



Q & A

WITH JOHN WYLIE AM

We thought you'd like to hear about what makes our founder tick.

What does an effective and efficient charity look like?

One that's crystal clear about the need it's addressing and continues to ask itself is it getting the desired change in the most effective way. Is the organisation's mission well defined and does it come before the interests of the organisation? It's not about you, it's about the people you serve. Serve these people well, place them first in everything you do, and you'll have the organisational integrity that's essential to sustainable success. Other questions they should ask themselves include is feedback actively sought from those you seek to benefit, insightful and acted upon, even if uncomfortable? Is your Board high performing? Does it roll up its sleeves and get involved, evaluate its performance bravely and is not obsessed with governance at the expense of helping in practical ways? Is technology embraced for greater efficiencies? Also look at the organisation culture and leadership. Are your leaders the right fit with the right skills, and can they achieve your mission for you? Do they support the people under them, encourage and develop them?

In 5 years' time what do you hope Tanarra Philanthropic Advisors has achieved?

I want to be able to say we didn't just help a few charities do good work. I hope we can show that the collective impact of our efforts has really shifted the dial on some of Australia's social challenges. Ultimately, I hope we've achieved a model where others in the business community are actively contributing, a model that's standing on its own two feet and not totally dependent on my investment in time and dollars.

What motivated you to set this up in the first place?

Directors and management teams of for-profit companies have a whole series of advisors they can turn to for trusted advice. But it doesn't exist in the charity sector. We don't want to turn charities into businesses. We want to provide a fresh set of eyes that an external business perspective can bring. It just makes good sense providing impartial advice, skills and expertise to help charities become more effective in achieving their goals.

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What's your greatest frustration?

Firstly, being able to scale this concept, to deliver more help to more organisations. Secondly, I'd like to see much greater collaboration, beyond co-funding, across Australia's philanthropic sector. There's so much duplication in researching organisations and not enough getting together to share information, experience and skills to collaboratively help address our big issues.

What have you learnt about charities as a result of this work?

The responsibilities and demands on charities, their leaders and Boards to do more with less are staggering. We're constantly in awe of their stamina and innovation in delivering solutions for Australia's most challenging issues. The other learnings are more about skills gaps like government engagement, financial modelling, big picture thinking and Board effectiveness.

How do you decide who to support?

At the outset we assess the work they're doing, the people, track record etc. If we're happy with that and think it has great potential then we look at their specific needs and see if our skill base can really add value. If all that is a yes, then we scope the project, agree on the pro bono hours we'll give and engage our team. We also have a network of trusted advisors we run things by.

Are there any stand-out proud moments?

Plenty. Seeing the Conservation Ecology Centre's Wildlife Wonders enterprise become a reality down the Great Ocean Rd. Seeing Maggie Beer Foundation grow from a few sponsored cooks doing their training to a national model embraced by the Aged Care sector. Seeing Teach for Australia expand into a new state to help more disadvantaged kids. Then there's the ripple effect we're creating with other Foundations who are now turning to us to help some of their organisations.