

AGENT PROVOCATEUR

Gritty causes need funds just as much as cancer, kids and kittens, says JULIET GRAYSON, but it's a tough ask

I have set up two charities in my lifetime. The first was Barnfield Riding for the Disabled (BRD), which I set up 30 years ago, and ensures that anyone with a physical or learning difficulties wishing to ride is given the opportunity to do so regardless of their financial circumstances.

BRD collects exciting success stories and has an archive of great photos of ponies and disabled people having fun. People are moved as they watch the disabled children (and adults) making small but significant progress.

The benefits are tangible and demonstrable. As a consequence, fundraising has been relatively easy. BRD organises two big annual events: a dinner dance with a tombola and auction, and an evening of greyhound racing at Wimbledon Stadium, raising thousands of pounds through sponsorship and donations.

Over the years, other events have included fundraising gymkhanas, fun days, and carol singing. Local organisations can sponsor a horse for a year, or a disabled child for a year's riding. Local pubs and shops put out collection boxes.

The fundraising journey could not be more different for the second charity I set up – StopSO. Focussed around prevention of sexual abuse, and offering therapy to the perpetrators, StopSO began in 2012 and achieved charity status last year. Anyone who is worried about their sexual thoughts, or who has committed any kind of sexual offence, can contact StopSO. The families of sex offenders, the unacknowledged victims of this crime, can also access therapeutic support.

So far, StopSO has 211 therapists across the country in training or trained, and has helped 425 people. The demand is growing



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exponentially, as the public begin to hear of our service. Most of the people contacting StopSO (89 per cent) are self-referred, and asking for help to stop (or not to start) offending.

However, since the therapeutic work with clients is confidential, the content cannot be shared unless someone gives their explicit permission. Our clients do not want to talk about the success they have achieved through StopSO. Most of them want to distance themselves from their old habits and behaviours.

This makes fundraising harder. We can't tell their stories or show pictures of our successes. We don't have photo opportunities!

There are other limitations to fundraising for StopSO. We don't have a local community to attend events and it would be unethical for therapists to encourage StopSO clients to

raise funds. Pubs and shops are unlikely to want to put out collection tins, as many of the public revile this client group.

So far, StopSO has received approximately £59,000 of funding in total. Less than £6,000 of that has been received in the last 12 months.

We are working towards being financially self-supporting for the administrative side of our work, and our business plan shows this should happen in end of 2019. Currently, our self-generated income comes through a £50 membership fee from each of our therapists, a £20 referral fee for each client, and a profit from the training courses we provide. But we are not self-sufficient yet and we will always need top up funding to offer therapy free of charge to those who cannot afford to pay.

Our latest strategy is an online auction, and asking StopSO supporters to put on a coffee morning, a parachute jump or join in a sponsored run.

Another idea, not yet implemented, is to contact organisations for funding such as Google, which needs to do more to prevent access to online child abuse images, and challenge them to support us. Or the Football Association, which might want to support StopSO as a way of proactively focusing on preventing child abuse.

We need a minimum of £80,000 to ensure our survival for the next year. We need new ideas about how to fund this work, either through charitable grants, through the government, or other initiatives. We need someone who can advise us and guide us through.

Given that it costs £65,000 to imprison someone for one year, preventing these crimes is the obvious way forward. Charities such as ours need support as much as the next organisation. ■

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