local charity organisation and I have been reliably informed that nearly every county within the UK has a similar community foundation. This is heartening, and it is the

place where local philanthropy comes together in organised fashion, and truly addresses the necessary support and encouragement for the local community. This contributes effectively and efficiently in creating a level playing field, something that society often attempts to achieve. The way it works, is that the foundation has fund holders who donate money for philanthropic reasons. These funds are invested into investment banks/similar organisations, and the interest received is used to offer support to useful projects within the local community, which require financial support, mainly towards costs. Some 300 charities receive grants every year totalling a few million pounds, and over 60 million pounds have been distributed over the 25 years of the foundation's existence. It is important that we create awareness of this work and encourage smaller charities around Kent to use this opportunity and apply for funding.

Being a trustee on a voluntary basis is also most rewarding in a personal kind of way. It's often a wonderful opportunity to look beyond oneself and one's own life. Some of us centre our lives on issues around ourselves, often getting overwhelmed by what's happening around us. The whirlpool of life can suck us in. Doing something like this, something of benefit beyond oneself, shifts focus from your own self to somewhere else, and someone else. It offers us the chance to get out of that whirlpool and help ourselves by the "feel good" feeling that one gets when one carries out work for a charitable cause. Actually, in reality, this is all about helping our own selves too.

Within the UK, there is another angle to charity work: building community cohesion. The UK has changed over the years, and we now have many different cultural groups from different backgrounds who have made it their home. The UK has, generally speaking, been welcoming of different cultures. Integration works best when it runs in both directions, and taking up a role in a local charity is one good way for any of us, from any background, to build connections across communities. Many cultural groups quite naturally look after their own within their own networks first, which is understandable and often a source of real strength and pride. Local, cross-community charities like KentCF, and smaller ones alongside them, offer a complementary space where people from different backgrounds can work together on shared local issues, and learn from one another in the process. Local charities do a lot of good work irrespective of cultural background. The Sikh community, for example, offers free food (Langar) to anyone, from any background, who walks into their local place of worship (Gurdwara), a lovely and humble example of a faith community reaching out to serve the wider local community and build a sense of rapport and togetherness. It's an attitude all of us can learn something from.

Finally, this write-up is also a call to philanthropy more broadly. Inequality is a real and growing concern in many societies: a small number of people and organisations hold a great deal of wealth, while many others struggle to cover the cost of daily living. Western countries generally have some form of welfare or benefits system, though provision varies widely, and many countries elsewhere have far less. This is an area where large, wealthy corporations, the handful of global technology

giants often mentioned in this context, for instance could do more, alongside similarly large local and national institutions. I have no doubt many already contribute to such causes within the UK, but community foundations could do more to encourage large-scale corporate philanthropy aimed at levelling up local communities. Government finances in the UK, as in many countries, have been under sustained pressure in recent years. Encouraging this kind of giving could be one way of easing pressure on local public finances without resorting to direct taxation of these organisations, a different kind of business case, but an important one, and one that could help ease some of the difficult trade-offs governments otherwise face. I hope this write-up gives our reader some food for thought, and perhaps get the right people to act on it.