

Manx Links... a series in which Cheryl Cousins from the One World Centre talks to local people, who have lived or worked in the developing world, about remarkable people they have met

The other day someone said to me “What I hate most about this time of year is all the charity begging letters piling up on the doorstep”. Hey, I reckon that what the poor in society must hate most are the situations that make the charities write those begging letters in the first place!

Remember the Millennium goals, those high ideals made by governments seeking to eradicate poverty at the start of a new century? We have now passed the half way point to achieving the Millennium goals, that is, we have passed the point in time, mid July 2007; we are no way near to halfway to achieving the goals.

Isn't it strange that when we think of charities we always think of money. Last month saw the Festival of Manx Connections, celebrating the work of Manx charities operating overseas. The Festival was not fully representative, but there were 21 charities, represented by well over 21 amazing people. A subculture of just ordinary people of all ages, individuals, volunteers, people living and working on the Island, who in their “free” time work tirelessly to bring a quality of life to others. They are not people who are hugely wealthy, or extremely gifted, just people who know that they can do something to make a difference.

Working for a charity doesn't mean you have to have some mad desire to stand on cold, wet, windy street corners rattling buckets and smiling vacantly as people scurry past determinedly not making eye contact! It doesn't mean that you have spend endless evenings at committee meetings, or that you to give up all your comforts and head out to some remote place risking life threatening diseases and travellers tummy.

Many people are not aware that they have skills and expertise right here on the Island that would be invaluable to small charities operating overseas. Whereas someone may have the ability to coordinate the building of a school in Africa or an orphanage in Romania, they can be burdened by on- going administration or website design, accounting or graphic design. The Festival was amazingly successful, it was a buzz of conversation and networking, people making contacts, sharing ideas and even money. But I realised that there is a very great need for a different type of sharing as well.

What is unique about giving to small local charities working overseas is that many of them really don't spend any money on administration... it all goes to the people who need it the most. The overwhelming response from the Festival was “I had no idea there were so many people doing so many things!” So, if our local charities need a bit of awareness raising to help raise their profile, do you have the skills, a computer, a printer that would mean they could continue to run with no administration costs?

Local businesses and companies must get heartily sick of the number of suggestions people come up with of how they can use their money, they are bombarded with begging letters. They may not feel able to give more, but what about the use of equipment or sharing skills? A half day release for a member of staff who can do book keeping, who could help write grant applications, who could help with logistics and planning? The printing of 100 flyers for a fundraising event, 500 leaflets promoting their work, laminating pictures, a mail drop; all these items cost a small charity time and money, would you even notice them from your organisation?

The Island is known for its generosity and charitable giving, but charities across the Island are struggling to get the people power they need to maintain the work that they are doing. And what they are doing is making a difference to somebody's life, Maybe it was an idealistic goal to expect governments to work to eradicate poverty, at the end of the day, the only change we can guarantee is the change we make ourselves. If you have skills you can offer, time you can share, maybe you could use your time more productively than tearing up begging letters as they come through your door!

If you would like more information or details on skill sharing contact the One World Centre on : 825464 or email: cheryl@owciom.org For details of Manx charities operating overseas see: www.oneworldcentreiom.org