

The Women's Fund for Ireland - *"Inspiring Women, Supporting Women"*

Setting up a Giving Circle in Ireland

The Women's Fund at  The Community
Foundation for Ireland

Introduction

Giving Circles have become hugely popular as a new form of accessible philanthropy and have proven to be especially popular with women. In April 2010 a major seminar on women's philanthropy took place in Dublin. At this, The Women's Fund for Ireland ("the Women's Fund") was launched by The Community Foundation for Ireland and huge interest was generated by a presentation on Giving Circles. This document has been prepared by the Women's Fund in response to a demand for further information on the topic. We hope you find the tips included useful.

1. What is a Giving Circle?

The concept is as simple as it is powerful. A Giving Circle is formed when individuals (usually, but not necessarily women) come together and pool their money and decide collectively, where to donate the proceeds. A Giving Circle has been described as a cross between a book club and an investment / share club.

Giving Circles tend to have a very specific focus. Many groups will be run independently by the members, but others may affiliate with an established organisation such as The Community Foundation for Ireland.

2. Setting up and Running Your Giving Circle

	Points to Consider
Getting Started	Gather a small committed group of friends, neighbours, extended family, work colleagues or a mix who are interested in giving together and who will run the group. Start with a manageable number and gradually build up membership of, say 20. Decide on a name for the Giving Circle if you wish.
Mission Statement	Agree an initial mission statement - decide whether you want to find and support groups in your local community (this is often a good starting point), in Ireland or another country or with an emphasis on a particular need.
Project Identification, Criteria and Process	Agree on particular focus area(s) and on criteria for deciding which projects to fund – you may want to develop a simple form setting out the criteria. You could also opt to link in closely with The Women's Fund (See Section 6 for more details).
Meetings	Decide where and how often you will meet – two or three times a year in the early stages is usually sufficient. Diary these for the year ahead so that they are not missed. Have fun and build in a social element – a drink or a meal after the meeting, drinks at Christmas, etc.
Donations	Decide the minimum amount that members will give. Each individual gives at whatever level they are comfortable, or at a minimum level agreed by the group. Some groups may hold extra fundraising events along as having

	regular amounts donated.
Decisions on Projects	Together, decide where the money goes (note: putting in additional monies does not confer additional voting rights)
Bank accounts and financial records	Decide whether to set up a bank account for the group or operate on a cash only basis. Financial regulations mean certain formalities will apply if you open a bank account. In any event, it is recommended that for two people should handle all financial matters and keep records of payments made. See also Section 6 re linking with The Women's Fund.
Tax relief	The issue of tax relief is not initially applicable though the group could consider seeking charitable status by establishing a charity – this will require the creation of a legal entity (for example a company limited by guarantee with no share capital) and will take a minimum of two years for any tax reliefs to be allowed. Linking with The Women's Fund could overcome this obstacle and provide the opportunity to maximise tax benefits on donations.
Grant size	Decide whether there should be a minimum or maximum level, in keeping with the donation income of the Giving Circle.
Record keeping	Agree how this will be done. It is vital that proper and transparent systems are in place.
Project Assessment	Decide whether you want feedback reports from recipient charities and if so, what level of detail, from whom and how you will do this.

Costs / Fees	Agree how overhead costs, even if minimal, will be covered.
Reviews	It is recommended that you do a review of your Giving Circle on a periodic basis.

3. Benefits of Giving Circles

- Greater impact in the community and ability to measure that impact
- Greater understanding of philanthropy – also known as planned giving.
- Greater opportunity to become a philanthropist in your own way and area.
- More informed, thoughtful, focussed and strategic giving, which is more personal, fun, and less formal than other types of philanthropy.
- Increased knowledge of areas of need among members.
- More engagement with the charity sector.
- More opportunity to take a risk.
- Excellent networking opportunities between members.
- The feel good factor!

See also Appendix I for Giving Circle case studies

4. About The Women's Fund for Ireland

The focus of this new Fund is to support at risk girls and women. Donors (individuals, company and Giving Circles) are helping to develop an innovative permanent Fund for Women that will support some amazing charities and groups that work with vulnerable women. The Fund will help in the following areas:

- ✓ Addictions
- ✓ Prostitution and Trafficking
- ✓ Violence and Abuse
- ✓ Mental health and Well-being for Disadvantaged Women
- ✓ Empowerment and Supporting Women to Access Decision-making roles
- ✓ Older women living in poverty

Some example of projects previously supported by The Community Foundation serve as examples of the type of project that could be supported by Giving Circles independently or affiliated to The Women's Fund:

The **Bedford Row Family Project in Limerick**. This was a Summer Lifeskills' programme for vulnerable mothers/ grandmothers who care for children. All were affected by imprisonment and addiction and some had been in abusive/ violent relationships. Funding was to cover 9 day long workshops for 12-15 people. This grant was for €4,500.

Respite: typically for women looking after other family members. The impact the break of even a few hours or a day here and there can be immense.

A grant of €3,500 was made to the **Chrysalis Community Drug Project in Dublin**. It was for a Client programme aimed at drug using women working in prostitution. It involved 4 weeks of what is called rape escape self defence sessions, safer sex negotiation skills and personal development and empowerment sessions.

5. Donating to The Women's Fund for Ireland

A key goal of the Women's Fund is establishing a permanent endowment fund to ensure that there will be a grant-making capacity to support women's projects in Ireland forever! (Grants are made from the interest earned while the capital amount donated is invested and grows over time). The fund stands at almost €250k (Sept 2010). For every donation to the endowment fund an additional 50% match funding is added by The Community Foundation to a maximum level of €100k.

To find out more about donating to The Women's Fund, please contact The Community Foundation for Ireland's Head of Fund Development, Niall O'Sullivan.

Donors who would like to make a donation online can also do so by clicking [here](#).

Additional information about The Women's Fund for Ireland is available at The Community Foundation's website [here](#).

6. Link your Giving Circle to The Women's Fund for Ireland

You may also like to set up a Giving Circle which is directly affiliated to The Women's Fund. Linking directly with The Women's Fund can simplify the giving and grant-making process for your Giving Circle. For instance, The Women's Fund could suggest several excellent projects to choose from, which meet the criteria of the Women's Fund and have been assessed. You would then decide which your group will support. This can be hugely helpful as the projects sent to you will have been vetted already by staff at The Community Foundation and will include charities and groups you may not otherwise come across.

In addition, The Community Foundation, as the umbrella organisation within which The Women's Fund operates, will accept one payment per year from Giving Circles with a list of donors to the Circle and their PAYE numbers and tax status where relevant. Each Giving Circle will have its own identified named fund at the Community Foundation. The Community Foundation will claim the taxes back from Revenue for the fund, thus potentially increasing the amount your group can donate to charities. By doing this, tax relief for your Giving Circle can be obtained and the value of the donations maximised without your group having to register as a charity which is a lengthy process.

A separate detailed Guide on this option is also available from The Community Foundation. It outlines the administrative process and more examples of the types of projects you could support. A small fee of 5% will apply for the service provided. Please contact The Community Foundation's Head of Fund Development, Niall O'Sullivan for more information.

7. About The Community Foundation for Ireland

The Women's Fund for Ireland operates under the wider umbrella of The Community Foundation for Ireland, an established grant making foundation with an asset base in excess of €27 million, which in its first decade has become one of the leading grant-makers in Ireland. The Community Foundation manages an increasing number of family and corporate funds. President Mary McAleese is the Patron, and the Board is comprised of distinguished representatives from the public, private and community and voluntary sectors. The Community Foundation - 'connecting people who care with causes that matter'. For more information see www.communityfoundation.ie

Appendix I Giving Circle Case Studies

Giving Circles can take on many different forms as determined by the members.

Example I

A group was established in **Belfast** in 2008 and is a mix of friends and friends of friends, mostly professional women. The idea originated on a study visit to Boston. Two of the participants had an interest in philanthropy and liked the simplicity of the Giving Circle concept and determined to get one going in Belfast. They decided at the outset it was to be women only and started by inviting all females on the course to an information meeting – 10 were invited and three signed up, but they persevered. Others gradually came on board and the membership has remained at a maximum of 20.

Each member gives stg£1 a day / £30 per month. Though well organized, there is no formal structure and the group has decided not to seek tax efficiency as a result. There are four meetings per year, each followed by dinner. Additional social events, fundraising events and cocktails at Christmas are also the norm.

The group agreed to support organisations or individuals within Northern Ireland working for the benefit of children, young people and women. There is a one page proposal form for members to make suggestions in advance of meetings and to provide further information if required. Among the grants made are:

- £250 on an ongoing basis to a taxi fund for Women's Aid Hostels.
- £500 to employ a voice coach for a young female carer with acting potential.
- £500 towards singing lessons for a young man in foster care with communication issues.
- £500 towards the costs of sending young people from West Belfast to volunteer in a project in the Bronx.
- £350 towards beauty training for a young woman recently orphaned.
- £500 towards the costs of a project on nutrition for young single mothers.
- £750 towards the costs of a Tag rugby club for young people with Downs Syndrome.

Example II

Every May Bank Holiday weekend for the past number of years, approximately 12 friends from **Monaghan** spend the weekend in the Innishowen Peninsula of Donegal. On a designated evening they hold an auction of their unwanted clothes (some unworn with the tags attached) all modeled by themselves; and whilst enjoying a few glasses they bid and buy. Each person there has an opportunity to nominate a charity and make their pitch for the proceeds. There is a vote with a show of hands and over the years recipients have included the Tydavnet Millennium club for the elderly, The Glenn Group, Ballinteer Dublin (provides summer camps for young people with special needs to give parents/carers a break), Alzheimer's support group, Medjugorje, Bosnia-Hercegovina refugee camps support group, Habitat for Humanity to build homes and hope in Madagascar, Day Hospital that provides day respite care for the elderly mentally ill in Monaghan and the MS Ireland Monaghan Branch. All of the recipient organisations had some involvement with one or other of the women involved.

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