

Lessons from Merchants Quay Ireland

The Resounding Eight-Year Success Story
of a Donor-Based Approach to Raising
(Far) More Money, for Good



Nana Murphy

With special guest appearance from the
world's greatest donor, Nana Murphy

A forewarning about the grammar, style, and tone of this case history you are about to read:

Lessons from Merchants Quay Ireland was originally created as a case history on proper donor care at the invitation of the Commission on the Donor Experience. With three American authors – Lisa Sargent, Denisa Casement, and Sandie Collette – you might already be anticipating a deviation from what the rest of the world knows as “standard” English. And you’d be right.

Almost immediately after the PDF was completed, we were asked if the case history could also be gifted to SOFII so that fundraisers all around the world could benefit. As such, know that it is an anomaly to SOFII’s standard style guidelines: while we tried to correct differences in UK/American spellings, you will find many of SOFII’s required punctuations and formattings notably absent.

Because the case history was produced in PDF (and is fully copyrighted) in its current format, SOFII editor extraordinaire Marie Burnett and SOFII founder Ken Burnett have generously allowed it live in all its Americanised glory, as is.

Any typos or grammar and formatting oddities you may find are purely at the hands of the authors, and not SOFII’s.

Thanks for reading, and enjoy!

Lisa, Denisa, and Sandie

Lessons from Merchants Quay Ireland

The Resounding Eight-Year Success Story of a Donor-Based Approach to Raising (Far) More Money, for Good

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| I. Born Out of Crisis (A Brief History) | 2 |
| II. Meeting Nana Murphy (Your Prime Donor-Based Directive) | 4 |
| III. MOI's 25 Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising | 6 |
| IV. Appendix: Creative Samples, Checklists, and More | 18 |

Case history created exclusively for
The Commission on the Donor Experience and SOFII by:

Denisa Casement, CFRE
Head of Individual Giving, Animals Asia
(Head of Fundraising, MOI 2008-2016)

Lisa Sargent
Fundraising Copywriter & Strategist
Lisa Sargent Communications, USA
(Copywriting & communications consultant, MOI, 2009-present)

Sandra Collette
Donor-Centric Design Expert
S. Collette Design, USA
(Design & creative consultant, MOI, 2010-present)

Special thanks

Abundant thanks as well go to **MOI's brilliant, donor-driven Interim Head of Fundraising, Colin Skehan (@colske)**... and **the entire all-star fundraising team in Dublin** (past and present). **Donors would not feel the joy without you:** Tony Geoghegan (CEO), Aislinn Murphy, Emma Murphy, Sinead Kenny, Patrick Ferrity, Seán Prior, Shauna Enright, Nick Jones, Daniel Alvey, Kenneth Baker, Martina M., and Belinda K.



The Resounding Eight-Year Success Story of a Donor-Based Approach to Raising (Far) More Money, for Good

Summary

In September 2008, an Irish homeless charity with less than two thousand donors on its database brought in a plucky CFRE (Certified Fundraising Executive) and American expat to head up its fundraising programme. Seven years, sixteen thousand new donors, a twelve percentage point increase in donor retention, and a fourteen-fold increase in revenue later, Merchants Quay Ireland was ready to bring its donor-driven success story to the charitable sector and the world.

Lessons from Merchants Quay Ireland is the longitudinal direct marketing case history that shows

the extraordinary now-eight-year effect of a radically donor-based fundraising and stewardship programme on revenue, results, and retention. Based on real life Dublin charity Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI), and authored by the fundraising strategy and creative powerhouse that launched and sustained the programme — the principles, creative practises, and strategies in this case history continue to drive superior fundraising results at MQI today. With proper application, what you read on the pages that follow will make amazing things happen for your organisation, your donors, and the good causes you serve.

This case history is dedicated to the good donors of Merchants Quay Ireland, and to supporters of important causes everywhere. Without their caring hearts and giving hands, no success – small or large – would be possible...

“Dear Tony,
Thanks indeed for your very moving appeal letter in today’s post. [My husband] is arranging direct debit from our joint account...God bless Tony. Thanks again for the opportunity to be a small part of MQI.”

(The generosity of MQI supporter Eileen in action, 2014)

I. Born Out of Crisis: The Unlikely Story of a Donor-Based Success

Our story begins in September 2008...

That's when Denisa Casement, CFRE, a US-born fundraiser with deep Irish roots, moved to Dublin. She'd been hired to start up fundraising for Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI), an Irish homeless and drugs charity located on the south bank of the River Liffey along Merchants Quay (pronounced like "key").

Prior to Casement's arrival there had been no fundraising staff at MQI for the previous seven years. The organisation itself had little fundraising experience. And a week into Casement's transition, Lehman Bros collapsed – followed quickly by an Irish banking crisis that made the one in the US look like a blip on the radar screen.

In 2009 while still working as a team of one, Casement asked fundraising copywriter Lisa Sargent,

and not long after, designer Sandra Collette – to serve as MQI's virtual donor-driven communications team from their home base in the US. The point here is not the crackerjack in-house fundraising team (which today are all Irish) or the virtual creative team's country of origin (still USA), but the overriding philosophy: all knew and continue to hold true to the ethos that for Merchants Quay to have any chance of sustainability, authenticity, and success, it needed to keep and engage its donors, new and longstanding.

So in the teeth of one of the worst recessions in Ireland's history, MQI's success story began.

Events that followed would test the move towards relentless donor-based fundraising – on every front:

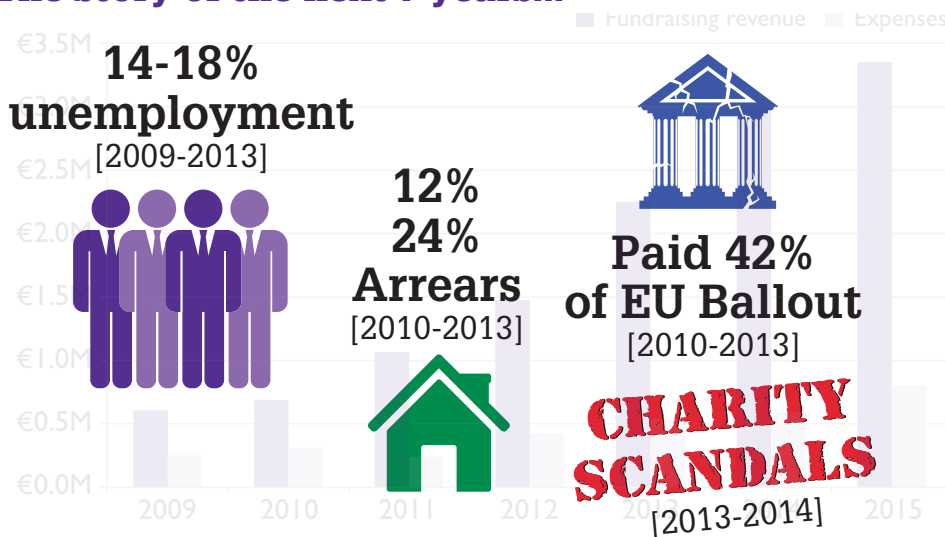
- From 2009-2013, **unemployment** in Ireland hovered between 14% and 18%;
- From 2010-2013, up to 24% of Irish homeowners had; **mortgages in arrears**;
- During 2010-2013, Ireland paid 42% of the **EU bailout**;
- And in 2013, 2014, (and most recently, 2016), **charity scandals** made national news that caused other nonprofits to report a dip of 30-40%.

Hardly the ideal climate to grow a fundraising programme.

Yet in many ways it is precisely those less-than-ideal conditions that prove the power and resilience of a donor-based approach to the business of raising money.

Because during those same years, watch what happened at MQI:

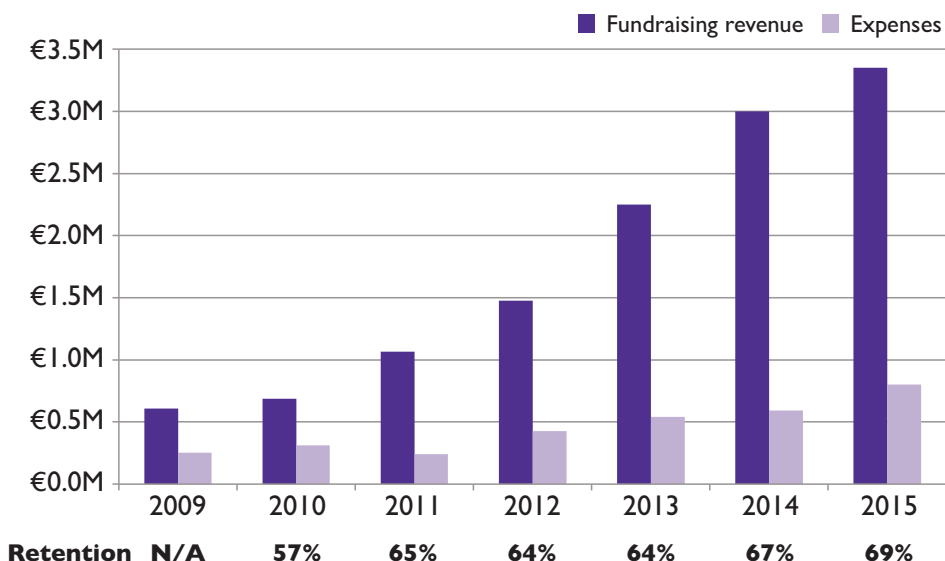
The story of the next 7 years...



- **Annual revenue of just €250K to €3million** (a more than tenfold increase in a little over five years), a number on track to reach **€4million in 2016**;
- **A donor retention rate of 57% in 2010 to 69% in 2015** (retention wasn't tracked before Casement came on board, hence the five-year tracking);

continued on page 3

The story of the next seven years...



continued from page 2

- An **active donor file of less than 2,000 in 2008 to 17,000 in 2016**, due to an active and ongoing donor-based acquisition programme;
- **Donor newsletter response rates of 2.7% in 2010 to nearly 14% in 2015**, with an average ROI increase during that same time from 3:1 to 7:1;
- And **while other nonprofits reported** the massive 40% revenue dip in 2014 during Ireland's charity scandals, MQI's dipped by just three percent.

As fundraisers, obviously, we all look to move those numbers in the proper directions. And if you'd like a closer look at MQI's results mailing by mailing, refer to the Appendix.

However the question that's always forgotten is: to what end? The money's great, sure. **But why go to the effort of donor-based fundraising in the first place?**

Before we dig into the tips and tactics and strategies, let's look at one more set of numbers.

The numbers that show the good accomplished by all that giving and retention...

...The numbers that show, on the chart below, the amazing world your donors will help you create, if you give them the chance.

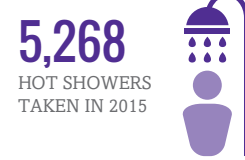
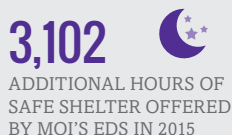
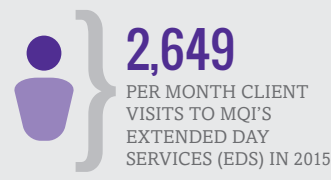
Donor-based fundraising is about helping your donors make the world a better place. And *Lessons From Merchants Quay Ireland* is a detailed case history, no doubt.

But the tips and tactics you'll find on the following pages have proved – during rich times and lean – to be worth their weight in gold.

The language of donors remains MQI's first language.

Here's how to make it your language too... (continue reading)

In 2015 alone, the generosity of MQI supporters provided Ireland's homeless and hungry, and people battling addiction, with:



And much more... including drug-free rehabilitation, detox, and a second chance.

II. Meeting Nana Murphy: Your Prime Directive for Donor-Based Fundraising

Who is this woman and how can she help you raise more money for your cause?



Meet Merchants Quay Ireland's "average" supporter... Nana Murphy. If you want to do donor-based fundraising, you must know your nonprofit's Nana Murphy too. The good news is, at most organisations all over the world, she's a lot like our Nana. She likes to read. She reads her post (yes, from the letterbox). She needs glasses. She gives to multiple charities. She responds to authenticity, emotion, and honesty. And, yes, she knows when you dish out something other than that.

In short, unless you are a grandmother in your 70s, you are NOT your average donor. That means your fundraising and donor communications decisions – from type font to newsletter content to package format – don't hinge on how you feel. They hinge on how your Nana Murphy feels. This cutout Nana, for you to place on your desk or bulletin board, is to remind you to keep your donors at the heart of everything you do... just like MOI has been doing for more than eight years now, to great results.



<cut along the dotted line

Nana Murphy

Donor-Based Fundraising in Action: Merchants Quay Ireland's 25 Guiding Principles



*"The future depends on
what you do today."*

— Mahatma Gandhi

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#1. Know your numbers: the first guiding principle.

Many nonprofits never calculate their key performance indicators – for the simple reason that they don't know how. But to understand how your job and practices impact results, how to defend the investment to your Board, and how donors respond (or don't) to what you do, your team must know the numbers. MQI rely on these daily, and you can too...

- **Response Rate** = Number of gifts received ÷ Number of mail packs sent
- **Average Gift (AG)** = Total income ÷ Number of donations received
- **Retention Rate** = (Number who gave in Year One and again in Year Two) ÷ Total number who gave in Year One
- **Return on Investment (ROI)** = Total Income ÷ Total Cost (note: may be as a percent, as in 200%, or as a ratio, as in 2:1)
- **Cost to Raise a Euro (Dollar, or Other Currency)** = Total Cost ÷ Total Income (expressed as a percent, as in 39%, or decimal, as in .39)
- **Net Income** = Total Income – Total Cost
- **Lifetime Value (LTV)** = Avg Annual Gift ÷ Annual Attrition Rate
- **Casement Quotient™ (for Calculating the Value of Your Team)** = (Annual fundraising income ÷ 52) ÷ total # of hours in your work week*

**e.g. n 2015 MQI's fundraising team raised €1,627/hr, or €2,300/day per day per person. This helps their board and other decision-makers to value the team's time accordingly.*

In Action: On the Casement Quotient™ and valuing staff time... *(See formula this page)*

One of the most important hurdles every fundraiser faces is defending those donor-based fundraising investments to your Board, helping them to properly value the team's

time, and protecting the programme from investing staff time in unrelated activities. At MQI, Casement regularly calculated the value of her team: per day, per hour,

per person. She cites the example of a Board member asking to release two staff for an all-day event booth. She asked... "Will this generate more than €4,600? That's the value of two staff for a day." The fundraising staff stayed put.

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#2-20:

The growth and sustainability strategies

2. **Eliminate fundraising and donor communications team silos.**

At MQI we don't build artificial silos around departments such as major gifts or planned giving. A "team ethos" reigns instead, right down to the open office space that promotes a daily running conversation and synergy among team members. No one is cloistered, and there are no turf wars over donors. Dublin staff are cross-trained and keep their trans-Atlantic creative team in the loop more than many in-house teams, including reporting back on performance and sending along quarterly packs of notes on donors' feedback and hard copy mail samples.

3. **And don't put your donors into silos, either.**

At MQI, for example, everyone gets the donor newsletter, from monthly givers to major donors to corporate and legacy givers. (Note: team performance metrics – such as the Casement Quotient™ on page 5 – go a long way towards preventing my-donors/ your-donors battles.)

4. **Continually recruit new donors:**

even with a solid donor retention rate, if you don't do ongoing acquisition, your donor base is shrinking. And sooner or later that spells catastrophe. Merchants Quay Ireland does several acquisition campaigns throughout the year – year in and year out.

5. **Have a welcome pack and update it regularly to retain new donors.**

This is not a one-and-done kind of project: MQI reexamines and refreshes its pack at least once a year.

6. **Mail enough.**

At MQI this works out to four newsletters and four appeals per year, in addition to any related thank yous. Note: we started

with fewer mailings. Income and response rates *increased* as we added more. Those self-proclaimed experts who tell you to "rest" your donors? Ignore them: absence does not make donors' hearts grow fonder.

Keep in mind that while a single annual appeal does not a donor-based approach make, neither does an "ask 'em till they bleed" scheme. As you'll see in the "In Action" section on page 10, MQI works to meet the needs of beneficiaries (i.e. the clients and the programmes they rely on, which need funding) and the needs of the donors (who don't want to be treated like 24/7 money machines) by taking a balanced approach.

continued on page 8



III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#2-20:

The growth and sustainability strategies

continued from page 7

7. Make Ask/Thank/Report Back your mission.

At MQI this isn't just talk. It's the driving, daily force behind our donor retention communications programme. This means:

- Ask, and not just for money – in appeals, ask for donations. In newsletters and other communications, ask donors to attend free events, for their opinions in surveys, and other invitations.
- Thank, and not just in thank yous – Send warm, personal thank-you letters. Thank in newsletters,

from articles to captions to call-outs. Thank donors in your invitations to special events.

- Report back, dependably – Newsletters are sent quarterly, like clockwork. They have no direct ask for gifts.

8. Always and actively be converting cash donors to monthly donors.

Ten percent of MQI's donor base is monthly – and that number is growing.

- Include a monthly giving option on all reply devices & donation pages for both

current donor appeals and acquisition appeals

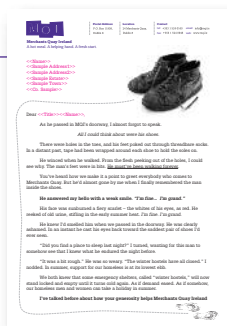
- We set aside one appeal each year to ask our under €150 donors to convert to a monthly gift; six different segments are asked for a single monthly gift customised down to the euro.

9. Upcycle your best-performing material – not the material that you or your staff or your department heads like best.

At MQI:

- Winning warm, or 'house,' appeals get modified and tested as acquisition packs, to excellent results;
- Newsletter stories are converted to emails and newspaper advertorials and inserts;
- Our best-performing newsletters are converted to welcome packs;
- Winning emotive images are used everywhere – from outer envelopes to building banners to legacy literature;
- In-house versions of winning packs are overprinted and kept on hand for donor visits, hyper-personalising, etc;

continued on page 9



Thank



Report Back



III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#2-20:

The growth and sustainability strategies

continued from page 8

- Articles and infographics are adapted for use on MQI's website and in the annual report.

10. Know who's in your database.

For example:

- NOT DONORS – if you treat these lukewarm prospects like active donors, prepare to be disappointed: Bought a raffle ticket/rubber duck/calendar/ candy bar... Signed a petition (great advocates but they're not donors yet) ... Attended an event with a friend/ sponsor... Sponsored a friend in your whatever-a-thon. Again, NOT active donors.
- LAPSED DONORS – (haven't given in over 24 months) Often discounted, these

donors are MUCH better than lukewarm, and respond really well to the right communications. For MQI, Christmas is the best time to renew lapsed donors.

- CURRENT DONORS (have given in the last 0-24 months)

11. And know the value of who's in your database.

You must know the value of a current donor in order to make a sound business case for acquisition costs and investing in donor retention. Here's how to achieve that:

- Track the results of your current donors (0-24 months) separately from all other segments.
- Calculate the Lifetime Value, or LTV, of your current

donors. (Refer to page 5, #7 for how to calculate.)

- Compare the LTV to the cost of acquisition (ACQ): Cost of new donor ACQ - LTV = Net Value. This is a rough Net Value of new donors.

To illustrate: if your retention rate for new donors is 50%, you will keep 500 of every 1,000 donors you acquire. If your lifetime value per donor is \$300 (again for example) then the net value of your new donors is \$150,000, or (1000 new donors/50% retention = 500) X LTV = Net Value

- Calculate the LTV for the donors you're losing through attrition, too. This tells you
- continued on page 10*

In Action: How a small team repurpose direct mail across multiple channels....

(For a sample of how the material is upcycled across channels, see appendix.)

Merchants Quay Ireland's programme was built on direct mail, and DM continues to be its main channel. The core audience is older, true. But the fact is that direct mail remains the workhorse

channel for fundraisers who use it properly. What's more, good emotional copy works for every age and audience... and MQI have proved it also adapted across multiple channels. Today

Merchants Quay's direct mail content and imagery are consistently adapted and upcycled at MQI into DRTV ads, banners on buildings, email, website images, online/social content, and more, enabling a small team to stay cost-effective while managing a €4million fundraising programme with donors at its core.

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#2-20:

The growth and sustainability strategies

continued from page 9

how much you should invest to keep those donors.

Continuing from above illustration: if you have a 50% retention rate, this means you also have a 50% attrition rate. Using the same \$300 LTV, every 500 donors you lose is \$150,000 in lost donation revenues. This helps you make the case for how much it's worth investing on retention communications to keep those donors.

12. Ask for the right amount.

Are your ask levels designed to retain donors or are you constantly trying to upgrade to the highest possible gift? (This is an example of bad agency practices.) In order to build

donor loyalty and retention you must inspire them to give (through great creative) and make giving do-able. Looking at their giving history enables you to take your cues from the donor. Donors don't like to say no... so make it easier to say yes, more often. MQI looks at highest gift and average gift in context:

- Is their highest gift at year end? Then that's when we ask for it.
- Outside of the holidays, we look at average gift. Then we create an ask string with that gift in the middle.
- Caveat: this strategy horrifies agencies. But with nonprofit retention rates floundering in dark, abyss-like depths, it's time to change tactics.

13. Continually personalise & offer opportunities for more personal engagement.

- At MQI every thank you letter contains: an invitation to monthly tour/open day/free concert, and contact details for the fundraising team – first name, phone number and email address of a *real person*.
- Hand-signed letters (as many as possible depending on volume)
- Customised letters that acknowledge a note or phone call from the donor
- Immediate thank-you calls for gifts above a certain threshold
- Hand-signed note from CEO for gifts above a certain threshold
- Major donors receive CEO's contact info

continued on page 11

In Action: Asking enough, and a donor-based approach to regular givers.

(For a sample MQI project production schedule, see appendix.)

Prior to 2008 MQI mailed sporadically: newsletters as time allowed, a few appeals, including at Christmas. Mailings were increased almost immediately and today stand at four appeals and

four newsletters each year, with thank yous in between – a schedule that balances capacity, consistency, and quality. Revenue rose in the move from two to three newsletters and again to

four and a similar pattern happened with appeals. Monthly supporters, it should be noted, receive all four newsletter packs and *only one* no-ask appeal at Christmas. This strategy inspires them to give around 25% in additional cash gifts each year, beyond their regular monthly gift.

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#2-20:

The growth and sustainability strategies

continued from page 10

- Acknowledgment of prayer requests sent to the friary. Note: MQI and the Franciscan Friary next door are separate organisations. But not all donors remember this. So, we send any prayer requests received to the friary *and acknowledge this in the thank-you letter.*
- Newsletters include: wish list for in-kind donations (with fundraising staff contact details); invitations to monthly tour/open day/free concert; legacy call-out boxes with free details upon request.

14. End review by committee. The review and approval process for your creative matters a lot: don't subject it to death by a thousand cuts in a review process that

includes all of your board, your executive team, and a dozen random programmes people.

15. Do multichannel, but think monochannel. Whether it's your website, your emails, your DRTV ads, your text-to-give campaign, or your direct mail pack, there is only one channel to donors: *you*. At MQI teams are not siloed by channel: instead the same staff and creative team oversees everything that goes out. They follow the entire process through and ensure a seamless flow and donor experience from beginning to end.

16. And cross channels. MQI cross channels immediately: for example, after an online gift and the thank-you redirect screen and thank-you email, donors are also

sent a thank-you letter via post within 24 hours – and a welcome pack soon after. DRTV responders who don't give but request information via post actually receive it, and quickly: usually within 2-3 days.

17. Keep donors over egos, always. Remember you are not your donors. We create and upcycle material based on what donors have responded to most strongly in the past, not based on whether we personally like a piece.

18. Drip-feed legacy. Making a gift in your will is a message that MQI donors hear often, hear warmly, and hear in a personal, nostalgic, and

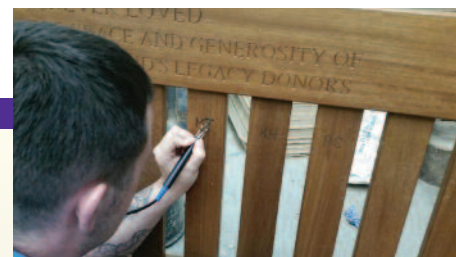
continued on page 12

In Action: Seeing legacy giving through Nana Murphy's eyes

(For a sample newsletter legacy box, see appendix.)

At MQI taking a donor-based approach to bequests means five things: **1.)** it is never called “planned giving,” but instead legacy or simply “make a gift in your will”; **2.)** communications are

approached from the donor's perspective – the benefits of making a will, looking after your loved ones first, being remembered for your good deeds; **3.)** a legacy bench to remember the generosity



of testators was created, and that news is shared with all donors; **4.)** a full time donor care officer is on staff to personally steward the process, and **5.)** the joy of legacy finds its way into newsletters, inserts, and appeals.

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#2-20:

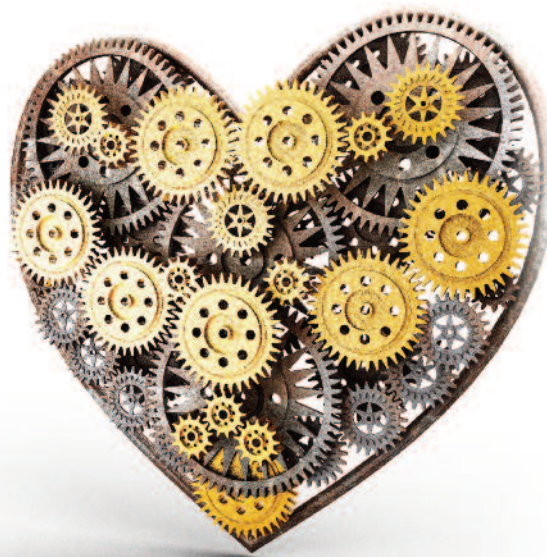
The growth and sustainability strategies

continued from page 11

reflective way: in newsletter call-out boxes and articles, on tours and visits, in special inserts. The process goes on, subtly, all year long – again to solid results.

19. Monitor continuously. Know this: *Planning* a great donor experience is not the same as *daily implementation* of excellent donor care – and the road to attrition hell is paved with good intentions and bad implementation. Every morning at Merchants Quay Ireland, one of the fundraising team runs a report of new donors from the day before and makes sure they get a hand-signed thank you. Every two weeks a team member runs a new donor report and makes sure they all

receive a personalised welcome pack. These are a few examples of the checks and balances in place that constantly monitor the donor journey to be sure what's supposed to happen, actually does: so no one falls through the cracks.



20. And above all... at MQI, culture eats strategy for lunch.

- Donor retention and loyalty isn't about one thing you do it's about every thing you do.
- Your strategy and processes must support a donor-centred culture.
- Every process must be assessed by its impact on the donor experience.
- We sometimes choose to do things less efficiently because they keep the donor experience more human.

In Action: Evolving a donor-based strategy starts with a donor-based culture

"At MQI, culture comes before strategy – not the other way around. This means we choose to do some things less efficiently because it keeps the donor experience more human and authentic. Everything is designed to engage donors on a more personal level. Whether they walk in with hand-knitted scarves, attend an event, or communicate by phone, note, or email, we respond by giving them our full attention."

– Denisa Casement, Head of Fundraising (2008–2016), MQI

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#21-25:

The copywriting and design principles.

21. Take your interviewing and story gathering seriously.

At Merchants Quay interviews are everything, forming the backbone of stories, quotes, and anecdotes in appeals, newsletters, and even thank-

yous. MQI interview clients/beneficiaries and staff throughout the year irrespective of whether there is an impending appeal. And they take it seriously – open-ended questions are customised,

interviews are recorded and transcribed. This lets staff capture good material as it happens, builds a storybank, and creates a steady flow of authentic material for the creative team.

continued on page 14



Without These.  You Won't Get These.

At MQI, high-quality interviews (above left) of clients, staff, and sometimes donors go on year-round. This allows for a steady flow of authentic material that is used to craft appeals, newsletter articles, testimonials, emails and more (above right).

In Action: Gathering your best material as an organic process...

Fundraising staff continually alert the creative team to story possibilities and not just when it's time to get a mailing out the door. This August 2016 email excerpt from Donor Relations and Marketing Manager Aislinn to the creative team is one example:

"I was just in the homeless centre getting pictures for the newsletter when an older man came in. He'd forgotten everything that happened in the past 24 hours. I chatted more to the staff about it, they're getting him help. It was so sad. Thought this was worth sharing, if you want more info I will follow up for you next week. – Aislinn"

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#21-25:

The copywriting and design principles.

continued from page 13

22. Remember the OAF. OAF stands for Offer, Audience, and Format. And MQI hold every proposition and possibility for an appeal up to this formula to ensure it's donor based. In short, audience comes first: if a

story is a difficult topic with donors, it doesn't get put into an appeal (but it is often considered for newsletters, where donors are open to learning and knowing about tough issues). Offers (a.k.a. propositions/asks) are built around whether they are:

timely, relevant, will resonate with supporters, have or can be given any special qualities (match, natural or official deadline, funding gap, etc), and have solid content or story/interview from which to craft the appeal.

continued on page 15



The OAF formula, see below, helps MQI develop donor driven propositions and place other content properly.



In Action: The OAF that let donors fund MQI's mental health programme

In 2014, the team had an incredible story. A homeless female client who had suffered through terrible tragedy was willing to tell her tale to supporters. On the table for consideration as an appeal was another story as well, of hiring a mental health nurse for MQI's homeless clients, with a possible matching gift. The team worried there was too much stigma around mental health, and the female

client's story won the vote. Off it went to creative. But the OAF kept knocking: based on the results that Casement regularly shared with the team, copywriter Sargent knew MQI donors did not respond well to appeals built around women. She also knew donors (the Audience part of OAF) would make the jump with her to understanding how depressing it must be for someone

living on the streets. At the eleventh hour, with the Oonagh appeal nearly complete, she called Casement. It didn't meet the OAF test. Could they try the mental health appeal? Yes. Oonagh found her home in the spring newsletter (above right), and the mental health appeal (above left) went on to pull more than a 21% response rate, funds that also help female clients like Oonagh.

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#21-25:

The copywriting and design principles.

continued from page 14

23. Write epics instead (or, no autoblag). Autoblag is a term coined by the late UK fundraiser George Smith. At its heart autoblag means copy that looks like it was written on autopilot. In every thank you, in every appeal, in every

newsletter, in every email, MQI strive to give Nana Murphy the best most genuine experience of any charity to which she gives. It means writing epic-like, heroic stories that are in rich in emotion, cue common truths, and use literary devices like alliteration, euphony, sound, and rhyme. It means

powerful images accompany the copy. It means no autoblag. To be donor based is to give Nana Murphy something beautiful. Something epic. Something heroic. Even when you tell the story of a programme. Epic is the aim. Every time.

continued on page 16

“On that night though, I vowed we would try. In honour of those who hadn’t survived – and for the anxious faces queued outside in the darkness.

↑ Note epic, heroic tone... even around budgets and programmes! ↓

MQI staff alone knew the harrowing concessions I’d made in order to receive those State funds, cutting the nascent Night Café budget to barebones...” (Excerpt from MQI’s Spring 2015 appeal for the Night Café)

In Action: And don’t silo your copywriting and design, either...

Design and copywriting can’t live in creative silos: they must work together. You could have the best story in the world, but if the design – the visual presentation – doesn’t make donors want to read, your message is lost. Donor-driven creative considers the donor at every level: copy supports the design of headlines, decks, and main text in newsletters, for example. The design is kept simple but appealing.

It’s easy to read for older donors (so copy yields to a larger font). They want to read, even though they couldn’t say specifically why if you asked. A proper marriage of design and copy draws donors in – and as you can see by the before and after response rates for MQI’s newsletter, donors respond accordingly.

— Sandie Collette, S. Collette Design (and donor-driven design consultant to MQI)



Newsletter redesign results, before (left) & after (right). See larger samples, appendix.

III. MQI's 25 Guiding Principles for Proper Donor-Based Fundraising

#21-25:

The copywriting and design principles.

continued from page 15

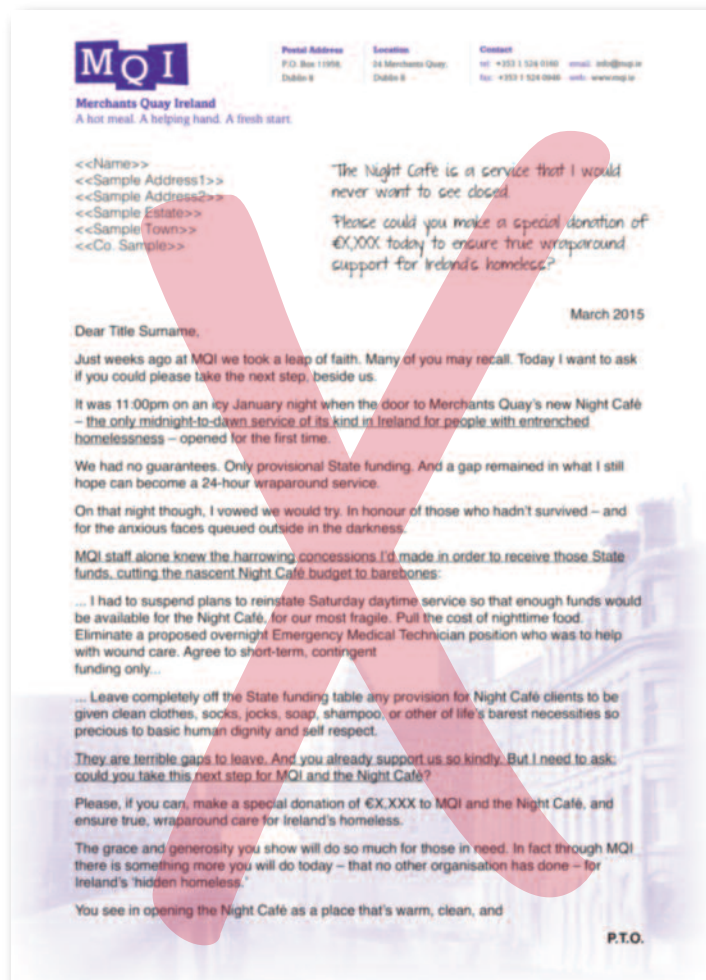
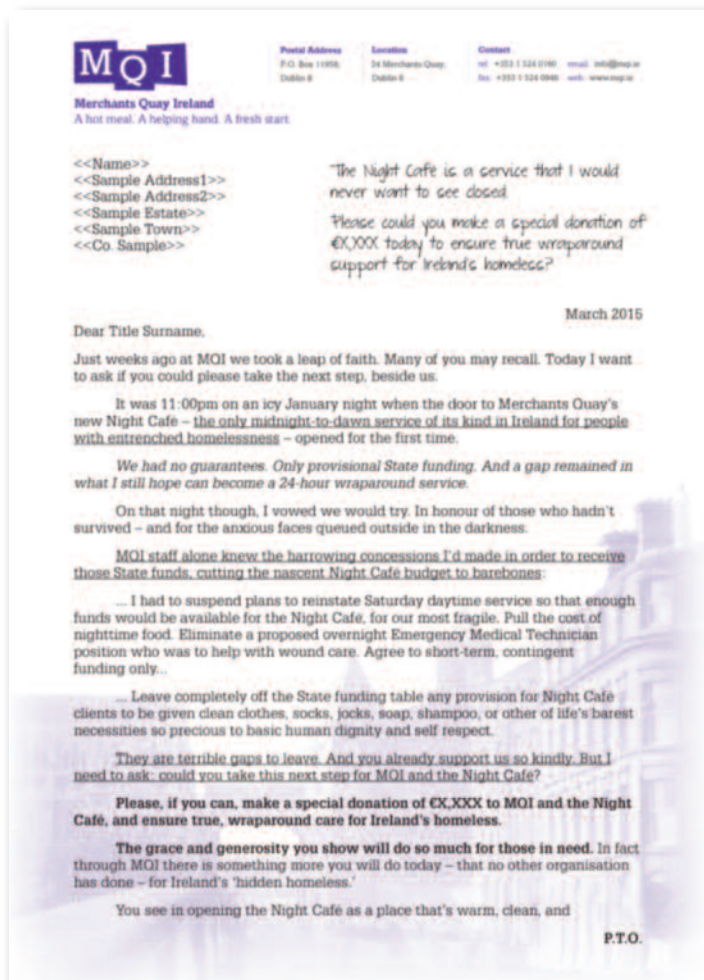
24. Create a pack not a piece.

A donor-based approach to everything you do includes receiving your post (or your email, or communication via any other channel) like your Nana Murphy does. For direct mail, for example, this means

MQI create packs, from outer envelope to reply form: each piece provides visual interest and beckons donors deeper while adding to the sum of the pack itself. We ask, "What do we want her to do next?" or "What if she does this instead?" to make it seamless from start to finish.

25. Write and design for older eyes first.

The goal is an easy and inviting read for Nana. Because if she can read it, all your donors can. MQI use a slab serif font, wide margins, short, tabbed paragraphs, provide page turn directions, and more.



Note the clean, readable, donor-friendly architecture of the page at left, which is how MQI format its letters. Then contrast with the daunting "Wall of Type" created by the letter on the right, an example of how many nonprofit appeals look today. Proper formatting goes a long way!

Why do donors give? The survey that speaks volumes...

In early 2016 as part of its *Quay Times* Winter Newsletter, Merchants Quay Ireland sent its donors a simple two-sided survey. Nearly four hundred supporters took the time to respond.

And perhaps the most important question that MQI donors answered was this: **What encouraged you to support us?**

Particularly after the recent UK media blow that good fundraisers everywhere share the pain from, it is vital to reinforce that done right – the donor-based

way – supporters feel good to be part of your mission ... that you need to be communicating with donors regularly, and in a relevant way.

Let's look at some of the verbatim replies from supporters that specifically mention the way they are communicated with, and why that matters.

I Give to MQI Because...

- ...
"a friend gave me a newsletter she got"
- ...
"because you offer to show people around"
- ...
"I read of the great work you do"
- ...
"I like the genuine feedback"
- ...
"I read about the good work MQI is doing"
- ...
"you get on with the job, no frills attached"
- ...
"it would have to be the first communication I received outing your work must have impressed me"
- ...
"to read the stories of all those whose lives has changed"
- ...
"the personal positive approach you take [with] both the homeless and supporters"



- ...
"reading the stories of clients who have had help"
- ...
"the first newsletter that came my door years ago was different to other requests"

- ...
"a mailing you sent describing your work with clients it touched my heart"
- ...
"you are local to me and I always like the tone of how you describe your work"
- ...
"I can't remember how I got involved but I am so glad"
- ...
"your personal touch with correspondence and thank you"
- ...
"because you are not always looking for fundraising and are thankful for what you get"
- ...
And last but not least, these two responses, which are again verbatim. I give because "*your regular communications letting me know what you are doing and what is needed to be done shows clearly how donations are being used*" and because... **"you just write to me."**


IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists



*"No act of kindness,
however small,
is ever wasted."*

— Aesop

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued



Merchants Quay Ireland
A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.

Postal Address: P.O. Box 11958, Dublin 8
Location: 28 Wintetavern Street, Dublin 8
Contact: tel: +353 1 524 0160, email: info@mqi.ie, fax: +353 1 524 0946, web: www.mqi.ie

<<Name>>
<<Sample Address1>>
<<Sample Address2>>
<<Sample Estate>>
<<Sample Town>>
<<Co. Sample>>

Dear <Title Surname>

3 September 2012

I'm taking a chance today by writing to you about a difficult matter.

I do so because in giving to MQI, you have shown compassion and understanding for those who struggle not only to survive, but to rebuild their lives in the face of overwhelming odds. Hunger. Homelessness. Addiction.

It is in honour of your remarkable commitment that I speak openly now.

You see, in addition to homelessness, extreme social isolation, and past abuse, one of the overwhelming odds faced by many clients is mental illness.

And if you have ever known sadness or loss or loneliness in your own life, you know how tough it can be to overcome. How hopeless, how small, you feel. Even with the supports of a family and a roof over your head.

The men and women I write you about have none of those home comforts.

In a moment I'll share what they confront daily. I'll also describe how MQI have reached out with help and hospitality on an informal basis for years.

But recently a donor like yourself gave us a chance to do much more...

MQI have received funds to cover half of the first three years of a pilot project for a drop-in mental health nurse for our clients. To my knowledge the project will be the first of its kind in Ireland. Because there is no other funding, the other half must come from supporter donations. This year's goal is €25,000.


We have less than fifty days. And that's where I need your help.

Funds must be in place by 31st October or it cannot get off the ground. Because you trust Merchants Quay to use your gifts as intended, I make you this guarantee: whatever amount you send today to support MQI's mental health project will be 100% refunded should we fail to reach our target.

As you read about what they go through, will you please consider a gift of €XXXX, €XXXX, or €XXXX?
(Please read on)

Bernie Murphy, an MQI counsellor, has seen firsthand what our homeless clients illness endure on a regular basis.

... in place to go back
... mental health
... is it? They have
... people pull back
... appointment based
... there are just no
... me to hear their
... I can do for you.'



... and... but not at

you can do for
they had the
would
full time
drop-in basis
a crisis. They could come here and after
nobody. It will be the start of it – and it's

"Over and over, these are the men and women that are told, 'We can't fix you, we can't do anything for you.' At Merchants Quay Ireland, we say 'Come in...'"
– Bernie Murphy, MQI Counsellor

... are alone on the streets and suffering
fixes or miracle cures.

donation to fund MQI's mental health pilot
here will be a place that will never turn

... the place that says "Come in."

my letter today.
Ireland's homeless and hungry,

... way there in funding a mental
Ireland. But without your help
ground. If we fall short of our goal,
on today will be refunded to you –
attitude of so many of Ireland's
mental illness right now.

© Merchants Quay Ireland Ltd. Regd. Company No: 260673. Regd. Charity No: 20000000. 28 Wintetavern Street, Dublin 8. Tel: +353 1 524 0160. Fax: +353 1 524 0946. Email: info@mqi.ie

Mental Health Appeal: Two-page letter

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued

My special gift for MQI's new mental health project

Yes, I believe the homeless and hungry who suffer from mental illness deserve the best lives they can. I will help fund MQI's new mental health project, and my donation by 31st. October of:

€25 €50* €100 I prefer €_____ please

*Deadline to fund the project is 31st October. This amount will be used to fund the project.

Payment Method: To make a gift by phone ring us on 01 856 1195

Cheque/Postal Order (Make cheque payable to "Merchants Quay Ireland")

Credit Card: Visa MasterCard Laser

Please deduct the amount I have ticked from my Visa / MasterCard / Laser as appropriate.

Card Number:

Laser / Security Code: /

Expiry Date: /

Signature: Date:

E-mail: Phone:

*** If you donate €250 or more** in any given year we can reclaim the tax paid on your donation from the government, so we could get more from your donation at no cost to you. My donation is over €250. Please send me a tax-back form.

Please send me information on how to remember MQI in my Will.

Please post your donation and this reply slip in the envelope provided, or alternatively post to **Merchants Quay Ireland, P.O. Box 11958, Dublin 8.** To make your donation securely online, go to www.mqi.ie.

I would like to schedule a visit to MQI.

MQI
Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services
Charity No. CHY 10311



Jane Doe
24 Merchants Quay
Dublin 8
Ireland

Mental Health Appeal Pack:
Reply, BRE, Outer

Your stamp here provides a cup of tea 

PLEASE RUSH TO: 

Merchants Quay Ireland
P.O. Box 11958
FREEPOST
Dublin 8

For helping Ireland's homeless and hungry today's
Thank you!

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued

At the Coalface, page 2 **National Housing Crisis, page 3** **Christmas Gratitude Concert, page 4** **The Family at Our Door, page 5**

Quay Times
The Newsletter for Supporters of Merchants Quay Ireland

MQI
Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

AUTUMN 2015

"I put so much work in to lose it all like that, it nearly killed me it did..."

Unbroken

Micheál was drug free at last and accepted into college when Ireland's housing crisis pulled his new life out from under him – and into the abyss of relapse. See how, nearly three years later, you are helping him to make a comeback...

Almost nothing about Micheál would hint at the life he's lived these past three years. Apart from a few small scars on his face he is groomed, well dressed, and confident. Those years, though, tested his resolve in ways that few people will ever face. Fewer still emerge unbroken.

Cruel irony
After two treatment centres, massive personal effort, and six months in a recovery house with another agency, the hope was that Michael could find a place he could afford, or get help from the local Council. He applied and was accepted to college pending good grades. But the shortage of houses would sweep it all away like

*"If you are talking housing nearby, the rent allowance, it's just not enough. And then you are single, you are a male, you know. It is a combination of everything. I'm looking everyday, anywhere I might be able to rent a place and it's the same story. You are either priced out of the market or they won't accept rent allowance."
– Micheál, MQI client*

continued on page 2

Proud MQI clients emerge with the winning cup —

Victorious in Homeless Football League!

An inspiring story of the community spirit that you foster at MQI...

Each week something wonderful happens on an astroturf field in Dublin City Centre. Homeless men get together for the love of the sport, and play football. And this year, Merchants Quay clients have won the Homeless Football League Cup!

Gavin, who works daily with rough sleepers as part of MQI's street outreach programme, offered to organise a Merchants Quay team after clients came to him with the idea. The chaotic nature of their lives, he reported, makes scheduling practices a balancing act. With no promise of a roof over their heads, clients can spend hours on the phone with the local authority simply to try and get a bed for the night. But they kept at it, and since the big win, the team are looking forward to defending the cup next year... a goal made all the more remarkable by what they overcome. *Congratulations!*

www.mqi.ie

Dignity. Humanity. Hope. You.

Now Available: MQI's Annual Review for 2014

Just published, Merchants Quay Ireland's 2014 Annual Review is now available online at www.mqi.ie, or in print with our compliments via post. To request your copy, ring Aislinn or Martina on 01 524 0139.

The Legacy You Leave

From your heart to their hands, forever loved...
Through a simple bequest in your will to MQI – of any amount you decide – you can make a tremendous difference to the lives of people with nowhere left to turn. And for your great kindness, we will hand-etch your initials onto a beautiful oak bench overlooking St. Francis Farm... forever a part of Merchants Quay.
For details on how you can remember Ireland's most vulnerable through a gift in your will, or to let us know that you've done so, please contact Emma Murphy on 01 524 0965 or emma.murphy@mqi.ie.

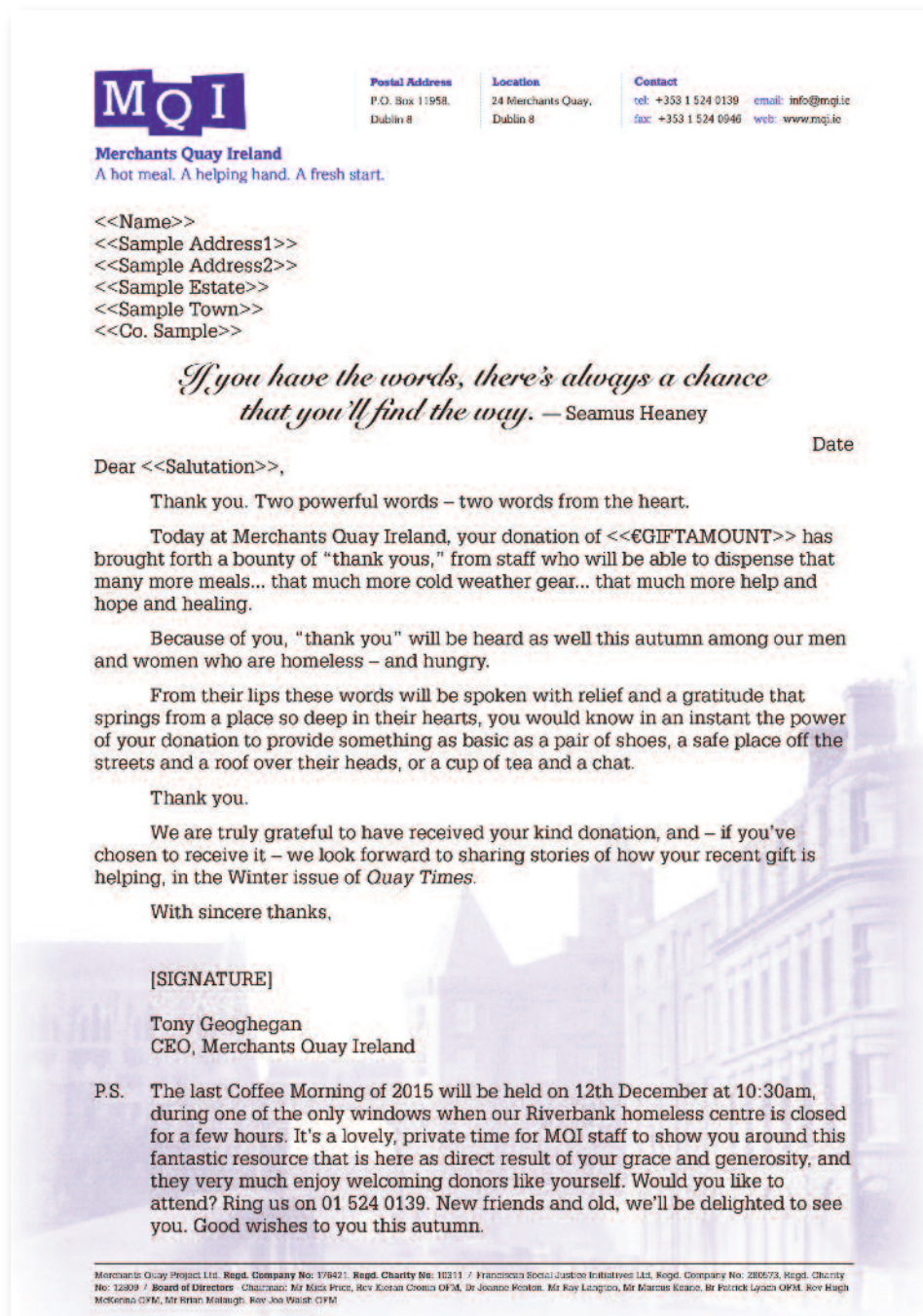
our gift by phone: please ring us on 01 524 0139.

At MQI we respect everyone who comes to us for help – and many are working toward a fresh start in life. So while their stories are true, client names and images may have been changed to protect their privacy. Thank you for understanding.

www.mqi.ie

MQI's Donor Newsletter

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued



Autumn Newsletter: Thank-you letter

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued

Each journey of hope has you at its heart.

Coffee Mornings: A Preview Tour

Preview what you'll see when you join us for Coffee Mornings at Riverbank, held regularly on Thursday and Saturday, in your honour...

How do people end up at MQI's Riverbank homeless centre? And what really happens there? These are big questions. And they're exactly the questions we want to answer for you in a way that honours the dignity and privacy you give to

those you help, without ever knowing their names.

It's why we invite you to Coffee Mornings at Riverbank when the homeless centre isn't in active use. Two mornings each month, after our rough sleepers have gone from breakfast - and

while staff and volunteers are in training - Riverbank opens its door to you our donors, without whom we couldn't open at all.

In the quietness we'll show you the food kitchen where we expect to serve 90,000 meals this year. We'll show you where rough sleepers can have a hot shower and feel clean again. We'll show you the presses of warm towels, clean socks and underwear. The contact rooms where clients can sit in privacy with an MQI counsellor. The dental surgery where we fix the pain and embarrassment of rotten teeth. We'll introduce you to our nurse who tenderly dresses ulcers on legs and feet that walk miles each day.

During the tour, Coffee



"I was surprised by... and how spotl

SPECIALLY RESERVED

You're invited... Private Donor Tours of MQI

Come for a cuppa, and feel the joy. Each month for a few hours when MQI's Riverbank Centre is closed we open the doors to you, our generous subscribers. Meet the staff who help Ireland's homeless and hungry in your honour, enjoy good company, free refreshments, and an exclusive look behind the scenes...

Upcoming Coffee Mornings, always on Thursdays starting at 10:30am:

- 11th February, 14th April, 14th March, 12th May

Reserve your place today by ringing Aislinn or Sinead on 01 524 0139. If you'd like, bring a friend or two! We hope to see you there.

Merchants Quay Ireland, P.O. Box 11958, Dublin 8 | www.mqi.ie | Charity No. CHY 10311

The Preview Article and Donor Tour Invitation illustrate how donor feedback drove a newsletter article to allay their fears around attending a tour during a time when the homeless centre might be open. It also illustrates communication across the pieces of each pack and media channels.

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued



Upcycling and Multi-Channel: MQI's core communications channel is direct mail. But it is by no means the only channel. Content and imagery are continuously being repurposed and upcycled for use across email, building banners, newspaper adverts, website images, and more.

Improve your appeal anatomy

25 ½ tips for writing better fundraising materials

Want to raise more money so you can do more good? Start with stronger appeals. But first, start with this dead simple copywriting checklist...

- Talk to Nana Murphy.**
Whether you write to donors via email or direct mail, keep their “picture” in your mind. Is your average donor 75 years old, female and a grandmother? See her. How does she feel? What’s she thinking? Writing to one person gives your communications an intimate voice... and a human touch.
- Be a “master of exclusion.”**
That’s what the brothers Heath wrote in *Made to Stick* (read it if you haven’t). Knowing what to leave out keeps your stories simple. And people remember simple. So don’t introduce too many themes, people, pets, whatever. Keep it simple.
- Add you, subtract the “Royal We”. (I is good too.)**
Because of you, 20 children have fresh drinking water. Thanks to you, Fido has a loving home. With your support, five more adults can learn to read. People love “you.” So: less “institutional we.” Less “us.” The magic word is “you.” (Note: Tribal we, as in, “together we can move mountains,” is good stuff, used properly. For more, see [“Ushering in the Age of Donor Realism”](#).)
- Focus on benefits, hard and soft.** Does the donation come with a magazine subscription? Say so. Will it bring 25 pets in from the cold? Say that, too.
- Write a pack, not a letter.** Your outer envelope, letter, reply/remittance envelope, and reply slip should – whenever possible – reinforce each other.
- Define your OAF.** Offer. Audience. Format. Before you start writing, you need to know what you’re asking people to do, when they need to do it by (e.g., is there a deadline?), who you’re writing to in the first place, and whether or not there are restrictions on the format of the pack itself.
- Use triggers.** Bob Hacker and Axel Andersson called them key copy drivers, and there are seven: fear, greed, guilt, anger, fear, exclusivity, salvation and flattery. But fundraising legend Mal Warwick posited that there are unique philanthropic drivers too. I use them often. Such as: Hope. Faith. Love. Duty. Compassion. Awe. Joy. Sorrow. Triumph. Shame. Justice. Gratitude. You should also harness a donor’s universal truths like the desire to change the world, give back for all you’ve been given, leave a legacy, etc. Remember, it’s about emotion. People give because you touch their hearts.
- Avoid taboo words and phrases.** One example: animal welfare organisations must never use copy that objectifies pets. Why? Animal lovers see their pets as people. So it’s always, “pets *who*” or “dogs *who*.” Never “pets *that*.” Are there no-no words and phrases in your nonprofit? Avoid them. Do you use a Style Guide? Make sure you refer to it.
- Turn on Flesch-Kincaid.** Studies show that even highly educated people read – and recall – more at about a grade 7 reading level, about age 13. The Flesch Kincaid Readability Test gives you that level automatically. (Note stats for one of my fundraising letters at right, including the 6.2 grade level.) Here’s how to turn it on:

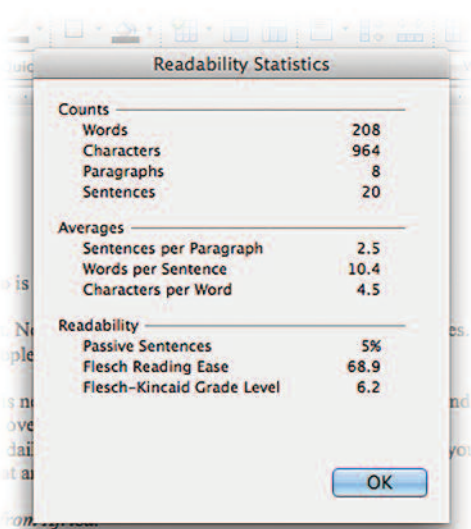
continued on page 26

Improve your appeal anatomy

25 ½ tips for writing better fundraising materials

continued from page 25

- In Word, go to *Tools. Click Spelling and Grammar. Click Options. Select Show Readability Statistics. Click OK. You're done.*



- Option: try hemingway app.com, into which you can paste text and have it evaluated instantly.
- **Pacing: chop long paragraphs.** Aim for 6-7 lines for your longest paragraph. And don't make them all long (or all super-short): mix it up.
- **Cross channels.** In e-news, refer to your magazine or website. In direct mail letters, refer to a great new resource on your website. On your direct mail reply device (or even on the outer envelope), direct people to your website to give as well.
- **Break unevenly.** If your letters are more than one page long, break the pages in mid-sentence, so reader has to turn the page to finish the thought.
- **Speak plainly.** Choose small words over big, straightforward over cute. Give grandiloquence the heave-ho. Avoid institutional jargon. (But insider jargon to the right audience, faith-based for example, is a good thing.)
- **Beware the voice of despair.** If you get all nitty-gritty with your readers, they *will not get past the horror* of your story to enjoy (much less act upon) the rest of what you tell them. Like the old song goes, "accentuate the positive."
- **Get to the point.** In that first draft, your lead is seldom where it should be... more often you'll find it buried in the middle. To spot the real lead, some writers I know literally cover the first paragraph with their thumb. (I rely on two or three drafts.)
- **Don't leave your reader hanging.** If you start a story, bring it to a logical conclusion... or tell the reader where to find it. Anticipate, then answer, questions.
- **"Kill your darlings."** Oft-quoted, heeded less. If you're attached to a poetic phrase you've written – what the late Joan Throckmorton called "deathless prose" – and your ego can't let it go, it's probably time to hit delete.
- **Tell the truth.** Your readers and prospects are smart, just like you. They can spot cleverly massaged copy a mile away, just like you. Why not tell it like it is?
- **Make yourself clear.** To renew membership... for a holiday fundraiser... to build a clinic. If there's a specific purpose for writing the letter, say so.

continued on page 27

Improve your appeal anatomy

25 ½ tips for writing better fundraising materials

continued from page 26

Give them a reason to give.

Urgency gets better results: “Donate \$75 by November 4th and the ABC Foundation will match your donation” is a whole bunch better than “Donate \$75 today.”

Ask the Big Three. When editing your work, keep three questions in mind:

- So what?
- Who cares?
- What's new?
- If you can't answer these, revise.

Check under the hood. If the mechanics of your piece aren't in place, you'll look sloppy in the eyes of your readers.

Always double check:

- Proper date
- Correct closing and signature
- Accuracy of any facts, figures and references
- Accuracy of any hyperlinks noted
- And... use spelling and grammar check!

Quadruple your proofing power.

A quick read-thru of your letter is not enough. To do it right, you need four separate proofs:

- Read on-screen.
- Print the piece, then read in your head.
- Stand up, walk around, and read it out loud.
- Let the whole thing sit overnight, at least. Read out loud again.
- Author Bob Bly advises a fifth: read the copy backwards, word for word.

Have a P.S. People read them. Usually first. So the first rule is to include a postscript in your appeal. And the second rule is to not make it an afterthought:

save some of the best stuff for the postscript. Ask again. Repeat the offer. It's prime real estate, so use it.

Say thank you.

Relationship-building is a two-way street. You can't do what you do without your donors. Don't they deserve to hear that? Say thank you.

25-½. Say thank you. Yes, I said it again. Here's why: in my opinion, it's one reason donor retention rates have been plummeting into the abyss. Listen: when I give to your nonprofit, I'm secretly hoping you'll be the first to treat me like I'm more than an ATM machine. So please, say thank you. Sincerely. Clearly. Promptly. And personally.



Make sure they can read what you send

Donor-driven design checklist for older eyes

Unless you reach for your glasses the minute you bring in your mail, know this: your older donors (and that means most of your donors) don't see your communications, online or offline, like you do. And if they can't read what you send, they won't give. This checklist, vetted from MQI's proven results over more than half a decade, will help you design for older eyes —

- Select a serif font.** Serif fonts have “tails” that complete the stroke of a letter, serving to guide the eye and distinguish one letter from the next. Sans serif fonts, literally “without serif,” do not. Numerous sources, from Colin Wheildon's landmark [Type & Layout](#) to the [National Institute on Aging](#), support serif over sans serif for print.
- Use 12 point or larger (depending on the font).** Not all fonts are created equal: so while you might use 12pt for Georgia, a font with a wider set, you'd be looking at 14pt for Times New Roman, a font with a narrower set.
- Be liberal with leading.** The space between lines of type is called leading (like the metal, pronounced with a soft 'e'). Like font, leading is measured in points (pts). Most sources recommend 1½ - 2 pts. At Merchants Quay Ireland, we use 5 points between lines.
- Visually group ideas,** both by size of type and font (bold, italics, and sparingly, sans serif), for things like:
 - Headlines
 - Decks
 - Main text (or body copy)
 - Quotes
 - Bulleted points
 - Charts
- Keep your styles consistent.** This means all (or the vast majority) of headlines have the same formatting, as do decks, main text, subheads, and quotes.
- Curb all caps, italics, and underlining.** At MQI, this doesn't mean we never use italics or underlining. But we do limit their use. (And in general we avoid all caps – even in headlines. For these – another good design guideline for older eyes – we use upper and lower case.)
- Avoid breaking words to a second line,** i.e., hyphenating.
- Unite your numbers and qualifiers.** For example: if you write “32 meals,” try to keep “32” and “meals” on the same line.
- Flush left and ragged right.** Flush left aligns non-indented type along the left margin, leaving a ragged (or uneven) right margin. Unlike justified text, rag right doesn't create artificial spaces between words on the same line, but instead leaves them uniform: this makes for more natural reading.
- Use normal letter spacing, or “tracking.”** This means avoid spacing individual letters too close together or too far apart.
- Limit line length.** Really wide “measures” – or line lengths – tire the eye. Aim for a line lengths of 50-65 characters, max.

continued on page 29

Make sure they can read what you send

Donor-driven design checklist for older eyes

continued from page 28

- **Take care with colour and contrast.** Older eyes don't process colors like younger eyes do. And that means:
 - Watch pale yellow – older eyes, which take on a yellow 'cast,' may simply perceive it as white
 - Avoid using blue and green together – older eyes have trouble telling them apart
 - Keep contrast strong – dark type, white background

- **Limit funky type and layout tricks.** Such as:
 - Avoid large blocks of reverse type (i.e., white font, dark background).
 - Avoid using type over photos
 - Keep layout simple

- **Be picky about paper.** Your review team might think glossy paper looks jazzy for your donor newsletter, but older donors are sensitive to glare. So if you want them to read it, do this instead:
 - Choose matte (non-glossy) paper
 - Choose a paper with no see-through



MQI Merchants Quay Ireland Homeless and Drug Services

"Something had just clicked inside me..."

How Marie is Winning the Fight of a Lifetime

A formerly homeless mother of four is beating overwhelming odds to overcome heroin addiction – thanks to gritty determination, a deep love for her kids and the 'whatever-it-takes' spirit of Merchants Quay staff. Read about the positive changes you're helping make possible...

Marie loves to laugh. That's what you'd notice first about this attractive mother of four, with the light blue eyes that seem to glow when the light hits them. And she's not above laughing at herself, as finding the humour in all she's been through. Because if Marie has learned one thing on her journey toward a drug-free life, it's that she's accountable for all of it.

She's forthright about both good and bad. The beloved horse she rode every night as a teenager, her devastation when he was sold after she went "on the hop" from classes. Out of school at 14... troubles with drinking and smoking hash violence at home.

Only in her 30s, she seems to have lived a lifetime. In and out of treatment centres while her mother cared for her children, Marie couldn't kick her addiction. Like many heroin users, she had issues with other drugs too, making it doubly difficult to stop using.

Ultimately, she'd hit rock-bottom before realising her true source of strength: her four children. By then her mother was out of patience – the kids would always have a home, but Marie was on the streets. "She was a great supporter, and I'd be lost without her... I ended up homeless then and in the hostels, something I said I would never do. I remember I used to have a photograph of me kids on the shelf and I wanted to stop taking the drugs but I couldn't. No pride, no dignity – everything just goes out the window. So I just decided I needed to get help."

Like many of Ireland's nearly 15,000 heroin users looking to break the cycle of addiction, Marie faced an uphill battle. She'd decided to seek treatment but was still surrounded by drug users at the hostel – including a friend in the next room who was smoking heroin constantly. "I used to have to sleep with a T-shirt over me, face so's not to smell it..."

Even safe in the Merchant's Quay treatment programme at High Park, it wasn't easy. In fact, of every ten drug users in treatment, just three are female – and Marie knows why. She says it's definitely more difficult "for women, with children especially. I don't think I could go through treatment knowing that my kids were in someone else's house being looked after... it's very hard on the mothers and I can only imagine what it's like on the kids."

She's quick to credit Merchant's Quay staff for all their support while she worked through the programme. "They sat up with me 'til one or two o'clock in the morning and if you were going through something they'd ask... they won't let you hide in any corner. With other places I never really got that."

And Marie remembers when she knew she'd make it through. It was, she recalls, "when my kids came up to see me. And I just started to realise that I want to do this thing... I want to be there for my kids, and from that moment on I really started putting the work in."

Now in aftercare housing, and attending her weekly aftercare sessions, Marie is drug-free. She couldn't be more delighted, summing it all up with customary wit: "I used to ring High Park when I left and I'd be havin' a chat with the staff and I'd say, 'I want to come back.' And they'd say, 'We miss you... but we don't miss you that much!' I'd be lost without the support from Merchants Quay. I'm grateful that I got the chance to go in there. Me kids they are benefitting so much from it."

1969 – 2010 41 years of service to the poorest and most forgotten people

At the Coalfane, page 2 National Housing Crisis, page 3 Christmas Gratitude Concert, page 4 The Family at Our Door, page 5

MQI Merchants Quay Ireland Homeless & Drug Services

The Newsletter for Supporters of Merchants Quay Ireland

"I put so much work in to lose it all like that, it nearly killed me it did..."

Unbroken

Micheál was drug free at last and accepted into college when Ireland's housing crisis pulled his new life out from under him – and into the abyss of relapse. See how, nearly three years later, you are helping him to make a comeback...

"If you are talking housing nearby, the rent allowance, it's just not enough. And then you are single, you are a male, you know, it is a combination of everything, I'm looking everyday, anywhere I might be able to rent a place and it's the same story. You are either priced out of the market or they won't accept rent allowance." – Micheál, MQI client

Cruel irony
After two treatment centres, massive personal effort, and six months in a recovery house with another agency, the hope was that Micheál could find a place he could afford, or get help from the local Council. He applied and was accepted to college pending good grades. But the shortage of houses would sweep it all away like

continued on page 2

Proud MQI clients emerge with the winning cup –

Victorious in Homeless Football League!

An inspiring story of the community spirit that you foster at MQI...


Each week something wonderful happens on an astro turf field in Dublin City Centre. Homeless men get together for the love of the sport, and play football. And this year, Merchants Quay clients have won the Homeless Football League Cup!

Gavin, who works daily with rough sleepers as part of MQI's street outreach programme, offered to organise a Merchants Quay team after clients came to him with the idea. The chaotic nature of their lives, he reported, makes scheduling practices a balancing act. With no promise of a roof over their heads, clients can spend hours on the phone with the local authority simply to try and get a bed for the night. But they kept at it, and since the big win, the team are looking forward to defending the cup next year... a goal made all the more remarkable by what they overcome. Congratulations!

www.mqi.ie

When MQI redesigned its donor newsletter for older eyes, response rates rose from 2.7% in 2010 (left) to 7.6% the very next issue. Ongoing donor-driven improvements to copy and design saw response rates rise to 13.54% (right) by 2015.

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued



Postal Address
P.O. Box 11958,
Dublin 8

Location
24 Merchants Quay,
Dublin 8

Contact
tel: +353 1 524 0139 email: info@mqi.ie
fax: +353 1 524 0946 web: www.mqi.ie

Merchants Quay Ireland
A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.

Production Schedule for March 2016 Appeal

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 08 Jan | Project kick-off (MQI & Lisa)) |
| 19 Jan | All background material due to writer (Lisa) |
| 19-27 Jan | Writing (Lisa) |
| 20 Jan | Creative with Lisa and Sandie print spec sheet for printer (Sandie) |
| 28-29 Jan | Client review, revision of copy and graphic concept (MQI) |
| 29 Jan | Client approved copy and photos send to designer (Sandie) |
| 30 Jan - 15 Feb | Design and Layout (Sandie) |
| 15 Feb | PDF mock-ups to client (MQI) |
| 16-17 Feb | Client review and revision of mock-ups (MQI) |
| 17 Feb | Approve files send to printer |
| 17-22 Feb | Printer shows proofs |
| 23 Feb | MQI reviews proofs |
| 24-09 Feb | Printer prints and prepare for mailing |
| 09 March | Mail drop date |

Appeal Production Schedule

Above MQI sample used with permission of and are © to Merchants Quay Ireland.

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued

Results: Another view...

APPEALS

| Year | Appeal | Rsp Rate | Avg. Gift | ROI |
|------|---------|----------|-----------|------|
| 2010 | AP1210 | 36.30% | €140 | 31.5 |
| 2011 | AP0611 | 13.51% | €125 | 12.5 |
| 2011 | AP1011 | 11.11% | €90 | 8.7 |
| 2011 | AP1211 | 41.75% | €152 | 30.6 |
| 2012 | AP0312M | 12.18% | €66 | 6.9 |
| 2012 | AP0512 | 14.73% | €81 | 9.2 |
| 2012 | AP0912 | 15.24% | €71 | 6.7 |
| 2012 | AP1112 | 45.30% | €163 | 22.8 |
| 2013 | AP0213M | 12.19% | €69 | 6.0 |
| 2013 | AP0513 | 14.46% | €77 | 7.1 |
| 2013 | AP0913 | 21.21% | €109 | 14.7 |
| 2013 | AP1113 | 42.23% | €139 | 26.5 |
| 2014 | AP0314 | 11.42% | €93 | 8.3 |
| 2014 | AP0614 | 16.12% | €81 | 10.1 |
| 2014 | AP0914 | 10.88% | €76 | 6.7 |
| 2014 | AP1114 | 45.79% | €138 | 28.8 |
| 2015 | AP0315 | 14.2% | €107 | 10.7 |
| 2015 | AP0515 | 14.2% | €84 | 9.8 |
| 2015 | AP0915 | 13.2% | €66 | 7.0 |
| 2015 | AP1115 | 46.4% | €150 | 29.0 |

NEWSLETTERS

| Year | Newsletter | Rsp Rate | Avg. Gift | ROI |
|------|------------|----------|-----------|------|
| 2010 | NL0710 | 2.7% | €115 | 3.1 |
| 2011 | NL0311 | 7.76% | €126 | |
| 2011 | NL0811 | 6.8% | €95 | 5.9 |
| 2011 | NL1011 | 8.5% | €104 | 8.9 |
| 2012 | NL0412 | 7.4% | €166 | 12.9 |
| 2012 | NL0812 | 7.73% | €86 | 7.0 |
| 2012 | NL1012 | 12.08% | €99 | 9.9 |
| 2013 | NL0313 | 9.90% | €81 | 8.4 |
| 2013 | NL0713 | 12.38% | €65 | 8.4 |
| 2013 | NL1013 | 12.73% | €94 | 10.1 |
| 2014 | NL0214 | 10.94% | €77 | 5.6 |
| 2014 | NL0414 | 13.5% | €70 | 6.4 |
| 2014 | NL0814 | 14.65% | €70 | 7.7 |
| 2014 | NL1014 | 10.79% | €91 | 7.8 |
| 2015 | NL0215 | 13.42% | €77 | 9.5 |
| 2015 | NL0415 | 11.02% | €64 | 6.9 |
| 2015 | NL0715 | 12.97% | €76 | 6.5 |
| 2015 | NL1015 | 13.54% | €80 | 8.6 |

Yes, those numbers are real. They illustrate the amazing things that can happen when nonprofits take a donor-based approach to the business of raising money, in strategy, culture, and creative. Note especially the climb in Christmas appeal response rates as donor care throughout the year got better and better, and the huge change in newsletter response rates in 2010, when MQI made the final move to donor-centric writing and design.

IV. Appendix: A Donor-Based Treasury of Creative Samples and Checklists, continued

Privacy, Respect, and Gratitude: Our Promise to You

Each time you give to Merchants Quay Ireland we promise you that...



... **We will never rent, sell or trade your name, address or contact details. Ever.** Your right to privacy via post, email, and phone deserves to be respected. So we do.

... **We will abide by your communications preferences.** When you give, you will receive a heartfelt thank-you. As well you'll receive *Quay Times*, our supporter newsletter. Most subscribers are delighted to hear about the lives they are changing. But if you ever find that you'd prefer a different schedule, let us know. We'll make it right.


... **We will let you know – and see – how your donations are working.** Your *Quay Times* newsletter is one way this happens. Our audited financial statements, online at www.mqi.ie, are another. You will also be invited throughout the year to personally tour the good work you support. (Unable to get about? Ring us. We'll bring the tour to you.)

The number to call is **01 524 0139**. We'd love to hear from you.

*Thank you for caring about Ireland's most vulnerable.
We'd be lost without you.*



Merchants Quay Ireland
A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.

Merchants Quay Ireland | 24 Merchants Quay, P.O. Box 11958, Dublin 8
Direct Line: 01 524 0139 | Website: www.mqi.ie | Follow us on Facebook 

Offering Donors Privacy, Respect, and Gratitude: the Merchants Quay Supporter Pledge

MQI set a tone of open and honest communication from the start, encouraging donors to contact the team with any queries, problems, or concerns. The pledge card above is included in Merchants Quay's supporter welcome pack, which is sent to every new donor several weeks after they receive their thank-you letter (which also lets them know the welcome pack is on its way). Note how it clearly lays out what donors can expect to receive, a number they can call if they have changes (with a phone line that is personally answered by the team), and the MQI ethos on privacy.



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

Follow the work of Merchants Quay Ireland at www.mqi.ie, on Facebook, and on Twitter @MerchantsQuayIR.

Lessons from Merchants Quay Ireland was brought to you with passion, grit, and creativity by:



Denisa Casement

Denisa Casement, CFRE

Head of Individual Giving,
Animals Asia
(Head of Fundraising,
MQI 2008-2016)

Twitter: [@DenisaCasement](https://twitter.com/DenisaCasement)

Email: denisa.casement@gmail.com



Lisa Sargent

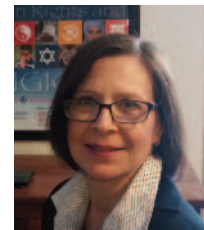
Lisa Sargent

Fundraising Copywriter & Strategist,
Lisa Sargent Communications, USA
(Copywriting & communications
consultant, MQI, 2009-present)

Twitter: [@lisasargent2](https://twitter.com/lisasargent2)

Web: lisasargent.com

Email: lisa@lisasargent.com



Sandra Collette

Sandra Collette

Donor-Driven Design Expert,
S. Collette Design, USA
(Design & creative consultant,
MQI, 2010-present)

Web: scollettedesign.com

Email: s.collette@scollettedesign.com



*Thank you for giving a damn about
great creative... great fundraising...
and great donor care!*



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

— Margaret Mead