

First impressions count

Project 04: Thank you and welcome

John Grain, February 2017

The brief

It's in the early stages of contact that the foundations of mutually great relationships are shaped. This project will look at all aspects of the first few days of a donor's contact with a cause, to set out - without making any assumptions as to what each individual might choose - the ideal way to get each relationship off to a good start and to show appreciation appropriately throughout it.

Summary guidance

Thanking and welcoming are not fundraising functions. They are not about raising more money, and they should not be measured in this way. They are an essential part of any supporter care programme, where the objective should be to provide the best possible service and care for every single supporter in the most individual and appropriate way. Achieving these objectives will deliver enhanced loyalty, longer-lasting relationships, genuine supporter advocates, and ultimately a stewardship function that is the bedrock of better, more sustainable fundraising.

Thanking should not be limited to responding to donations, but can be used more imaginatively, and strategically, to provide even better supporter care and recognition: for example acknowledging donors and sharing the positive impact they have had for their longevity in supporting, for particular giving milestones they may reach (for example on the anniversary of their first year of regular giving), for project successes, for emergency or crisis responses, for sharing the charity's story, for being active on social media etc. All are excellent ways of demonstrating just how much you value and appreciate those who give freely of their money, time, influence or resources to help you.

The importance of finding better ways of saying thank you and of welcoming a new supporter to your charity simply must not be underestimated. At the most level, being thanked imaginatively, promptly and with integrity is the very least a donor should expect from you, given that this is the only thing they receive in return for making a donation.

In many respects, showing appropriate, genuine appreciation towards our supporters is more critical for the voluntary sector than for any other sector because our gratitude is often the only collateral we have to trade with. We must get even better at giving thanks and our aspiration should always be to be the best at it - bar none.

The following are the eleven main principles and recommended actions from the project findings, followed by the twelve key conclusions.

Principles and recommended actions for thanking & welcoming

1. The sector needs to take thanking and welcoming much more seriously, rather than continually paying lip service to this area of supporter care. Many donors giving smaller value gifts are excluded from being thanked, and often content of thanking messages is dull and uninspiring. Our own examination of over 200 thank you letters and e-mails (stretching back as far as 2008) showed large numbers of similar phrases being used over and over by charities. While none of these phrases are “wrong” per se, they are so overused that they have become completely predictable and no longer carry any major impact for supporters. This is further exacerbated for many donors who are generously supporting multiple causes and therefore seeing these phrases repeated many times over across acknowledgements from different organisations.
2. First-time donors should always be thanked for their gifts irrespective of the amount unless they have specifically asked not to receive an acknowledgement. If the amount is very small, a thank you should still be sent, but should explain that normally gifts of this level are not acknowledged due to the costs involved.
3. Acquisition materials should not include a tick box option for new donors to opt out of receiving a thank you. It prevents the charity from showing any appreciation for a first time gift, making the donor feel good about what they have done, demonstrating what a difference they can make and welcoming them to the organisation effectively. All are essential foundations of a good stewardship programme. In subsequent communications options for opting out of receiving a thank you may be feasible or even desirable for some organisations, with sufficient explanation and rationale of course.
4. All new donors should receive a Welcome Pack. This need not be expensive or overwhelming, but it should introduce the donor to the wider work of the charity and set expectations for how the donor can expect to be treated and valued by the charity.
5. New donors giving online should be given the option to get their Welcome Pack digitally or via the mail.
6. Existing supporters should always be thanked for their gifts, irrespective of the amount, unless they have specifically chosen or asked not to receive an acknowledgement.

7. Thanking could be much more imaginative than it is currently. There is an opportunity to use much more engaging content through better use of case studies, quotes, testimonies and images. Handwritten thanks should be used more often, and formats could be varied much more. Thank you cards, better digital content and telephone calls would all help make a thank you stand out and be more memorable.
8. Much better use could be made of the telephone for thanking supporters – both to say thank you quickly, but also to offer a far more personal and engaging acknowledgement for those donors who have done something particularly special, unusual or significant.
9. Digital acknowledgements should not just be limited to bounce-back receipt e-mails. These acknowledgements are an opportunity to provide engaging and involving content, which can be done easily and relatively cheaply.
10. Thanking should not be confined to donations. There is an opportunity to recognise donors for the length of their support, for anniversaries (e.g. In Memoriam recognitions), for campaigning, for volunteering, and even for things like informing the charity of a change of address. All of these are ways of making the donor feel valued and demonstrating excellent standards of supporter care.
11. This area needs far better measurements and key performance indicators. Rather than simply measuring the speed of sending a thank you, charities should also measure the direct costs of thanking and introduce a process for trying to evaluate the quality and impact of thanking as part of wider satisfaction measures (see point 7 in principles and actions section, page 19).

Conclusions

1. Overall, there was a slightly disappointing response to the project. Whilst one view may be that there is a continued apathy to the importance and value of thanking, it was clear from the responses we did receive that better appreciation of supporters at key points can go a long way to creating hugely positive and long-lasting relationships with donors.
2. In the majority of cases we reviewed through our mystery shopping, there continues to be a lack of imagination and effort put into most charitable thanking, with the approach generally being to take the path of least resistance – re-using or minimally updating existing letters, using basic bounce-back receipt e-mails with no follow-up, and rarely employing other formats and mechanisms such as cards with images or the telephone.
3. However, there is strong anecdotal evidence that high quality, inspiring content in all the main thanking mechanisms (online, print and face-to-face) can motivate supporters to become better advocates of the charity – sharing their stories and the charity’s- and can often inspire them to give again as a result of their thank you.
4. Our survey revealed that only two thirds of charities said they thank new donors for every single gift. While we salute those organisations for their efforts and commitment to supporters, it also means a significant opportunity is being missed by the remainder. That is a large number of organisations who are failing to get relationships with new supporters off to a good start. We would strongly recommend reviewing any policy of this kind, and we certainly question the wisdom of any approach that excludes new donors from getting any kind of acknowledgement for their first-time support. Showing genuine appreciation for a donation, or any other kind of contribution, should be a basic tenet of any supporter care programme.
5. Are the short-term cost savings in not thanking supporters risking potential longer-term damage in terms of the relationship with these supporters? We are very concerned about the possible long-term consequences of many charities choosing to never acknowledge a gift of £5 or less, and around one in eight charities choosing to never thank donors giving £10 or less. This fails to take into account the donor’s wishes or expectations and could easily be perceived as arrogant and unappreciative. The incentive for someone to keep giving if they never receive an acknowledgement of any kind, or learn how their gift is being used, is questionable at best. It is also entirely possible that a donor may be ‘testing’ a charity before committing to any further support, so the consequences of not thanking such donors could be potentially very significant.
6. Speed of thanking continues to be the main measurement used in terms of any quality control. Whilst turnaround times appear commendably quick, we do question whether this has sometimes become the main priority, to a point where quality is being sacrificed for speed. Clearly the ideal would be to thank donors promptly with high-

quality content, but it should not be forgotten that the latter is certainly far more memorable than the former! Providing engaging, interesting and informative thanks should always be the primary objective of any acknowledgement process – even if mass produced.

7. Handwritten acknowledgements such as letters or cards, either written in full or simply topped and tailed, are appreciated by donors and considered to be much more personal. It can be the single most effective way of making a thank-you communication stand out and be more memorable from the donor's perspective.
8. The proportion of online thanking that consists solely of automatic receipt e-mails is disappointingly high, with the thanking survey showing that over half of all online acknowledgements are done this way. Our own mystery shopping exercises indicate that these are generally of much lower quality than bespoke thank-you e-mails and letters, and could potentially leave the supporter feeling very underwhelmed. This is an area that could be easily improved upon at low cost and with little impact on resources and time, but could greatly enhance the donor experience.
9. We were surprised by the survey finding that only a tiny proportion of charities thanking new donors online sent a digital Welcome Pack. Only 1% said they send an online version of a Welcome Pack, although 16% said that a Welcome Pack was sent via the post. Even so, less than one in five new online donors received any kind of dedicated welcome to the organisation. This seems like another missed opportunity for engaging new supporters with involving and inspiring content delivered quickly online.
10. We were also surprised that the survey suggested that a greater proportion of follow-up contacts to a donation online were delivered via print rather than digitally for both new and existing donors (23% to 22%), which also seems surprising and certainly more costly.
11. There is a great opportunity for more imaginative thanking that is genuine and authentic. It does not always have to be linked to a donation. We found some good examples of thanking supporters on specific milestones and anniversaries (for example, after giving a regular gift for a year or maintaining membership for five years, on the anniversary of an in-memoriam gift being received, or after a project has been successful or a particular programme goal has been achieved).
12. There is not enough measurement of thanking – in our survey fewer than four in ten responders actually measured thanking as part of any management information or key performance indicators, and over one third of responders to the survey had no idea what a thank you cost to produce. Speed is the main measurement used in thanking, and we believe much more could be done to more effectively measure the impact, benefits and costs of thanking supporters – particularly at a time when charity

fundraising practices are under scrutiny like never before. Again, this seems to reflect the overall lack of value placed on this activity by the sector as a whole.

In addition to explaining and justifying the above principles, actions and conclusions. The full project provides several instructive case histories, plus links to a number of informative articles on thanking and welcoming, all with instructive examples and useful advice.

The approach

This project was structured to consider all aspects of the thanking and welcoming processes for supporters. We considered everything from the first few days of a donor's contact with a cause - without making any assumptions as to what each individual might choose - to investigate the ideal way to get each relationship off to a good start and critically, how to show appreciation appropriately throughout the lifetime of a relationship with a supporter.

The specific objectives for the project were:

- To examine and challenge existing assumptions about welcoming and thanking donors
- To identify useful and practical existing research (from both the voluntary and commercial sectors) that could be applied to welcoming and thanking
- To discover and examine examples of existing good practices and successful thanking and welcoming within the sector
- To understand from donors what is useful and important in welcoming communications
- To understand from donors what value and importance thank you communications have
- To make recommendations to the Commission on the Donor Experience for the best approaches to take to welcoming and thanking donors.

The approach for this project covered a number of key areas, including gathering case studies from within the sector, gathering case studies from the commercial world, reviewing previous research into thanking and welcoming (again, from both the charitable and commercial sectors), carrying out an online survey into thanking within charities and interviewing a small number of charitable supporters about their views on how they were thanked and welcomed by charities they support.

Principles and actions

1. The sector needs to take thanking and welcoming much more seriously.

Frankly, the overall response to the Thanking and Welcoming project was somewhat underwhelming. Despite promotion on blogs via Fundraising.co.uk, the Supporter Care Forum, on the JGA website and on social media, the number of submissions made to the project was quite limited, despite many anecdotal assertions as to the value of good, responsive thanking.

As discussed in the introduction, many phrases are overused in thanking communications, to the point of losing effectiveness. The most common, and therefore least impactful, phrases are as follows”

Appears in over 90% of acknowledgements:

“Thank you (so much) for your kind / generous donation of <£amount>.”

“Your support really/truly is greatly appreciated.”

Appears in over 75% of acknowledgments:

“Thanks to people/supporters like you...”

“You really are making a (real) difference to....”

Appears in over 50% of acknowledgements:

“You are helping to build a brighter/better future for...”

“You (really) are helping to change/transform lives.”

“If you would like to know more about any aspect of our work please do not hesitate to contact me/us and we will be happy to help.”

Appears in over 40% of acknowledgments:

“Worth an extra <£x> at no extra cost to you.”

Finding better, more exciting and inspiring ways to express these sentiments would go a long way to making an acknowledgment far more memorable, and interesting, for the donor.

2. First time donors should always be thanked for their gifts.

A first gift to a charity is often described as the most difficult to get, and therefore it seems strategically suspect to then not thank someone who has given for the first time if their gift is arbitrarily judged to be too small to warrant an acknowledgement.

There are two major flaws with this approach: firstly, on a fundamental level, by not acknowledging a gift, the messaging from the donor's perspective cannot be positive ones - "my gift wasn't worth thanking", "they don't care enough to thank me", "they can't need the money if they can't be bothered to say thank you".

Secondly, who is to judge what is or isn't a substantial gift for a donor to make? For example, a pensioner giving £5 from their state pension of £120 is giving 4% of their weekly income - the equivalent of someone earning £30,000 per year giving a gift of £23.

3. Acquisition materials should not include a tick box option for new donors to opt out of receiving a thank you - many will do this automatically thinking it saves the charity money, but they will not be thinking of what this prevents the charity from being able to do such as building any kind of initial relationship, sending a Welcome Pack, or taking the opportunity to make the donor feel good for giving with a well-crafted and engaging acknowledgement.

4. All new donors should receive a Welcome Pack

Our understanding from conversations with supporters is that Welcome Packs are seen as useful and helpful for donors who are new to an organisation and can be particularly good at reassuring them over key areas (use of data, preferences etc.) as well as setting expectations (how they will be treated and explaining more about the work of the charity). Donors do not perceive a Welcome Pack to be wasteful or expensive, provided it is well planned and appropriate for the particular audience and reflects how they gave their initial gift.

The issues with poorly received Welcome Packs generally seem to involve being overwhelmed with too much information and material, being asked overtly for more support (thus negating the welcome aspect) and anxiety over the cost. These can all be relatively easily addressed by sending materials and information relevant to the donor (Y Care International offer a nice Welcome Pack with a range of loose postcards they can select from depending on the donor and where they were recruited), offering a genuine welcome and setting out the standards and expectations (see Appendix 1: Case Studies, page 43). This need not be expensive or overwhelming, but should introduce the donor to the wider work of the charity and set expectations for how the donor can expect to be treated and valued by the charity.

New donors giving online should be given an option of getting their Welcome Pack digitally or via the mail. Digital versions should be developed to offer engaging content using video and strong imagery and can be delivered more quickly and at a lower perceived cost.

The Alzheimer's Society (see Appendix 1: Case Studies, page 42) has developed a donor-centred welcoming engagement programme as part of their overall supporter journey work. It reflects the ethos of the charity in terms of supporter care and the emphasis on long-term, permission-based, non-pressuring relationships with donors.

5. Existing supporters should always be thanked for their gifts irrespective of the amount, unless they have specifically asked not to receive an acknowledgement.

As with Point 2, it seems counterintuitive to not thank someone for their gift, unless they have specifically requested not to receive an acknowledgement. We would recommend thanking every eligible donation (particularly those made by cheque, card or voucher) unless there are exceptional circumstances (for example, a very low level gift made in cash of 50p or less).

Even if there were a policy to not thank donations under a certain threshold, it would be appropriate to acknowledge the supporter at the outset so that you can explain what the internal policy is in terms of thanking. This would give the donor the understanding as to why you do not thank donors for gifts of under a certain amount, rather than simply hearing nothing at all from the charity. Once a year, these donors could be thanked for their cumulative gifts to ensure they are not forgotten or unappreciated.

In the early 2000s, Habitat for Humanity GB would always receive a low-level donation to most appeals from an elderly lady donor – generally of £2 or less. However, they came regularly, and so they would always be acknowledged with a letter of thanks. After one such letter the lady phoned to speak to the signatory and explained that she made lots of small gifts to many charities that she was interested in, but Habitat for Humanity were the only organisation to always write and say thank you. As a result, she told them that she had decided to update her Will to remove the charities she had originally decided to leave bequests to and make one single bequest to Habitat for Humanity, as they were the only organisation that genuinely appreciated her support. While we are not claiming this would be commonplace if charities always thanked their donors giving lower amounts, it does demonstrate the power of appreciation and the impact a genuine, honest thank you can potentially have.

6. Thanking could be much more imaginative than it is currently.

Our conclusion is that the thank you is too often just an afterthought and hastily put together to meet a need, rather than being planned as a significant donor communication that can motivate, inspire and generate improved loyalty.

More engaging content including case studies and media and that avoids stock phrases is effective. Handwritten thanking should be used more often and formats could be varied much more – for example thank you cards, better digital content and the telephone – would all help make a thank you stand out and be more memorable. SolarAid (see Appendix 1: Case Studies) have made excellent use of all of these approaches and achieved some exceptional responses from supporters in terms of additional income, advocacy and loyalty.

More than ten years ago, the Railway Children charity would use A5 cards with a strong image on the front and a short thank-you message on the back as their standard acknowledgement mechanism for some appeals. Feedback for these was always good, with donors telling the charity they had pinned them up at work, at schools and at home on the fridge, or had shared them with friends and family.



A number of charities have used thanking videos to good effect. These include Terence Higgins Trust (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yADgtkkgK3g&list=UUvDIu4SI_mKkD9uYFOqXutw), Friends of the Earth (<https://vimeo.com/85266691>) and, perhaps most memorably of all, CharityWater from the USA, who spent a week personally thanking donors of all kinds using videos on the occasion of their fifth anniversary (<https://www.youtube.com/user/charitywaterthanks>). These short videos do not have to be expensive or have high production values, but they do need to be genuine and authentic and have interesting content.

Blogs and social media are a good way of expressing thanks more publicly – identifying and acknowledging donors in a way that can be more informal and sometimes humorous. A brilliant example can be seen with the Innocent Drinks blog (see Appendix 1: Case Studies), particularly with the way they thank customers taking part in their Big Knit charity initiative for Age UK. Wonderfully original acknowledgements, individual thanks, light-hearted and amusing copy that is very on brand and genuine appreciation. Donors would love this!

7. Much better use could be made of the telephone for thanking supporters – both to say thank you quickly, but also to offer a far more personal and engaging acknowledgement for those donors who have done something particularly special, unusual, or significant.

8. Digital acknowledgements need to be more than just bounce back receipt e-mails.

It is typical of taking the path of least resistance to just assume an automatic receipt e-mail will suffice for those making gifts online. While it is the minimum that might be expected, anything more is an opportunity to engage and involve the supporter in a much more interactive way. At the very least, following up the automatic bounce-back e-mail with a more interesting and inspiring thank you should not be difficult to do and can impress a supporter – see the example from the Hope and Play charity in Appendix 1.

9. Thanking should not be confined to just donations.

There is an opportunity to build loyalty and goodwill by using thanking to strengthen the relationship, even when a donation has not been forthcoming.

On the whole we could be much better at thanking supporters directly when there has been a major success for the charity – for example, if the numbers of a threatened wildlife species begin to increase, when land has successfully been bought or preserved for environmental reasons, a medical research breakthrough occurs, or a project has better than expected results. All of these are great reasons to contact a donor who has supported the work, say thank you and let them know what they have helped you achieve. There is a good example here from Anthony Nolan, where Alex, a young boy that has benefited from a lifesaving transplant, directly thanks everyone who has supported the charity via a powerful video message.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DttB54Aa4dc>

At Children's Aid Direct in the 1990s, we would send donors who gave to emergency appeals a thank-you card after six weeks to let them know what we had managed to achieve thanks to their support in the crucial early days of a disaster response. These donors were sent with a suitably positive image and a short summary of our impact. There was no ask of any kind and no response form. This approach always generated a huge secondary response of donations from supporters grateful to know just what they had helped us achieve.

SolarAid have achieved excellent feedback by recognising donors for the length of their support (see Appendix 1: Case Studies, page 22), particularly with direct debit givers.

Anniversaries are another good opportunity to demonstrate a personal level of thanking and supporter care. For example, in-memoriam donors acknowledged again on the first anniversary of their gift demonstrates the charity's awareness of a probable emotional time for the

supporter and lets the supporter know the charity is aware of their situation and has taken the time to acknowledge the anniversary.

Better, more inspiring thanking for taking campaigning actions, such as writing to an MP or signing a petition, is another obvious opportunity, as is acknowledging volunteer service.

Even a simple thank you for informing the charity of a change of address shows how important the donor is to the charity and confirms that the new details have been received and updated.

All of these are ways of making the donor feel valued and demonstrating excellent standards of supporter care.

10. This area of Supporter Care needs better, and more relevant, measurements and key performance indicators.

While it is important, and of course prudent, for charities to know what activities cost, it is equally important to think carefully about what and how the impact of such activities should be measured. Fundraising has a directly measurable financial return, but this is a far less useful measurement of a genuinely donor-centred supporter care strategy. The benefits of an exceptional donor thanking programme can be measured in terms of satisfaction, engagement and long-term behaviour.

This could be done in a number of different ways. For example, when talking to supporters on the telephone, there is an opportunity to ask them about their thank-you communications and what they think of them, which would give useful anecdotal insights. Questions about thanking could also be included in any wider donor satisfaction research – Mission Aviation Fellowship did this in their 2015 survey to supporters (online and print), which provided some very useful insights into how valued, and valuable, thanking was for the organisation.

Acknowledgements:

We would particularly like to acknowledge the contributions of Jennie Mummery (Alzheimer's Society) and Richard Turner (consultant) to this project.

Appendix 1: Case Studies

1. SolarAid
2. Innocent Drinks & Age Concern
3. Hope and Play
4. Alzheimer's Society
5. Y Care International

1. SolarAid

SolarAid view thanking as an opportunity to engage supporters and help spread their story. This culture and philosophy of great thanking and appreciation is at the heart of their fundraising philosophy, which is not centred on how to get money out of people, but on how to inspire them to spread their story. They have found that people will often share a genuine, well-thought-out thank you with others, thus inspiring new people to get involved.

The example below demonstrates this to excellent effect. A blog post from a supporter talks about his son who had collected £24 for SolarAid and who received a personal thank you card in response.

“Anyway, Harry collected £24.00 and we sent it off to SolarAid with a note from the man himself. Yesterday a card arrived with delightful personal messages to Harry from the SolarAid team thanking him for his efforts. Cue misty eyes from his parents.

So if you do want to make a contribution to those less fortunate this Christmas, my whole hearted recommendation would be SolarAid!”

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NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE FRONT LINE

24 December 2013

A BIG SHOUT OUT TO SOLARAIID!



My eldest son Harry came home a couple of weeks ago and announced that he wanted to collect money for "poor people in Africa." This gave me a wee bit of a dilemma as I worry that much of our 'charity' locks developing countries into poverty by undermining the very local markets they rely on for that development, but I wanted to encourage my young son's philanthropy, so choosing the right charity was paramount. I put a request for suggestions out on Facebook/Twitter for suggestions and my good friend Neil Bradbury suggested [SolarAid](#).

SolarAid distributes solar powered lamps to villages without electricity to allow school kids to study in the evening without relying on highly polluting kerosene lamps. The lamps go out via a network of local entrepreneurs and they have to be purchased at a subsidised price which allayed my fears that a donation could be damaging in the long term - plus the renewable energy angle rang my bell.

Anyway, Harry collected £24.00 and we sent it off to SolarAid with a note from the man himself. Yesterday a card arrived with delightful personal messages to Harry from the SolarAid team thanking him for his efforts. Cue misty eyes from his parents.

So if you do want to make a contribution to those less fortunate this Christmas, my whole hearted recommendation would be [SolarAid!](#)

SolarAid had realised that one of the most effective ways to get their mission and story across was to simply show people a solar light. These lights are well made, bright and handy. Whilst at an awards event, a guest offered to buy the solar light a staff member was carrying around. The light cost the charity about £5, and the donor bought it for £50. The next day, a guest at the SolarAid office did the same. Based on this experience, SolarAid decided to do two things as part of their thanking. First, they offered to send donors a solar study light if they gave a donation of £50 or more (this fell within the gift aid incentives permissible in the UK; for

donations up to £100, you can give a benefit of up to 25 per cent the value of the gift) and second, they began to offer a solar light to donors who had a direct debit with them for a year.

This thanking approach paid dividends in many ways. One week the charity saw they were getting a run of new donors all from within a similar postcode. They could not figure out why, but then received a call to the office from another new donor from the same postcode wishing to give £50. He specifically asked if he would be entitled to a solar light. Of course, SolarAid said yes and asked “how did you hear about us?” they were told “Oh, it’s Dorothy at number 4, she has one of your solar lights and has been knocking on everyone’s door in the street asking people to donate to your charity”.

SolarAid also prepared some cards with photographs of their work, reminding people of their mission with a thank-you photograph on the back from one of the programme teams, but entirely blank inside. This enabled them to write messages to supporters in response to a donation. Sometimes staff (not just those involved in fundraising) would all sign the card (say to a school or a church). Having the cards available made it easier to send something out. They found that people sometimes replied, thanking SolarAid for the thank you and sometimes shared the thank you on social media.

As part of measuring progress towards its goal SolarAid, had a team working on the impact of their work. They conducted research that established the impact of each solar light - for example, over three years a solar light led to over a thousand hours of extra study for a child. As they could equate donations to the number of solar lights they sold, they could equate donations to impact (for every £3 SolarAid received, they sold a light at a fair market price in Africa - this took into account all their costs, including fundraising). From this data, they created a calculator that converted money into impact and embedded it online:

<http://solar-aid.org/online-impact-calculator/>

The impact of a solar light on a family in Africa is truly remarkable. Type in a gift amount in the white box below and you'll be amazed by how far your generosity will stretch. Remember, light changes everything.



These calculations are based on the research we have conducted with solar light customers.

This could then be used in several ways as part of the thanking process.

Thinking about engagement led SolarAid to ask what they could do when people gave online that helps engage them and makes them feel good. The answer was brilliantly simple - they added a box asking why. This meant they could also refer back to their comment when thanking the donor and make it a more personal and authentic communication.

Donors told them with a range of comments demonstrating what was inspiring them to give, and SolarAid would send the best comments around to all staff and trustees each week as part of a weekly update.

They even gained an insight as a result. A number of donors were telling them they were giving to offset their carbon footprint. As a direct result of this discovery, SolarAid changed their SEO terms for anyone searching for a carbon offset charity to make sure SolarAid came up as an option. This is a great example of really listening to donors.

During the Big Give weekend in 2015, a couple of SolarAid staff worked over the weekend, and when someone gave online, they responded with an immediate, personally written thank-you email as along with the automated one the donor would get from donating to the Big Give. They introduced themselves and told them of the impact of their gift, equating their donation to the number of solar lights they could sell. Then they invited the donor to ask any questions they might have. This created great supporter engagement as you would expect, but they

noticed something else – prompted by this thank you, some people started giving a second donation!

In April 2014, when SolarAid approached a million solar lights distributed to families in Africa, they decided to do a campaign to thank all their donors over recent years – they could genuinely say every donation had helped them achieve this milestone. They produced a special video to say “thanks a million” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rjZGcEnMDU>) and sent out an email, along with postcards.

Additionally, for a week the staff plus volunteers got on the phone to thank as many donors as possible in person. There was no ask.

One donor was so taken aback she asked the caller to repeat what he had just said. He thanked her again for her support and told her of the milestone they had achieved - only to find she had put him on speaker phone for her whole family to hear! Years later, they still have people who say I remember you, “You’re the charity who called me up to say “Thanks a million””.

2. Innocent Drinks & Age UK

Since 2003, Innocent Drinks have supported Age UK by encouraging customers and the public to knit little hats to go on the top of their smoothie drinks at Christmas time. Imagination and originality is encouraged, and for every one sold 25p is donated to Age UK. Over the years, a huge hat-knitting community has been built up and has been brilliantly supported and celebrated by Innocent via a dedicated website and on their blog on their own company website.

These two examples below, sent seven years apart, demonstrate how brilliant Innocent is at thanking and recognising the people that support their Big Knit campaign. There is much to be learned from the tone of voice, the style, and the sheer originality and authenticity of the thanking.

Oct 24, 2008

the final countdown



the big knit
making winter warmer
for older people



Surely we couldn't reach 500,000 hats. Could we?

It's been all hands on deck this week at Fruit Towers as we counted our little socks off to see if we could reach our target of half a million hats. Having all hands on deck was pretty useless really. The only decking we have is outside, and all the hats were inside. And there's not much decking anyway, and rather a lot of hands in Fruit Towers, so it was pretty cramped. It's also been raining these last few days.

But we soon realised the error of our ways and got back inside to continue the count.

Which is why, at 6.09pm Greenwich Mean Time yesterday evening, when we totalled up all of our unpacking, we can reveal with absolute accuracy that we cruised beyond our target of half a million hats (we're currently on 501, 423 - and still counting).

Now, if we were American, this would likely be cause for some serious high fives, a few chest bumps and plenty of **butt slaps**. But we're not American. We're **British**. And we didn't quite

know how to celebrate. So I climbed into a Perspex box and got covered in hats. It seemed the sensible thing to do.

And made me rather happy.

In fact, we're all rather happy here at fruit towers. 501, 423 hats really is a staggering amount. And we're so, so grateful for your incredible knitting efforts. So, for anyone who has knitted a hat, wherever you may be, please stand up now and take a bow. You've been amazing. And we love you all (or if there's more than one of you, why not try a little **chest bump** action?).

We'd also like to say that although we often showcase the more creative hats we've received here on our blog, please don't think that we're not just as impressed by all the other hats. We know that each and every one is a labour of love, and we're in awe of them all.

At the end of the day, every single hat we receive means 50p for **Age Concern**, and that's the main thing.

There's still a few packages to be unpacked here in the office, so we'd best get back to it. Think we'll all be quite sad when there's none left to unpack. It's been like Christmas every day these past few weeks...

And don't forget people, the hats will be on shelf in Sainsbury's stores around the country from 5th November, and they do tend to be snapped up pretty quickly, so get yourself down there pronto to avoid disappointment. And in doing so you'll be helping us raise £250,000 for Age Concern to help keep older people warm this winter.

Again, thank you.

Nov 26, 2015

meet the knitters - 2015 edition

We've already mentioned the **Big Knit** on the blog. A few times, in fact. It's one of our favourite subjects.

We love our knitters and every now and again you get in touch with pictures or stories that we want to spread further. So, now that this introduction is at the industry standard length, we're going to share with you a few of the stories we've heard this year.



Hilary and her 92-year-old mum, Lily, knitted over 300 hats for us this year. We're pretty sure Lily might be one of our oldest knitters this year. A massive thanks to them (and that chick hat at the front is genius).



Katherine, on the other hand, is just four years old and possibly our youngest ever knitter. Her mum let us know that she'd managed to make 15 of her own Big Knit hats (with only a little bit of help). Thanks, Katherine (and Tiffany too, of course).



Stella found herself in hospital back in 2011 and took up knitting Big Knit hats as a way to keep herself busy. Since then, she's made over 1,400 hats. That's enough to fill an entire football stadium (albeit a miniature one). Cheers, Stella.



Jo has been involved with the Big Knit for years. She even started her own website entirely to help others take part. She's very much a legend round these parts so we can't say we were surprised to find out she'd made 1000 hats this year. We've said thank you to Jo many times over the year, and we've no trouble saying it again. Thanks, Jo.



Last week Rashmi [got in touch with us via Twitter and Facebook](#) with an amazing bit of news about her mum knitting over 1,000 hats for us. We retweeted it, obviously, and felt all warm as loads of strangers sent in messages of thanks and support. The Internet can be a wonderful thing. Thanks, Rashmi's mum. You're a knitting superstar (like Beyoncé but with knitting needles).

We love finding out more about our knitters. Please do drop us a line if you know of somebody amazing who you think should get a mention. Thank you again to everyone above, everyone who isn't and everyone who will be in the future. You are all the best.

3. Hope and Play

Below is a thank-you email that would make any donor's heart soar. Note the PS, which might make the donor think twice about opting out from such heart-warming communications.

From: Hope and Play

Date: 15/10/2016 18:13 (GMT+00:00)

To: David

Subject: Your donation to Gaza's children

Dear David,

Earlier this year, you kindly donated £300 to help get school books, stationery and bags to children in Gaza. Well, with your support, we reached our goal, and the children have all been given their much needed supplies for the new school year. Check out the colours on those rucksacks.



Just as importantly, they were given a message that someone is thinking of them. After nearly a decade of the brutality of siege and violence, of warplanes and of bombardment, many of them feel that the world watches and doesn't care.

You told them that you care.

So thank you very much for your donation. You've made a difference to 300 children who need it. You can see some of the pictures up on our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/hopeandplay/posts/1308062085885227>.

Lastly, as you may know, our volunteer artist, Jackie, kindly created a copy of our best selling print, the Palestinian Songbird, for us to give to those donors generous enough to support us with £50 and over. As you very kindly did so, we will be sending you this by post to the address we have for you. THANK YOU!!

With our respect and thanks,

Saskia and Iyas,

Trustees at Hope and Play.

P.S. You opted not to receive marketing communications from us. Please rest assured, you are not on our marketing list. This email is simply to let you know your donation has been used (there's not even a link to ask you for another!). You will not hear more from us, even though we remain very grateful for your support.

4. The Alzheimer's Society

The Alzheimer's Society have been developing a comprehensive Welcome programme as part of their wider Supporter Journey work. The following are their Welcome Pack development guidelines.

What is a Welcome?

It is essentially an amplified thank you, which the supporter receives after completing an action. An action can either be completely an event and giving in all their sponsorship, making a single gift such as cash or an in memoriam donation, or signing up to a regular product such as a membership or regular giving. It is not something that is sent to enquirers or someone who has signed up to an event, nor is it a "Welcome to the Product", as this may happen before the "Welcome to the Society" communication.

What should it contain?

- The words "Thank You" rather than "Welcome" should be used, as it is important that the organisation recognises the action that the supporter has just undertaken.
- The recommended signatory for this communication is as follows:
 - Individual supporters, Groups & Associations – service user or person working at a service
 - Trusts, Corporates & Major Donors – Jeremy to sign
- It should include the following things:
 - There should be no direct ask in this communication; however, something 'light touch' is acceptable. For example: "Other Ways to support us – Leave a Legacy, Become a Dementia Friend".
 - Signposting to services.

- Information about the Society and the impact that the giver's donation is having.
- The opportunity to give feedback or collect more information, such as an email address.
- Details of where more information can be found online.
- A case study demonstrating how essential their donation is, which should help give them a reason for future support.

5. Y Care International

Y Care International redesigned their Welcome Pack for new donors in 2015 to be more appreciative of a new donor's support, to offer a better and more inspiring introduction to the work of the charity, to reassure the supporter about how money was raised and spent and how they, as a new donor, would be treated. It also included a simple survey to provide an opportunity for the donor to re-engage with the charity in a non-financial way and to provide some helpful information for the charity to use.

It is an A5 pack consisting of a covering letter, three panel A5 leaflet and a set of four postcards that visually introduce Y Care International's work. These can be mixed and matched as appropriate.

It has been extremely well received, with many positive comments from new supporters.



ABOUT YOU

We would love to know a bit more about why you chose to donate to Y Care International. By taking a few moments to answer the following simple questions, you can help us improve our communications to you...

1) Which of these areas of Y Care International's work is most interesting to you personally?

Employment and entrepreneurship - helping young people get a job or start a business

Health & Wellbeing - helping young people and their communities stay free of disease and healthy

Resilience - helping young people prepare for and cope with the terrible consequences of natural disasters and conflict

Justice and rights - helping young people access the information and legal knowledge they need to give themselves the best chance of success

Emergencies - providing immediate support and assistance for young people and their communities when disaster strikes

All of the above

2) Are there any particular countries in this list that you would like to hear more about?

Colombia Guatemala Haiti

Please complete and return to us at the address overleaf

Survey offers non-financial engagement for new supporter

How We Spend Your Money

We know many people who give to charity are anxious about how much of their money actually reaches the frontline. It is vitally important to us that we balance as much money being used to reach those who need us the most with running an efficient organisation and raising as much money as we can in the most cost-effective ways. We are proud of our record in achieving this balance.

EXPENDITURE

• Charities	900k	87%
• Fundraising	1,400	87%
• Governance	40	1%
TOTAL	1,040	100%

What Difference Your Support Makes

Our effectiveness means with Y Care International a little can go a long, long way. Here are some examples of what we mean:

£5 could help provide a young person with the guidance they need to feel more confident about themselves and their future

£15 could help supply a young person with the tools they need to improve their health and environment

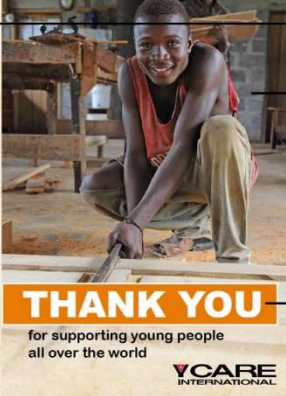
£40 could help give training to young people to learn a trade, like farming, building, or cooking

£100 could help a young person to develop the skills they need to start their own business and lift themselves and their communities out of poverty

Get In Touch

We are always happy to hear from our supporters. If you need to get in touch for any reason, please contact us at:

Y Care International, 67-69 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6BP
Telephone: 020 7549 3160/020 7549 3175
E-mail us at fundraising@ycareinternational.org



Simple explanation of finance and cost effectiveness

Active, engaging image

Genuine Thanks

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Thanks to our supporters, we are making an impact in changing young people's lives.

Working in over 20 countries worldwide through our YMCA partners
Over 81,000 young people reached with future aims to reach many more
Over 12,000 young people have received skills training and support to find jobs

Our Promise To You

We never take our supporters for granted. This means wherever you choose to support Y Care International we will strive to:

- Always keep your information costs as low as possible so that even more of your gift goes directly towards supporting young people
- Always bank your donations promptly so that they are put to work supporting young people straight away
- Always acknowledge your donations promptly (unless you inform us otherwise)
- Always keep you informed on how your support is making a difference to the lives of young people
- Always listen and be available to answer any questions you may have about your donation or Y Care International's work
- Always respect your privacy and hold your details in accordance with the Data Protection Act

Jerusalem: 600 young women have learned a new trade to find work or start a business

Sri Lanka: 1,022 young people able to access trauma counselling after suffering violence and losing loved ones in Sri Lanka

West Africa: 7,000 young people protected from easily preventable deaths through the construction of water points and latrines in slum communities

Guatemala: 711 teachers trained in tackling stigma towards young people after a terrible civil war

Bangladesh: 1,000 young people trained to help communities safe in disaster prone regions

Togo: 1,071 unlawfully detained young people released from prison

Introduction from Terry Waite - adds gravitas and credibility

Short summary of recent impact

Supporter Promise lets the donor know what to expect and reassures about privacy

Y Care International works in partnership with young people worldwide through the YMCA movement to create opportunities for them to change their world for the better.

OUR VISION IS OF:

Empowered young people who are employed, healthy, treated justly and resilient.

A set of four simple, but visually engaging postcards provide context for the overall work of the organisation, success stories from different programmes, and options for getting further involved with the charity

Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America with half the population living in rural areas. We train young people to gain livelihood skills and lead independent lives.

'I learned loads of things. How to make my own fertiliser and pesticides using natural products, they taught us about seeds the most suitable and resistant for our lands, and how to prepare the soil. I have been working very hard every day since then. Now I have tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, chillies and everything is growing very well.'

Miguel, Farmer, Nicaragua

Togo is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its poor human rights record is due in part to its treatment of detainees – nearly one third of whom are less than 25 years old. Togo's prisons hold young people alongside adults for an average of six to nine months without trial – many for petty crimes.

'I was detained in Lomé jail for 34 months – it's not unusual in Togo. My boyfriend was shot dead in front of me outside my home. I was accused of being an accomplice and arrested. When I left prison the YMCA helped me finish my training and I got a diploma. When I graduated they gave me a mirror, stand-up hairdryer and the equipment I needed to start up my own business.'

Eugenie, Hairdresser, Togo

Appendix 2: Useful Additional Resources

There are a number of useful additional resources that readers may want to reference for further information, insight and inspiration.

Lisa Sargent is a US-based creative strategist and copywriter, working exclusively with non-profits on direct mail, e-mail fundraising and donor care communications. Her articles have been featured in Mal Warwick's newsletter, *FundRaising Success Magazine* and *The Agitator*. Lisa also publishes [The Loyalty Letter](#), a free e-newsletter for non-profit and charitable organisations read by subscribers around the world.

Her contributions on the Showcase of Fundraising Innovation and Inspiration (SOFII) website offer a range of examples for providing exciting and dynamic thank-you letter content.

<http://sofii.org/article/sample-thank-you-letters-for-you-to-swipe>

<http://sofii.org/article/in-lieu-of-flowers-how-to-write-lively-memorial-donation-thank-you-letters>

<http://sofii.org/article/how-to-write-a-better-thank-you-letter-and-why-it-matters>

This example, also from SOFII, shows a fundraiser really listening to her donor, thinking on her feet and responding in an entirely appropriate and personal manner with a communication that any donor would be delighted to receive.

<http://sofii.org/case-study/station-wdcn-nashville-usa-special-thank-you-to-a-donor>

This post from *The Agitator* fundraising blog describes the impact of Concordia College in New York turning Giving Tuesday into Thanksgiving Tuesday and involving the whole organisation.

http://www.theagitator.net/branding/thanksgivingtuesday/?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm_content=388628&utm_campaign=Express_%272016-11-30_03%3a00%3a00%27

This blog post (also from *The Agitator*) demonstrates the difference an imaginative approach to thanking can have to make an acknowledgement stand out from the generic and predictable.

<http://www.theagitator.net/communications/the-magic-of-a-great-thank-you/#comment-1946314>

Appendix 3: Report Sources

1. The JGA Donor Thanking Survey ran online from 7th Jun until 29th July 2016. In total, 129 responders completed it. A full report, *The JGA Donor Thanking Report*, was published in September 2016 and is available as a free download from www.johngainassociates.com
2. Mission Aviation Fellowship *Supporter Survey 2015*
3. Case Study submissions were received from Solar Aid, NSPCC, Oxfam, Hope And Play (via Ken Burnett) and Y Care International.
4. Informal interviews with eight charitable donors were carried out in West Oxfordshire in August 2016.
5. Mystery shopping was carried out with a small number of charities with donations made online and via the post.
6. Thanks for everything! How do charities recognise and say ‘thank you’ to their key donors (Helena MacNeary and Joe Saxton, nfpSynergy, May 2014)
7. What’s Stopping Charities Getting Closer To Their Supporters – A survey of supporter care programmes in UK charities (Brightsource, 2012)
8. FRSB Supporter Care Manual – How to achieve exceptional standards in Supporter Care (Fundraising Standards Board, October 2011)
9. *Failing to Hit the (Bench)mark*, mystery shopping report (JGA Ltd, March 2008)
10. *Say Thank You The Right Way* (Carolina Herrera, July 2016, SOFII website, <http://sofii.org/news/say-thank-you-the-right-way>)
11. *Does Thanking Really Work?* (Laura Croudace, SOFII website, October 2014, <http://sofii.org/article/does-thanking-really-work>)

Appendix 4: Related Commission on the Donor Experience Projects

There are a number of other Commission on the Donor Experience projects closely linked to this one. For a comprehensive overview of outstanding supporter care delivery and best practices, we recommend the following project reports.

- Project 03: Satisfaction and Commitment
- Project 05: The Supporter's Journey
- Project 13: Giving Choices And Managing Preferences
- Project 16: A Distinctive Service Culture
- Project 18: Supporters as Advocates
- Project 19: Evidence of Impact and Effectiveness

Appendix 5: Methodology

The project methodology was as follows:

The Survey into Charity Thanking was set up in Survey Monkey and ran from the 7th June until 29th July 2016. To take part, respondents had to work for a charity and complete the survey online. The survey was promoted via the John Grain Associates Ltd website and in their e-bulletins, via a feature piece and subsequent online ads on Fundraising.co.uk, through the Supporter Care Forum, and on social media. Overall, we received 129 valid responses from charities. There was no paper version of the survey.

Requests for case study submissions were made via the Commission on the Donor Experience website and via a blog piece on Fundraising.co.uk.

Individual donor interviews were carried out with eight supporters of charities in West Oxfordshire in August 2016. These were recruited by word-of-mouth and took place in a variety of locations, including the donor's own home, cafes and hotels. The interviews were confidential and findings anonymised. The gender split was five women and three men and ages occurred across the following ranges: 18-35 (2), 36-55 (3), 56-75 (2), 76+ (1). Charities were supported in a variety of ways (by cheque, credit card, direct debit, sponsorship, event participation, collecting box, donations of goods to shops, and in memoriam. Two donors were legacy pledgers. Donations were made online, via the mail, over the phone and face-to-face. The minimum gift mentioned was £1 (collecting box) and the maximum gift mentioned was £1,000 (cheque). Charities supported included: Against Breast Cancer, Alzheimer's Association, Asthma UK, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, The Blue Cross, Cecily's Fund, Christian Aid, Cancer Research UK, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Helen & Douglas House, Help for Heroes, Macmillan Cancer Support, Oxfam, NSPCC, Plan International, The Royal British Legion, RNLI, RSPCA, Save the Children, Sobell House, Soil Association, Special Effect, WaterAid, The Woodland Trust and World Vision.

Desk research was carried out online.