

Not ladies who lunch, but women who get things done

For the price of a Prada handbag, you could pay the salary of a teacher in an Indian orphanage for two years, says MIKE DICKSON. No wonder so many women are turning their hands to philanthropy



In a house in Holland Park, 15 intelligent, affluent women are listening to Tony Juniper talk about the environment. Tony, who has only recently given up running Friends of the Earth, is one of the UK's best known environmentalists.

For the last 25 years, he has spent most of his time trying to bang heads together for a more sustainable society: locally, nationally and globally. Activities he's been responsible for span ecology and conservation experiences for primary school children, making the case for new recycling laws in the UK and orchestrating international campaigns for action on rainforests and climate change.

He speaks from a huge depth of knowledge gained by working on the environmental frontline – fluently, note-free and at impressive speed. In 30 minutes he covers climate change, rainforest preservation, flying, nuclear power and the importance of campaigning. As he points out, the current challenges to our environment

IT ALL STARTED HERE
Princess Diana used her fame to bring the plight of landmine victims to the world's attention

will affect all of us sooner than we think, and will also significantly affect the lives of our children and our grandchildren. It is today's issue.

This is a receptive audience, with everyone having previously taken part in a one-day Intelligent Philanthropy course. But his speech nevertheless leaves them slightly stunned.

For several years, I had become increasingly convinced that women's role in philanthropy is more important than is generally recognised. Men are hunted down remorselessly by charities for donations, especially after their annual appearance in the *Sunday Times* Rich List. Only this week, a fundraising conference called 'Raising Funds from the Rich' fielded more than 800 delegates – presumably all worried sick about their charities' future income.

But in my experience, men are much too busy running the universe (or currently trying to save it) to have much time for charitable involvement. And in any case they are guarded by pleasant but firm personal assistants who take their role of 'gatekeeper' very seriously.

It is usually men who write the cheques at a charity dinner, but it is their wives who increasingly have the influence about where their donations go.

This generation of women are definitely not 'ladies who lunch' – and though they're targeted to join fundraising committees of the great and good, in the main they'd rather opt out. They are highly intelligent and articulate, some run their own businesses (one on the course received a seven-figure bonus last year) and all had successful careers of their own before having a family. Many are now marooned in nice houses in West London, hedged in by the school run, busy-ish but bored.

From these assumptions, Intelligent Philanthropy was launched – to educate influential and well-off women about the art of effective giving. The response was immediately very positive. In the course of a day, they learn the key facts and issues in the charity world, how to make donations that are focused and effective, experience a reality game where they select causes to receive from £100 to £1 million and listen to a speaker on a key topic. At the latest gathering, they heard Tony Juniper's sobering analysis of the environment. And yes, they did have a short, alcohol-free lunch.

All of them were either already engaged in giving or interested in giving in a more focused manner. They were up for giving, getting organised and getting involved.

The importance of women's giving was revealed in a report last year by Philanthropy UK, a resource for free and impartial advice to aspiring philanthropists who want to give effectively.

The report found that many more women were becoming involved in philanthropy, yet their generos-

ity and commitment was unrecognised. It found that more women are establishing charitable foundations, and that they are having a significant impact on major philanthropy, but are largely unknown except by those they help. Consequently, they are under-represented in giving statistics, and their involvement in philanthropy goes largely unreported.

The report featured profiles of the millionaire creator of the Harry Potter books, J.K. Rowling, who feels a moral responsibility to give 'when given far more than you need'; Tetrapak heir Sigrid Rausing, whose commitment to human rights and women's issues is well known; ballet dancer Darcey Bussell, who is motivated by her 'desire to give something back'; and businesswoman and social entrepreneur Mia Morris, prompted by her sense of community and social responsibility.

'The course inspired and encouraged us to look at our charitable giving intelligently,' said Liz Elston Mayhew, a former banker and businesswoman. 'I came away with a far better understanding of the charitable sector and how I should go about giving my time and money. I now focus on a few specific areas which interest me and have the satisfaction of knowing far more about the charities I support and the impact of my giving.'

Coutts & Co is one of the only private banks to realise the importance of women in family decisions about giving. Coutts is now focusing significant marketing efforts on women's interests. Highlighting inspirational women in business might have something to do with the fact that the bank is headed up by a thoroughly impressive woman, Sarah Deavis, or the fact that 30 per cent of its clients are women, many of whom have made their own money, or have inherited and managed significant sums.

Building upon the successful development of its philanthropy service, it is organising a half-day course for women in November with New Philanthropy Capital – which will highlight giving to challenging causes such as domestic violence and the trafficking of women. Women have shown that they can get things done. It was the interest and involvement of women that led to the huge increase in public awareness of breast cancer and the subsequent increase in funding for charities working in the area.

Women's involvement in giving is often more than just philanthropy. It has a huge impact on their children, who are often caught between being brought up in a very privileged environment and the real world inhabited by their less fortunate friends. It is a difficult issue for them to deal with. Women want to engage their children in important issues and have the time to encourage them to take part actively in charity work, a hugely civilising influence for the future.

And in the charity world, women have major influence. Seventy per cent of the UK charity workforce is female. Approximately 50 per cent of charity chief executives are female. Research shows that women are 20 per cent more likely than men to support charities but men give more in value, because there are more men making large donations.

If the well-off women now showing serious interest in supporting charities in an intelligent and effective manner were to meet the women who lead and work in the charities themselves, who knows what might transpire? This may be a thought for another one-day course. I must call J.K. Rowling... ●



GIVING IS MAGIC
Millionaire Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling



Mind Your Own Beeswax

Veronica, daughter of *The Spectator's* Dot Wordsworth, provides a monthly guide to the jargon of the financial world

'Now we're all ruined,' said my Aunt Ann dramatically, the light glinting on a large emerald brooch. 'We spend all our time talking about what was once the elephant in the drawing-room.'

'Not drawing-room, Aunt, just room.' But she was right. When Justin drove his Alfa Brera S 3.2 litre, he didn't talk about having it on credit, he just drove it around. Rather show-offishly. Now he talks about why he should still have it.

That elephant is neither the Indian nor the African variety, but of American origin. The online OED caught up with it in 2006 and the earliest examples come from the United States. The first, from 1959, does not stipulate that the elephant is not mentioned, merely that, 'It's so big you can't ignore it.'

Unmentionability was cemented by a book title in 1984: *An Elephant in the Living Room: a leader's guide for helping children of alcoholics*. Since then we've sharpened it from living-room to just room, except for Aunt Ann.

An allied wildlife metaphor is 'the anaconda in the chandelier'. This was used by the Sinologist Perry Link in 2002 as a figure for China. Unlike the elephant, it is not so much unmentionable as unpredictable. But since anacondas are not poison-fanged, I'm not sure I'd much mind one in the chandelier, if I had a chandelier.

There is an elephant connection here. A possible origin of *anaconda* is the Tamil for 'having killed an elephant'. I also remember from university that the medieval European *bestiary* pictured giant snakes crushing elephants. These snakes seem to appeal to Americans. Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) has one woman character commenting on another: 'I've no doubt the rabbit always thinks it is fascinating the anaconda.' The rabbit had not yet had much chance to think anything similar about car headlights, for the first recorded reference to them is 1904.

Today's crisis, though resembling an anaconda-wrapped elephant decked with bells and whistles, fits the category of *black swan* in the book of that name by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2006). His black swan is something seen as unlikely but which has a huge effect, such as the attacks of 11 September 2001. Not that Taleb hadn't heard the swansong two years ago: 'Fannie Mae, when I look at its risks, seems to be sitting on a barrel of dynamite vulnerable to the slightest hiccup. But not to worry: their staff of scientists deem these events "unlikely".'

So now Justin has forsaken Canary Wharf, perhaps we'll join a travelling circus. I'm just not sure about the animals.

Veronica Wordsworth

Useful websites

Women & Philanthropy:
Inspiring women,
inspired giving
www.philanthropy.org

Charities Aid Foundation
UK Giving report
www.cafonline.org

Coutts & Co
www.coutts.com;
email: maya.prabhu@
coutts.com

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