

Philanthropy courses for next generation members are growing in number as demand for knowledge in how to give effectively continues to rise. **Marc Smith** meets two twenty-somethings to find out what is driving them to make a difference...

# Next gen philanthropy: staying the course

**T**here are those who would have you believe that today's young adults are more likely to be philistines than philanthropists, but perhaps they've just been talking to the wrong people.

Children born into wealth, as everyone knows, have to balance the financial security, comparative luxury and personal freedom they inherit with the burden of expectation that accompanies them as they grow up in the shadow of famous ancestors.

Yet, for every spoilt, celebrity-seeking scion who ends up wasting the opportunity that's given to them, there are plenty of young individuals who are quietly and successfully making a real difference.

Take 24-year-old Valerie Gordon and 27-year-old Ian Meyer who are, respectively, past and present alumni of a next generation philanthropy course run by the UK-based Institute for Philanthropy in partnership with the Institute for Family Business. Both talk with great intellect and passion about what they want to do with the money they have but, as Valerie admits, it is learning about philanthropy at an early age that is key.

"For children of wealth, learning about and getting involved in philanthropy is essential. And it's really important to be involved at a young age," says Valerie. "A lot of people only start to learn about philanthropy when they are older and I wonder how differently they would have done things if they knew what I know now at the beginning of my career."

Valerie is a sixth-generation member of the UK-based family-owned distiller William Grant & Sons, famous for their



Ian Meyer with students from the Bauleni School in Lusaka, Zambia, who his family foundation has been funding



Scotch whisky brands including Glenfiddich. She doesn't work for the family business, which she says gives 1% of its pre-tax profits to charity – mainly local projects in Scotland – and is organised through a charity board on which her sister sits.

The family doesn't have a formalised foundation and each branch of the family does its own thing in terms of giving. Nevertheless, philanthropy is something Valerie has been aware of from a young age. And far from putting her off, the lack of formal structure around her family's giving fired her desire to become more involved in the future.

It was her father who introduced her to the idea of going on IFP's course and Valerie says she didn't need any convincing. "He didn't have to sell it to me, I wanted to do it. It was perfect for me," she says.

The course, the first of its kind in Europe, provides 18-30-year-olds with learning sessions led by leading non-profits and civil society thinkers, exposure to community initiatives on the ground and the analysis and frameworks of philanthropy experts. The ultimate aim, according to the organisers, is to support them in "stepping up to increased involvement in their personal, family and business philanthropy."

Unlike some people on the course who were in the process of setting up a foundation or taking over an existing one, Valerie says she came with no preconceived ideas about what she wanted to get out of it.

"I came with an open mind to learn more and meet people," she says of the time she spent between October 2007 and May 2008 (eight days split over four weekends) on the course. Crucially, it is an informal environment that Valerie

says made it very easy to talk to the other participants. "We got to know each other over dinner on the first night and then got straight onto indepth about social issues," she says.

The theoretical part of the course focused on the key differences between charity and strategic philanthropy; how to plan one's giving; how to research what you want to do; how to find the right organisations; how to write a proposal; and how to manage risk.

Theory is mixed in with site visits to various non profit organisations. Valerie's group focused on socially excluded youth and meetings with two very different individuals – a member of the primeminister's task force on social exclusion who took a high level, professional approach to the issue, and an ex-gang member who buddies up with current gang members in an effort to persuade them into going straight – stood out.

"We learnt so much," says Valerie. "For example, what you can realistically expect to change, how to ask the right questions, how to approach organisations and how to go about due diligence. Young people don't necessarily have the confidence or experience to do them all and the course recognises that."

#### THE VALUES OF GIVING

While Valerie has six generations of family ancestry behind her, Ian is the son of a UK entrepreneur who built up businesses at home and in the US.

In 2000 his parents set up a private family foundation that is based in London, but wholly owned in the US. According to Ian, the Meyer family values dictate that you should always

give back, and this simple premise was the reason why his parents established the foundation.

"I have always been aware of philanthropy – even though my family didn't call it that. I was always taught to give, but it didn't have to be money, it could also be time," explains Ian, who says the foundation simply aims to create as much impact as possible by helping those in need.

Like Valerie, he says there is no formal philanthropic mission, and the family focused on issues that were important to it, such as illnesses that had affected family members. "It was pretty ad hoc with no real structure which was one of the reasons I came to work for the foundation and went on the IFP course," admits Ian.

*"There is so much opportunity to make a difference. It has been very inspiring"*

Living and working for an asset management company in San Francisco, it was a surprise when his parents asked him if he wanted to come and help out at the foundation. "I'd quit my job and was thinking about doing a masters degree but it was taking a while to sort out so I began working for a community volunteer group that helped clean up neighbourhoods and parks," explains Ian.

When he decided to return to London his parents told him about IFP's course and suggested he give it a go. Ian began the course in November 2008 and has just completed the first module.

"I think I had a dated view of philanthropy – that it was all 'old money' and just a case of giving to charity – but that is not the case. There is so much opportunity to make a difference. It has been very inspiring and exciting," he says.

In particular, the ideas of strategic philanthropy and social entrepreneurship were explored by his group. The latter caught Ian's attention when his group made a site visit to a school for social entrepreneurs and participants got to see some of the projects being worked on, such as a bike repair business. "Coming from a finance background the idea really appealed," says Ian. "I like the fact that it's more than just writing a cheque."

Nevertheless, the course has also taught Ian what he terms the "unsexy" side of philanthropy – when it's not always possible to see the fruits of your money, time and effort. "Most charities are looking for core funding, effectively administration funds, that doesn't go towards a specific project but is really effective in the long term," he explains.

## PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Both Valerie and Ian have put the knowledge they have gained from the course into practice. While Valerie's aim to join her family's philanthropic vehicle and attempt to make it "work harder" remains something for the long term, she and four other participants set up a funding collaborative on finishing the course.

The collaborative decided to commit its funding to the area of the elderly. Last October the group convened and met with several organisations serving the elderly that the group had researched, finally choosing to fund Contact the Elderly, an organisation that works to reduce the loneliness and isolation of elderly people in the UK. The group received a proposal from the organisation, which on approval, will grant a pooled sum towards CtE's communication's strategy.

"Once we started our research into charities we realised how hard it was to measure their effectiveness," recalls Valerie. "No wonder some foundations concentrate on education – it's easier to measure.

We wanted to do something different – some of the most effective charities don't market themselves at all."

Other participants have also continued to put their new found knowledge to good use: one has started a fund at a community foundation, while another is in the process of completing the set up of her environment focused trust and has made her first grant from it.

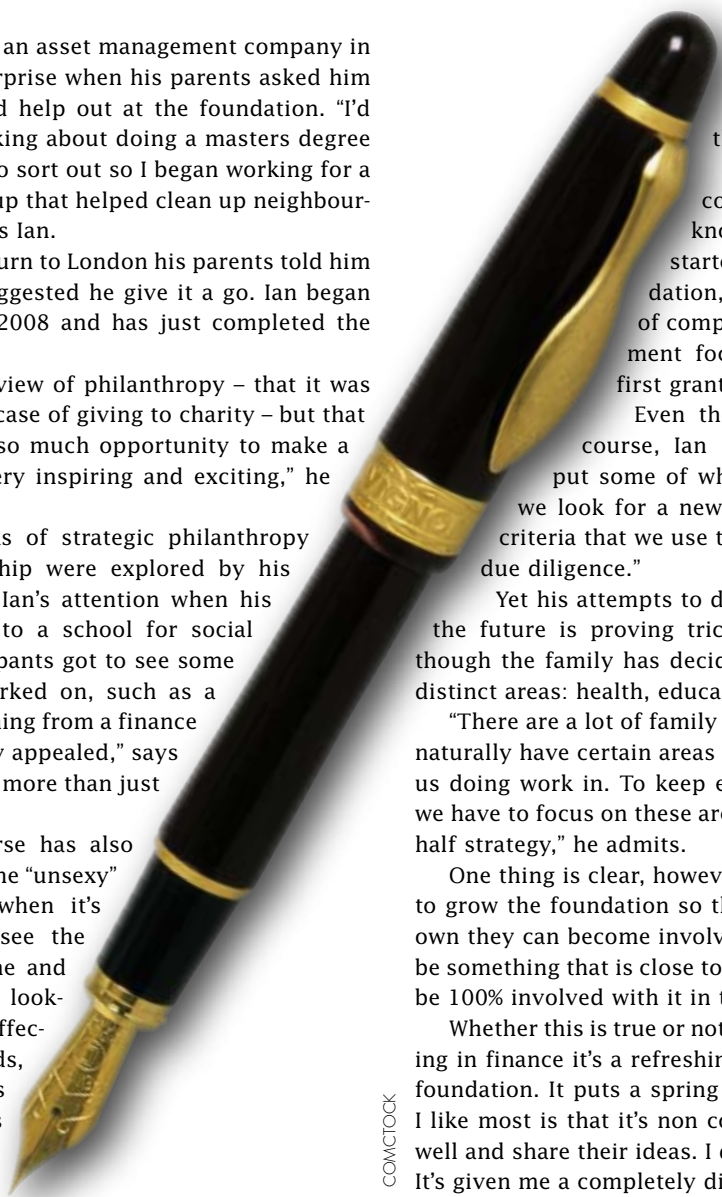
Even though he has yet to finish the course, Ian says he has already begun to put some of what he has learnt to use. "When we look for a new charity, we now have a list of criteria that we use to benchmark when carrying out due diligence."

Yet his attempts to develop a full blown strategy for the future is proving trickier than he anticipated, even though the family has decided to focus its giving on three distinct areas: health, education and the environment.

"There are a lot of family members on the board and they naturally have certain areas of interest that they want to see us doing work in. To keep everyone onside and passionate we have to focus on these areas. I guess it's half emotion and half strategy," he admits.

One thing is clear, however. Ian is adamant that he wants to grow the foundation so that when he has children of his own they can become involved. "The foundation will always be something that is close to my heart even though I may not be 100% involved with it in the future," he says.

Whether this is true or not remains to be seen. "After working in finance it's a refreshing change to come to work for a foundation. It puts a spring in your step. One of the things I like most is that it's non competitive – people strive to do well and share their ideas. I definitely made the right choice. It's given me a completely different outlook on life." ●



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