

Potential Story Angles

Giving What We Can is an unusual organisation and offers many possible angles for stories. For example:

Putting Ethics into Action

Toby Ord (the founder and director of *Giving What We Can*) is a research fellow in ethics at the University of Oxford. *Giving What We Can* is his attempt to put some of the important ideas of recent practical ethics into action in the real world. He says:

“Many people agree that global poverty is one of the biggest moral problems of our time, but very few people are prepared to donate a large part of their income to help eliminate it. I decided to put my money where my mouth was and to set up a society for people who want to join me in this. Ideally it will become a well recognised way of living one’s life, something akin to being a vegetarian.”

Dr Ord is not the only member of *Giving What We Can* to come from a background in ethics. Renowned philosophers Peter Singer and Thomas Pogge have been well known for giving a significant fraction of their incomes and were quick to sign up, along with half a dozen graduate students in the field of ethics.

Taking Giving Seriously

When people give to charity, they don't always think about whether they could do even more good by giving to a different charity. The members of *Giving What We Can* take this very seriously. They are aware that their choice of where to donate their money means the difference between saving a single life and saving a life every day of their careers, and they are willing to follow the numbers in order to make the biggest contribution they can.

Of course, there are times when it is difficult to compare benefits of very different types, but there are a surprisingly large number of times when following the numbers gives a clear winner. For example, it is unclear whether it is better to save one person's life or to cure two other people of blindness, but other things being equal, it is clearly better to save a thousand lives than to cure two people of blindness.

The other way in which the members of *Giving What We Can* take giving seriously is that after recognising just how cheap it is to make significant improvements in people's lives, they decide to direct a significant part of their income towards achieving these amazing benefits.

Providing Advice on Where to Give

We've all heard impressive-sounding statistics from charities about how much good you can do for people in developing countries for mere pennies. These claims promise a great deal, but are often very difficult to interpret. For example, are the quoted prices the cost of the drugs alone, or do they include the costs of delivery? Are they the costs to protect a person from the possibility of illness, or the cost needed to protect enough people such that on average one case of illness will be averted? Do they include the administration costs of the program? Does the organisation have other programs between which the money will be split?

Giving What We Can aims to use the best research on aid effectiveness from organisations like the World Health Organisation to help people work out where their money can do the most to help people. It turns out that there is a vast discrepancy between the most effective and least effective programs, and donors can do much more with their donations if they give them to the more effective programs: it is the difference between saving one life and saving a life every day for your career. *Giving What We Can* doesn't promise to be able to work out the *best* charity, but have found charities that are at the forefront of effectiveness and are happy to share this information to allow others to do more with their donations.

Defying the Credit Crunch

While much of the world is focusing on tightening the purse strings, the members of *Giving What We Can* are defying the spirit of the times by committing to give at least 10% of their income to those who have much less.