

## EuroView: *The future of giving is with 'little Hans'*

by *Michael Alberg-Seberich*

“Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmermehr” (“What little Hans does not learn, big Hans will never learn.”), my Bavarian grandmother always used to say. The essence of the saying is an observation that is shared in many cultures, and it is backed up by research in the social sciences.

Our basic set of values is formed during childhood and adolescence. But what does that mean for philanthropy? Do we need to expose children and youth to giving early on? Can you actually learn to give?

I think you can! Ironically, this is one of the areas of education that we often forget about in the world of philanthropy. More than 20 years ago the Council of Michigan Foundations in the US created ‘youth giving boards’ in community foundations. In Canada the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative of the Toskan Casale Foundation is teaching secondary school students about charities and how to support them through giving. This is a programme that the London-based Institute for Philanthropy has also introduced to the UK.

In Europe, while there is curiosity and some experimentation with learning to give, there is also hesitation. But there is a compelling case to try to help a new generation of donors to make (engaged) philanthropy a part of their (family) heritage. More important still may be that we ensure that young people all over Europe



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experience giving early on in their life so that philanthropy, as a form of civic engagement, becomes one of their lifelong values.

The children of wealthy donors – often called the ‘next gen’ in philanthropy jargon – are increasingly served by philanthropy advisors and banks in Europe. In addition we may see the emergence of one or two independent platforms for these donors in Europe that are similar, for instance, to Resource Generation’s CORE programme in the US. The ‘curriculum’ for these young men and women covers the basics of grant-making, the role of philanthropy in a family, legacy, an introduction to the third sector and character development. The programmes are organised outside the school or university. They are experienced based and bring together peers who face similar questions. The next generation in Europe certainly seems to have choices if it wants to embark on a social journey early in life.

In the end, philanthropy is about a deed that we all value highly: giving. This is why on the secondary school curriculum of the US ‘Learning to Give’ initiative – part of the organisation ‘The League’ – philanthropy is defined as the giving of “time, talent and treasure”. The core of philanthropy is universal!

Learning to give benefits the whole debate about providing a service and the promotion of civic engagement: everyone that gives ought to be able to ask the right questions about a cause or a charity. Educating young people about giving is the not-for-profit guise of consumer education. Transparency in the third sector ultimately only makes sense if we all know what the numbers, the stories and the challenges stand for.

Learning about giving early on can bring a positive outlook into a young person’s life. I recommend that you attend a youth bank meeting in Northern Ireland, England, Germany or the Balkans at least once. Or listen in at a meeting of a youth giving council of the German NGO ‘Children for a Better World’. Young people here talk about the needs in their community, they talk with people who offer solutions to those challenges and they give out small grants. If you think you’re a tough donor or professional grant-maker, think again. These young people take on this responsibility with stunning rigor, care and passion.

If you are in New York you may want to visit ‘CommonCents’, an organisation that runs the ‘Penny Harvest’, the largest youth philanthropy programme in the US. In this programme, six to 12-year-old students turn something of very little value – cent coins – into, on average, a \$1,000 cheque, and hand this money to causes they consider important. The programme is a service to the community but crucially for these young people it is also proof that they can actively contribute to a better world.

These are all innovative approaches to learning to give. They are part service learning, part character education and part philanthropy education. There are many other examples of in- and out of school programmes that encourage children and young people to learn to give.

It looks like sowing the seed of philanthropy early on with “Hänschen” is possible. It is up to us to create the opportunities all over Europe that allow young people to do so.

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