



## Donor's stories

### PETER CULLUM CBE

*Peter Cullum is the founder of Towergate Insurance, which funds the Towergate Charitable Foundation. Discover more about his involvement with corporate philanthropy and with his own foundation, The Cullum Family Trust.*

*Peter Cullum is the founder of Towergate Insurance, Europe's largest independently owned insurance intermediary. The company funds the Towergate Charitable Foundation, which was set up in 2006. Peter also has a personal foundation called The Cullum Family Trust. He was awarded the CBE for his contribution to business, entrepreneurship and charitable causes in 2010.*

"I'm not sure you ever realise when you first start being in any way philanthropic. Thinking back, my first experience was when I was much younger. I was a member of the Round Table at the time, and I provided help to the local community through fundraising and voluntary work. I remember going to a children's hospice near Billericay and playing games with some of the patients. Those few hours had such an emotional effect on me. That visit will always remain with me – it's sobering when you are confronted with real heartbreaks in your community.



*"As my business interests grew, so too did my passion to give back. I wanted philanthropy to be a core part of my company's values, ethos and way of working."*

As my business interests grew, so too did my passion to give back. I wanted philanthropy to be a core part of my company's values, ethos and way of working. I was inspired to create the Towergate Charitable Foundation after reading about a US breast cancer research charity that had partnered with the car manufacturer, BMW. It convinced me to do something worthwhile at



Towergate, where we would work with charities and drive the company's culture, values and commerciality in tandem.

We decided to work with several children's charities following focus groups with customers and staff. We now include an optional £2/£3 charity donation on all our invoices to support either Cancer Research UK, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NSPCC ChildLine or Help the Hospices. We also support military charities and sponsor leadership programmes for people studying Masters degrees in the clinical sector.

Our staff are at the heart of our charity work. As a result, the Foundation has quickly become part of our company's fabric and culture. 'Giving something back' is important to us all, and our charity focus always scores favourably in our annual staff survey.

We match-fund staff fundraising and also have Charity Champions in place – staff who undertake voluntary roles to promote, encourage and engage others to get involved. Last year, we took a group of our champions to Great Ormond Street Hospital for the day and afternoon tea at The Ritz as a thank-you.

The Foundation donates around £2m a year to various charities and, once a year, we invite our charities to present to our board of trustees. Without exception, we are blown away by that presentation. We are truly inspired by the work, enthusiasm, dedication and skills of the experts involved in the process. We also get charity practitioners to meet with our employees face-to-face because they bring to life the work they are doing.

In 2006, I set up my personal foundation, The Cullum Family Trust. Having sold some shares in my company, I was fortunate to be able to start the charity with more than £20m and my two daughters, Claire and Abi, are involved in the everyday running. But before they started – and with the help of Coutts – I made sure that they had philanthropic training to understand causes and how to choose charities.

We are disciplined about how we select charity partners and how much we invest in any one charity. My daughters, for example, are particularly interested in the Born Free Foundation and animal rescue charities so we support a number of those. Also, as I used to live in Sussex (and my daughters live there now) our Trust is working with the Sussex Community Foundation (SCF). My daughters work with the SCF to decide which local causes to give to. They get involved by visiting the causes rather than just cheque-writing. They are inspired by the SCF's work in the local community and make donations when they are required.



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I didn't have any pre-determined ideas about the causes I wanted to work with, other than education, and as a result, we support a number of different charities. Personally, I have always been keen to work with a charity that addresses homelessness. For the past two years, I have worked with Shelter on its programme that aims to empower people with the skills to stop them from being evicted. It has been an educational experience, albeit tinged with sadness.

Over time, my thoughts on which causes to support has changed, however I always aim to maintain my long-term commitments. We frequently receive letters and, on occasion, my daughters will bring specific requests to my attention if they strike a positive chord.

I also wanted to look at how I could help young, bright, MBA graduates who struggle to raise funds for business start-ups. That's why in 2009, I set up the Peter Cullum Centre for

Entrepreneurship at Cass Business School where I studied for my MBA in the 70s.

Since then, I have made investments into a number of start-ups, which the charity gets nominal income from and is ploughed straight back into the centre. I take my role seriously and am greatly enjoying being part of the investment committee that delivers on suitable investment. If we think a start-up has legs and they're capable of delivering a credible business plan which we believe they will put in place successfully, we invest. It is as much about our belief in people's ability to execute, as it is gut feeling and ambition. There is no profit in it for me, but it gives me a huge buzz to help in this way.

I have been fortunate to have generated wealth through my business activities and I feel an overwhelming need to give most of it away. I would like to do this while I'm still alive, which is a privilege to others.

What's driving me on at the moment is building four schools with the National Autistic Society. We already have one project up and running in Surrey. My eldest grandson has autism, so I am aware of the huge challenges that children with autism face in education. Going to a school for children with autism helps you put life into perspective.

How far I get involved with a charity varies, but I generally do not want hands-on operational involvement as that would be intrusive. I like to visit – it's more real than writing cheques and inspires me to do more. I have drifted away from funding a charity in the past, because it failed to maintain effective communication with me, and so there needs to be a balance.

My philanthropy is led by my heart and then my brain. I think that most people have a good heart and want to do others a good turn. However, giving can be complex and I do like to take advice and seek the views of others. Coutts Philanthropy Services has been helpful to me throughout my journey. Indeed, there is a lot of responsibility attached to giving in terms of follow-through and outcomes. I personally give because it is the right thing to do. I would say that giving is good, but you also have to be good at giving!"