

Hands off to be helpful

Nick Gornall has a little secret. He's a Pilotlighter, which means he spends time, every month, sharing his expertise and knowledge with a charity. Here, he tells *Coutts News* about working with good causes and his next big challenge – The Coutts Charitable Trust.



I heard about Pilotlight around four years ago, after learning some of my colleagues were involved. It's an innovative organisation which brings experienced people from the business world to the charitable sector, giving charities access to skills they normally wouldn't have.

For me, the first thing was deciding which charity to work with. There are so many good causes out there, I really had to search my soul to decide which area I wanted to work in. Pilotlight pitch different ideas to you, and then you decide if you want to be part of that team.

It's a bit like joining a dating agency – they find you a charity that matches your needs. I rejected the first couple put to me, but that helped me

understand what I really wanted to do. I'm the type of person who, if I am passionate about something, I will be able to add more value.

The commitment is that I give up three hours of my time every month and meet with usually the charity's CEO and help solve a challenge they might be facing.

My first assignment was coaching a woman who ran a South London charity called

Music 4 All, which gave children in the area an opportunity to get involved in radio and music production. She was a remarkable person working around the clock, seven days a week, and what she really needed was an understanding of how to delegate.

I sat down with her and showed her how she could plan her time more effectively. But it was probably tea and sympathy as much as anything else. I really saw the benefits of helping her first hand. She grew in confidence and felt more at ease about getting other people involved in the day-to-day running of the charity.

Right now I am working with CBIT – the Child Brain Injury Trust. They provide support to families with children who have suffered a brain injury, usually after an accident. Often the child's behaviour changes so fundamentally that all the people around them

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notice a complete difference.

My job is to support the CEO in developing a five-year strategy for where the charity wants to be. I'm not allowed to write the business plan or actually interfere, which can be frustrating, especially as usually I am so hands-on. But that's all part of the development process. And it's also about helping someone else gain those skills themselves.

While you don't need to be a subject expert, you do need to have the ability to get your ideas across in a proactive and supportive way, rather than a dogmatic 'You will do it my way' sort of approach.

Coutts sponsor my subscription to Pilotlight, which is great. As an organisation, we are well connected in terms of social responsibility but I think it's only as I have become more senior that I am aware of exactly what we do. But now I have taken on Peregrine Banbury's role on the Coutts Charitable Trust, I think I will see so much more.

Being a trustee is a great honour for me and will also mean I get more visibility of how Coutts supports the charitable sector. I think the Trust represents the avenue for Coutts to support good causes and charitable organisations, and we do that through a percentage of our profits.

I'm looking forward to working with the chairman and the other Trust members. I took on the trustee role because I feel passionately about Coutts and believe I can help influence the Trust's work going forward.

Coutts is an incredible place, where there are so many people doing their own bit for charity or community, in a big or small way. It really is a special business and makes me proud that I am part of it.

■ www.pilotlight.org.uk



Weather warriors!
Allistair Hignell (third
right) with Becky Mann
and other runners

Becky beats the deluge

WHEN PBAs BECKY MANN AND Steven Lea met ex-professional cricketer Alastair Hignell, aka Higgy, at a Coutts client event, little did they think they'd soon be participating in a 13-mile charity run in support of the Multiple Sclerosis Resource Centre (MSRC) in Colchester.

"Higgy is such a great character, full of enthusiasm and an inspiration to others who also have MS," explains Becky, from Coutts' Bristol office. "And as he is a patron of MSRC, my private banker Peter Bolland offered my and Steven's services as runners in his next event, the Stroud half marathon."

The pair battled with heavy rains on the day, and completed the race in times of 1 hour 54 minutes and 2 hours 2 minutes respectively.

"I staggered over the finish line in horrendous weather conditions, pleased with my time but even more delighted I beat Steven," enthused Becky.

The pair raised £1,700 for the charity, including a £500 donation from the Coutts Charitable Trust.

"A huge thanks to everyone who sponsored us for a very worthwhile cause," she added.

New initiative for Niger

COUTTS IS LOOKING TO SET UP A microfinance bank in Africa in partnership with World Vision UK.

The charity helps children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice and has already been working with the Group since 2007. Around 300 RBS employees have sponsored over 400 children across 15 villages in Niger, Africa, using the Group's Give As You Earn scheme to boost contributions.

Now Coutts will be developing its own programme and Christina Rogers,

private banker, Guildford, is discussing several options, including the microfinance bank, with the charity.

"We initially thought about simply supporting RBS with their fantastic Niger project, but it makes sense to do something different and bring our own particular expertise to the scheme," she explained. "Once we've decided what to do, we hope to send a group out to the chosen project in 2010 to evaluate progress."

■ If you would like to find out more, email christina.rogers@coutts.com