

Dame Steve Shirley gets behind local philanthropic efforts



Mayor's Consort, Mayoress of Bournemouth, Dame Steve Shirley, Richard Dimbleby and Matthew Bowcock a tech' entrepreneur and philanthropist

Dame Steve (Stephanie) Shirley, who would be considered by most as one of the most inspirational characters in philanthropy, has just been appointed by Gordon Brown as The British Government's Ambassador of Philanthropy. Modestly Dame Shirley, who is seventy-six and has given £50mn in grants from her own foundation, says of the new post, "I think the Cabinet Office asked around and my name was put forward." But adds proudly afterwards, "It is a great honour particularly at my grand age."

Of the Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

awards and fund which she recently helped launch in she says its a movement of more than fifty foundations, which started in the USA, to get people at a local level to understand what a difference they can make by being involved with charity and what charity that begins at home can achieve. "Local people can really see their money put to work to do good work." explains Shirley.

"In my view awards really work", says Shirley who appears as sprightly as if twenty-six. "I do believe that people should be given

awards early in life." Shirley explains that they have a number of awards at the Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole including "Young Philanthropist" for people under twenty-five years of age and says she was surprised that they had an award for philanthropic impact. "It's great to focus on the idea of someone measuring the effect of what they are doing." Shirley says. The concept is really targeted to bring out the generosity of local people."

"Projects that the foundation fund will work on are of a wide range."

“Giving is a social activity in my view, it’s not really a financial one .”



Dame Steve Shirley

says Shirley. “They are all local schemes like support to hospitals and homeless hostels – it’s not multi million pound stuff but things that make an impact and encourage self sufficiency and sustainability,” says Shirley before continuing on her theme. “Giving is a social activity in my view, it’s not really a finan-

cial one but on the other hand money is effective and can really make a difference particularly if partnered with people’s time and skill.”

Shirley first points out that her role as Ambassador of Philanthropy is an honorary position, not paid, and that she is not party political or a civil servant. She also confirms her role with

Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole is not educational but is a pledge to inspire the idea that giving is a pleasurable act which can change society and raise the bar on our capacity to be generous.

“When we pay our taxes, it’s taken from us involuntarily and we have

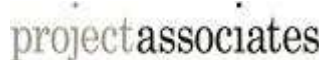
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Diary note: Next Citywealth London event is Thursday May 13th 2010. Venue to be advised.

“I’ve given away enough money to take me out of the Rich List..”

no real choice about how the money is spent, although in theory we do by electing a political party of choice. No foundation will want to fund anything that should be funded by the government. I personally think hospitals should be funded by taxation but people do enjoy giving to hospitals.” She says, then offers an opposing view.

“The Department of Health will match funding which is pledged privately for new hospitals and educational organisations and will support academic schools which are part funded partnerships. They fund the Olympics and the public has always supported museums and opera houses. It’s not replacing tax paid projects but working in partnership to improve facilities.”

Shirley continues talking about philanthropy and women in philanthropy. “There is no requirement that people should give away their money and people do what they like to do but they will get involved with charities if it gives them pleasure. I think women

are more social and cultural and wealthy women, not just people who have made their own money, but inherited money also, give with more involvement and with more caring and they have a more careful approach.” She finishes her comment by saying, “I am careful with money and I hate waste.”

Dame Steve Shirley is high profile in her giving which is at odds with many wealthy families who prefer to remain anonymous, I ask her about the different approaches. “When I first started giving,” she says, “I didn’t want people to know or know how much I was giving away, but I realised at some stage that you could be more effective if you talked about it.” She adds, “I’ve given away enough money to take me out of the Rich List but it’s a matter of pride and measuring the impact my money is a source of great joy.”

Charities have been hit badly on their investments with the downturn so I ask Shirley what she thinks about the recent trend of applying corporate measurements to charities and running them with tight business controls. “The economic crisis has hit everyone,” says Shirley. “Some charitable losses could be poor corporate governance, but it’s been such a long time since we’ve had a recession, that it’s not a surprise it caught people by surprise. I am an enormous admirer of using the skills of financial analysts to look at charities. They should be asked, as you would if you were going to invest in companies, what are your profit margins, who are your staff, what is your marketing strategy? Charities should be asked these questions as business would.” Shirley says she has been asked to chair a private clients group and includes legal and accountancy advisers to

Citywealth Tomorrow Club—next event 10th May, London



The next Citywealth Tomorrow Club, set up to help people in their first job in the private wealth industry, to gain contacts, will be on 10th May in London at a private members club. An UHNW client has been invited to speak to the group.

Contact jbelle@j-p-c.tv or kjones@citywealthmag.com to attend.



Dame Steve Shirley. With the Princess Royal who opened the Priors Court autism school funded with £15million from The Dame Stephanie Shirley Foundation.

try and strengthen philanthropy. “We want to make sure that philanthropic advice is first class and promoted properly by professionals who sit in front of private clients to talk about giving,” she says, “when people are making wills, advisers should be talking about getting involved with philanthropy.”

Of her life Shirley says, “I have a wonderful lifestyle. I travel purposefully to interesting parts on the country, learning to give money away wisely and the more I give away the wealthier I seem to feel.” Then adds, “With exceptions, when a business person makes money, it becomes almost a way of life to measure things in monetary terms. Money is important in that it allows us to choose how we live, but the legacy we leave, is not the money in your will, but the way in which we have made our

money represent us as individuals.”

Although the Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole awards and fund is a local project, I mention the increasing amount of individuals who want to work on charitable projects abroad but Shirley thinks philanthropy, as the Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole awards and fund are saying, starts at home. “It’s a good way for everyone to start, before you give aid in Africa, you need to understand the processes of learning about giving. I think you are better off starting locally then scaling up later. As Asia is topical, I ask about Asian philanthropy. “It’s a bit different. It’s targeted towards Asian beneficiaries and a lot of money will be sent back to the subcontinent but they do similar work at grass roots level on local projects.”

Dame Shirley has her own pet philanthropic project which she is very excited about. “One of my projects, a school for autism, is working on setting up an autism specific agricultural college, adjacent to the main school. It will have start with six students, but will have eighteen students eventually based in Newbury in Berkshire.”

Finishing up the interview she says, “When people like me set up foundations, we are trying to be professional

about our giving and adding skill and time to our wealth. The wealthy have an enormous amount of power to control their lives which is in stark contract to most. If I can inspire others to give and similarly do so effectively then I am delighted to be involved with philanthropy projects like the Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. I had a warm welcome and the people I met had more time to talk and weren’t on Blackberry’s all the time. I liked the people and the area very much especially taking a tour locally to look at Hardy’s cottage.”

www.communityfoundations.org.uk/

www.steveshirley.com

www.ambassadorforphilanthropy.com/

The Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole which is an independent charitable trust, founded in 2000. Announced the opening of a philanthropy awards and a new fund which allows donors to give money to a variety of local projects. The awards hope to inspire giving locally, Matthew Bowcock. Serial Entrepreneur and Chair of the National Community Foundation Network, was the speaker at the launch.