

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHARITY TRUSTEE

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Why did you decide to join a charity board?

I had been looking for a way to do some charity volunteering for a while. With my work schedule, it was unfortunately not practical to volunteer on a weekly basis with a charity. In 2021, Boardmatch did an Instagram takeover week with the WeAct campaign featuring a board member in her twenties. That made me realise that not all Trustees are retired accountants, and that younger people have something to offer! Up until then, I had always thought you needed to be a retired expert with decades of experience to have anything to contribute to a board.

What are your typical tasks and duties on the board?

There's the normal fiduciary duties we all have as board members, which involves signing off on decisions, reviewing reports, etc. During our meetings, we all have something to contribute to discussions, simply sharing our experiences of issues being debated or giving our opinions on matters. I also sit on our Finance and Risk Committee, which oversees the financial health of the charity. This involves reviewing accounts on a quarterly basis, discussing issues that might present a risk to the charity in the future, and contributing to policies around the financial conduct of the charity.

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What has challenged you in your trustee role?

Getting to grips with the basic principles of trusteeship was definitely a challenge. At the same time as that, you're also trying to familiarise yourself with the charity and the work they do. So my first board meeting was a bit overwhelming! I was very grateful that the charity I joined put a lot of effort into making sure I was integrated well from the start. The CEO took the time to meet me and bring me up to date on all the documents ahead of the first board meeting, and the chair of the board also met with me to bring me up to speed. At the same time, I was able to avail of some free training from the Carmichael Centre which helped fill in the blanks. So while it was a big challenge, it felt like I couldn't go too far wrong with all that help around me.

What has been the biggest reward or benefit in becoming a trustee?

For me, it's really rewarding to be a part of something bigger. It's great to hear the quarterly updates and see how the charity is developing and growing. It's also brilliant to be sitting on a board with such an interesting group of people. On a professional level, I have learnt so much from working alongside the board members. I've gained a much better understanding of governance and financial management, which is really valuable in my career.

What would you say to someone thinking about joining a charity board?

I would say not to count yourself out. There's a perception that board members need to be experts in their field, or need to be experienced in legal or financial matters. In reality, boards are crying out for members of all backgrounds and experiences, so if you're passionate about a particular charitable cause then you probably have a lot more valuable skills to share than you realise!

Joining a board is definitely challenging, but it's really enjoyable and is a great way of volunteering your time. It also makes a great addition to your CV, so it's something I'd really encourage people of all ages and experiences to consider.