

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHARITY TRUSTEE

DAMIEN MCGLYNN

TRUSTEE OF WATERFORD HEALING ARTS TRUST

DIRECTOR OF CREATE



"I know from experience that most boards are looking for genuine diversity of experience and perspective, and everyone has something to contribute. It's about recognising the skills and experience that you have and finding out how to put them to good use."

Why did you decide to join a charity board?

I've worked for charitable organisations in the cultural sector my whole career, so over that time I've become very aware of the important role that boards and trustees play in supporting and developing the organisation. I'd been in organisations where "the board" were talked about as this distant, scary thing far removed from our day-to-day jobs and then been in others where the board were really active, engaged and felt very close to the staff team.

The more I learned about the work of these boards and the wide range of skills and personalities that can contribute, the more I felt that I should offer my own time to other organisations. I worked in the UK for ten years and eventually joined a couple of boards so when I moved back to Ireland in 2021, I was very keen to find an organisation I strongly identified with to apply for a trustee role, so after keeping an eye on Boardmatch email alerts for a few months, I saw the opportunity with WHAT and applied straight away. After a conversation with the Director and Chair, I was invited to join the board.

What are your typical tasks and duties on the board?

Being a trustee is far more than just board meetings. These tend to happen quarterly or maybe 6 times a year, depending on the organisation. It's an important part of the governance process, but there are also plenty of other ways to engage with the organisation's work, through things like recruitment, policy development, attending events, and also the more in-depth work that subcommittees of a board will do around particular issues like finance or diversity and inclusion. I'm not a finance or legal expert at all, so I tend to offer my guidance and support in areas that I feel more equipped like management, strategy, communications and funding.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHARITY TRUSTEE

DAMIEN MCGLYNN



What has challenged you in your trustee role?

I've only been with WHAT a short time, and it's been a fantastic experience so far. I think the most challenging part has been arriving in to the board at a time of significant change. The organisation is going through a really ambitious transformation, and this meant that there were big questions and discussions happening when I first joined. Trying to contribute constructively when you're quite new is difficult, but I also knew that bringing a fresh point of view to some things that others had been very close to for a long time was likely to be helpful.

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

I always say that I'm a people person, and one of the things I enjoy most about being involved with various boards is getting to meet different people. Because of how organisations tend to structure their boards, there is often a mix of people from different backgrounds and sectors. So while I'm very used to meeting, and working with, others in the cultural sector in my day job, I gain an awful lot from having conversations with people who come from very different sectors. It's a great form of ongoing professional development and networking, and I think there are opportunities to develop valuable connections and lasting friendships through boards.

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

If someone was thinking about joining a board for the first time, and a little unsure about it, I would say go for it, 100%. You need to understand the commitment required and be sure that it's a good fit for you personally and that it's an organisation or cause you care about. There are so many different kinds of boards - from smaller local organisations to national charities - so it's important not to think that there is a certain 'type' of person that becomes a trustee. I know from experience that most boards are looking for genuine diversity of experience and perspective, and everyone has something to contribute. It's about recognising the skills and experience that you have and finding out how to put them to good use.

You might not think it yet, but you are the kind of person that someone needs on their board.