



There is no other. There is only us.

This piece reflects on the nature of philanthropy, particularly that we encountered between 2021 and 2024 at Ajaz.org.
It shares lessons about philanthropy and what good giving looks like.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy is a subject of great academic interest – covering philosophy, history, ethics, trends, politics and even the science of giving. In their book *Meaningful Philanthropy*¹, Dr Jen Shang and Adrian Sargeant made an important contribution to the psychology of giving this year, with a focus on why it is that very wealthy people commit so wholeheartedly and often such very large sums of money, to philanthropy.

Indeed, philanthropy is often considered the preserve of the very wealthy and aligns with the idea that benefits flow from the well-placed to the vulnerable – the “others”, whose circumstances are far removed from those of the “us” – the givers. But a philanthropist is anyone who gives – not just money, but time, advice, experience. Philanthropists are everyday people. All of us.

Philanthropists give and receive much more in return – meaning, purpose and connection. The giving and receiving become the same transaction – at the food pantry, at the baby bank, on the helplines. Over the past three years, we have experienced this in many ways: how people come to give so often, not realising that they, too, need to receive.

Take me as a good example. I came to this work with Ajaz.org during an exceptionally difficult period in my life. In my discussions with the CEOs of the charities Ajaz hoped to fund, I found myself able to answer the question “How are you?” with honesty and candour without transgressing boundaries. I found warmth, acceptance, and welcome in my circumstances, which gave me an insight into how these organisations worked that I would not have otherwise seen – because I came to it in heartbreak.

Philanthropy offers gifts that are unexpected, surprising and profound for all those that encounter it. Often, it changes our lives in ways we wouldn’t have anticipated – such as unexpected professional development, improved social provision, better mental health, new friendships, new homes, changes of career and all because of encounters with charities.

Through volunteering at a children’s charity, for example, Tasneema was able to see how her experience of domestic abuse as a child could be turned into good to help her help other children in pain. Katherine, at rock bottom, was able to help her friends after receiving support herself; Stacy’s volunteering with a children’s cancer charity brought profound meaning to her life and that of her family. Dawn, who volunteered to fill the gaps between freelance jobs, found a community that gave her so much that she accepted a job in the charity and is now her community’s go-to contact for donations. “Little Village has enriched my life in ways I never thought possible”.

While we may live in different places and spaces, from different backgrounds, cultures, ages and perspectives, and our paths may cross in philanthropy as employees, service users, volunteers or donors, we all come to it seeking something – even if we may not immediately recognise it in these terms. And what we find is a common, unifying force, given and received by those involved, a force that carries benefits beyond these individuals, out far and wide — *by Nicola Brentnall MVO.*

There is no other. There is only us.

¹Meaningful Philanthropy: The Person Behind The Giving, Jen Shang and Adrian Sargeant, Policy Press, 2024

Ajaz.org: A Summary

Between 2021 and 2024, Ajaz.org made donations to support charities that help children and families in crisis. In 2021, the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic was still stretching long over the UK. 20% of the population was living in poverty, and the number of children homeless or at risk of homelessness was the highest ever recorded. Nearly two million households faced destitution.

Politics and politicians, in general, seemed increasingly removed from the realities of life for most people, particularly those with the least. In the face of growing need, local philanthropy, the practical action being taken by individuals and not-for-profits to help fix what was broken, was one of the few reasons for hope.

With demand for these ventures soaring, we wanted to join in and focus on organisations that supported children and families in crisis, those that provided the help families needed, with love and without judgement.

We funded not-for-profit organisations working across the fields of bereavement, poverty, mental health, domestic abuse and access to justice. These charities were a mix of large and small, well-established and recently underway. All of them shared the same characteristics – caring for children and families going through the worst possible times and believing that great relationships change the world.

To thank the charities for all they were doing in this tough, uncompromising environment, on top of the grants, we commissioned artists to create beautiful illustrations that encapsulated the power and the love at the heart of the work of each

charity. These illustrations can be seen here and speak to the approach of Ajaz.org from the start — through Ajaz’s personal example, it was to a funder that was different from others, one that wanted everything to be about the helpers.

At the same time, for the same reason, we created a fellowship and community of leaders that we hoped would support and encourage each other. We all shared what we could – wisdom, good humour, advice, techniques to communicate, to raise money and to share the load. Friendships were made, hearts were lifted, and tips were given. We met six times over the period to share tips and insights on culture and people, storytelling, fundraising, strategy, and AI. The Fellowship will continue beyond our giving.

Separately, we offered advice on governance matters to charity leaders who needed a hand to resolve issues, strengthen their effectiveness or move forward with clarity and conviction. We worked with charities we funded and others who came to us for help.

We wanted to be sure that our involvement added value to the charities and not stress. Over the years, we have learned what great giving is and what a good donor looks like, and we hope that we got the balance right. The CEOs let us know, and this is shared in the pages that follow, so Ajaz.org might build on this in the future.

Giving: What works well?

Being a donor and working with children and families in crisis through charities has been an enormous privilege.

We have encountered leaders of enormous skill, erudition, energy and vision. Many of them are themselves experts by experience; others bring extensive insight and understanding of the charity sector and the demands that it carries.

We have seen how they connect with the people who have walked, skipped or run through their doors in search of support. The quiet ways and means of their leadership.

We learned from them in so many ways – most notably – what works for them in their relationship with their donors.



Study The Charities, Then Trust Them and Get Out of The Way

“Ajaz.org is a personable funder. You came out to see us, to understand what we were trying to do and how the funds would be used. Other funders just want a piece of paper to apply – for you, it was personal that the families we help were important to you, too. This mattered to us, not least as in our work; it is often impossible to put into words what we do. You just got it. I always felt you were there for us – that I could always just pick up the phone and you would be there”.

- The Bodie Hodges Foundation

Charities like donors. They like getting funds to support the work or else that work suffers or stops. Sadly, however, sometimes, and inadvertently, funders can become a burden – wanting reports, insights, access, and more – often not realising the cost and time pressure these places on charities.

In our giving, we did the work up front, ahead of the donations we made. We visited, learned, looked, and, most importantly, listened. We read the information, such as impact, financial, and strategy documents, before committing to a three-year cycle of giving. Later, we supported in different ways, fundraising drives, promoting the charities to other donors and other advice.

We were purposefully light on reporting, preferring to check in with those we were working with and to hear stories at the moment about how things were going. We could read the Annual Reports and Impact Reports that were produced by the charities each year to get a sense of what was going on. We did not need to take from them even further; we needed to add value, not extract it, reduce stress, and not increase it.

Our charities told us:

“It was a unique experience from the outset. Ajaz.org is open, friendly, accessible, and understanding. It likes to really get to know the organisations that it funds. So often, invitations for connection in any meaningful way are turned down by funders as “just not something we do”. There is this distance between us and the work and many of the funders we encounter who feel so far removed from the work we do – but Ajaz.org is very different – very accessible”.

- Free Your Mind

“Ajaz was always understanding, totally getting the pressure we are all under to deliver what we do – deadlines and there weren’t many – were always really fair”.

- Buttle UK

“Ajaz.org has been supportive in so many ways. From a non-onerous application and reporting relationship, other funders can demand so much from charities even if they approach them directly, and this can seriously disadvantage smaller charities. With Ajaz.org, pragmatism was at the heart of everything – how can we help, what can we do for you?”

- The Miscarriage Association

“We really liked the approach – Ajaz.org was like our cheerleader – always on our side – there was no sense of demand, and that meant we could get on with the work – because you trusted us”.

- Little Village

“I always knew that you were there – that I just needed to reach out, and you would be there for me”.

- Shift



Unrestricted Funding

“Your funding was unrestricted – which was amazing – and while other funders are slowly getting into unrestricted giving – you knew immediately why it is important. You said to us, “You will know where to spend this money to have the biggest impact”, – to which we felt “Wow – you see and understand us”.

- The Bodie Hodges Foundation

Following trust and confidence comes unrestricted giving – the type of donation most charities really want and need. Unrestricted funding can be used to keep the lights on and pay the rent and the staff. Way too many donors refuse to countenance paying salaries or overheads – wanting instead to link their funding to what they consider to be “delivery”.

After learning about how a charity works, seeing its leadership, and knowing its results and the difference it makes, donors who are most effective for charities give unrestricted gifts and believe that the charity leaders know the best place for the resources to be spent. For charities operating on the front line and those meeting with families in dire need of essential support, this approach has worked very well.

We trusted the organisations we were working with to know where they needed to allocate the resources – having the flexibility to pivot and move is so important when lives are at stake. Charities all have careful plans, strategies and budgets, but the operating environment is dynamic – and needs and opportunities can shift and emerge. In speaking with the charities over the course of the three years, the value of unrestricted giving just kept coming up in conversations, as well as the added value of trust and freedom to get on and deliver the work.

“you understand the value and significance of unrestricted funding and certainty – we knew we had 3 years funding so we could plan with more confidence – knowing the funding was there, and that we could flex it to fit what we needed, it wasn’t locked away for one thing only”.

- Candlelighters

“your funding worked so well for us as it enabled us to provide our families with what they needed as they needed it. The money gave us that breathing space and confidence to respond – it has been about trust and being able to be in the moment with parents and carers in housing need and who need time to express what they need – you gave us that space”

- Shepherds Bush Families Project

“In giving unrestricted funds, you enabled us to explain to donors that restrict giving how we cover the core costs that make the work possible.”

- The Parent Rooms

“The unrestricted funding helped us to designate a pot of funding for innovation and for trying new things. This led us to increase our helpline open hours by 8 hours a week, into the evenings. On the first evening of this extended pattern, the phone rang, and when answered, a woman in crisis said, “Thank goodness you are there”. We are in a really energising time now, and we feel that Ajaz.org has made a very big contribution to our new outlook and our offer”.

- The Miscarriage Association



Funding The Hard(er) Stuff

“There is no silver bullet to transform the lives of young people and their families who face serious issues and challenges. It is tough work, and it takes time and patience. You believed in us as we were getting going, in our pilot phase. You took a chance on us. The results show real progress since we started – with reductions in behaviours that can lead to so many problems. There is a long way to go, but the case is being made that it can work”.

- Shift

We know that fundraising for certain areas of work can be hard – particularly for those charities working in children’s social care or access to justice for those families without recourse to public funds. These families are some of the most vulnerable of all.

In hearing the stories of the suffering of so many, we hope that more donors will be willing to take on those areas that others can’t or won’t – to be there for the children and families whose lives are all too often a struggle just to survive.

Ajaz.org provided funds for a legal advice fund for families with no recourse to public funds (Coram), for specialist social workers to support families in crisis with children at risk (Shift), and to help establish a new approach to children’s residential social care (Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust). Our unrestricted funds allowed help for benefits advice (Shepherds Bush Families Project) and essentials for women and children fleeing domestic abuse (Buttle UK).

Ajaz gave funds to create a fund to allow Coram to get legal advice and emergency support for families denied funding help to help them frame the argument to support their case for help. This fund was a visible symbol for those with nowhere else to turn, that someone cared about them and was there for them. We never had any doubts about funds going to the harder, more difficult areas because we know the value of these grants to charities and particularly to families. After our detailed work up front, we knew we could trust the charities to do the right thing. They knew the realities out there far better than we could ever do.



“Going to those areas where other donors don’t go was a characteristic of Ajaz’s giving – these were among the first questions for us back in 2021 – what is the hardest thing to fund? Can we help there?”

- Coram

“Your gift and your trust in us to get help to those who needed it the most helped fund a benefits advisor to run extra sessions to support appeals for Personal Independence Payments. The freedom to have more resources to help the families navigate the courts is amazing – one family the advisor helped not only won their case but secured £14,000 in back payments, as well. This kind of thing is life-changing. This is what Ajaz understood”.

- Shepherds Bush Families Project

“It was great working with a funder who understands the urgency and significance of emergency essentials – like blankets, coats and shoes for children who are cold. Too often, charities that provide these are written off as not serious as they are not providing systemic change – but Ajaz understands and respects that those in crisis can’t wait for the system to improve 15 years down the line. There is room for both types of work, and seeing Ajaz’s passion for the here and now has been encouraging”.

- Buttle UK

Back young charities multi-year and watch dreams become reality

“The funds were very welcome – unrestricted, multi-year funding is terrific and sends a signal of real trust in us as an organisation and as a team – we are trusted to get on with it and to apply the money for our plan. It not only helped us to keep going, it helped us to keep dreaming and to keep thinking about the future. It took worry away – and meant we could invest in key roles that have helped us to develop and strengthen the organisation.”

- Free Your Mind

We wanted to fund a range of charities, large and smaller, at different stages of their development. For the smaller ones, breaking new ground on funding can be exceptionally hard. Multi-year relationships give donors a chance to see the trajectory of a charity they believe in – and it has been hugely rewarding to learn of the developments, growth and confidence that have followed our decision to donate.

Many donors won't give until they have seen other donors getting on board, and others refuse to consider giving if charities can't demonstrate that they have secured unrestricted or multi-year funding before. It is a real Catch-22 for charities, and so much time and effort is wasted and potentially thwarted because of this approach. As donors, we need to be ready to be the first. To do the research, we need to be confident and then go in and break new ground so others follow.



The Parent Rooms is a small charity in Northern Ireland, working to address the huge gaps in support in perinatal mental health. At the point Ajaz started funding the organisation, the charity had just £8,000, and very big dreams, in the bank. We could have declined to fund for the same reasons all the other donors gave – too small, too risky, not enough track record - but there was something special about this team, and we wanted to give them the chance they so badly needed and much deserved.

“Before Ajaz.org reached out, other funders said that the organisation was too small, too untested – and unrealistic in its ambition. Ajaz’s donation opened many doors that had previously been closed – simply because we could say we had unrestricted, multi-year funding from a donor. We weren’t doing anything differently – we just had the signal of support and belief. It made all the difference. Just recently, we were approached by an agency working on behalf of a major donor who wants to fund this work, and a key question was – have you worked with a major donor before? A track record was essential. With Ajaz.org, we had that. It’s persuasive and helps us move to the next level”.

- The Parent Rooms

In the past three years, we have seen the charities we work with flourish and grow. Not only because of us, many other donors have all helped make this happen, but we were able to play a part and each year, turn the page with them as their stories unfolded. This is the way great grant-making works – choosing the right partners, believing in them, getting behind them with unrestricted funds and just watching them flourish – so they can stand independently when the grant cycle ends.

“Ajaz enabled us to invest in the service we provide to bereaved families rather than endless start/stop project work that restricted funding demands. This is best shown in the number of bereavement sessions we could offer. When we started, we were offering 300 sessions a year, now, because we have been able to invest in counsellors and because we own the building, which you helped us with, we are delivering over 750 sessions a year. We can stand on our own two feet now because of this support, in ways we could only have dreamed of 2 years ago... we are ready to go forward on our own”.

- Bodie Hodges Foundation



Children in residential care face enormous challenges. They are often moved between foster carers, and their time in each children's home is short. This instability and uncertainty mean these children have multiple profound challenges – the risk of sexual exploitation, gang involvement, the experience of the criminal justice system, mental health problems, and early parenthood.

Back in 2022, Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust (LPT) was fundraising for the core costs it needed to open a network of 5 children's homes that can provide long-term placements and consistent care, with love and understanding at the heart of the work. This alone was ambitious, but the LPT team had more they wanted to do, including developing training, qualification and career pathways for youth workers in children's residential social care – to upskill and retain this vital workforce so that children and young people in care get a much

better chance at life. This was a bold agenda for some of society's most vulnerable citizens and a significant fundraising challenge.

Ajaz.org believed in the team and their conviction that no matter how broken the system is – things can be better. As our time together ends, LPT has filled the first home with children who have been there for a long period, itself a huge achievement. The children are safe and secure and have re-engaged with education, too – attending exams and two of the five are starting college. This is hugely hopeful for their future well-being. The second home is now well into development, and a third is nearly fully funded. The LPT qualification has now been validated by Kingston University, and another is in development – a leadership qualification for care home managers that will lead to greater structure, common standards and, again, a career path.

“Your funding was unrestricted in the core costs budget, allowing us to invest in posts that enabled us to concentrate on realising the vision – and it is working”.

- Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust

The Multiplier Effect of A Single Gift

“Word got around the community that free food and essentials were available in the kitchen at The Parent Rooms. Some parents who weren’t involved in the counselling or other support available started to come in because they were really struggling. One woman came because she had absolutely no money, no food in the house and nothing for electricity or gas. She didn’t know what to do – but heard about the pantry and the chance of something there. Michelle was able to give her enough to get through the week and helped her with introductions to other agencies that helped her through the Winter with funds for fuel”.

- The Parent Rooms

Sometimes, a single grant to support a good idea can lead to others coming on board and multiplying the value of a gift many times over. During the last three years, the cost-of-living crisis has been biting hard. Families have been forced to cut back on food and heating. We wanted to find ways to lift the load a little bit.

Two grants that we gave provided charities not only with money to fill some gaps but also a story they could fundraise against. This kind of more spontaneous grant-making is worth a try – because it sends signals of care and support for the charities and the communities they care for.

Michelle Bradley, CEO of The Parent Rooms, told us in one conversation that many parents were really struggling to manage, cutting down on essential items like nappies, formula, and more – in ways that caused huge stress to the babies and families concerned.

The Parent Rooms had a kitchen where parents and carers could make cups of tea and coffee. Ajaz.org helped stock the cupboards with nappies, wipes, and formula milk. The items would just be there for those who needed to take them, no questions asked. For those who simply had nowhere else to turn, these cupboards became a lifeline.

The multiplier effect saw more parents coming through the door who, in turn, received essentials and help with heating and more. Then other donors started giving, topping up the supplies so there was always something there. The offer has extended to other essential items and support that would otherwise be out of reach. It is now a regular offer for donors and families alike.

The Multibank

The Cottage Family Centre is place for children and families to come for support, advice, companionship, learning and practical help to rebuild their lives or make a fresh start. It is a friendly, non-judgmental, and local people who are the key to the work, such as counsellors, therapists, helpers, and volunteers. It launched the first Multibank, a platform for giving created in partnership with major suppliers like Amazon and others.

“We believe in creating relationships, not partnerships, and that is absolutely what we have been able to do with Ajaz.org. Ajaz gave money to support The Big Hoose, a project that saw us taking surplus goods from suppliers and getting them to families in crisis – essential products like toiletries, health and sanitary items, blankets and bedding for those with nothing. Ajaz’s funds helped us to fill a gap in the budget at a vital time, to get our fundraising over the line, so we could keep going and expand to more Multibanks from there”.

- The Cottage Family Centre



Food and Fun

OnSide supports a growing network of state-of-the-art youth centres. These offer children and young people somewhere safe and inspirational to go in their leisure time, the support of youth workers along, with a hot meal for £1.

As the cost-of-living crisis got worse and worse, every penny became crucial for survival for many families. Parents and carers tried to work more hours while cutting back on expenditure wherever they could. Tensions rose in many households, and the long school summer holidays meant that those who could at least rely on free school meals saw the threat of weeks without that guarantee or any hope of safe activities for their children to fill the days. OnSide heard how youngsters were stealing from the food cupboards in their youth centres to provide for their families or dropping out because their families couldn't afford the 50p entry fee or £1.00 for a meal.

To respond, Ajaz gave funds to form the basis of what we called The Summer Fun and Grub Club, a pot of money for OnSide to ensure all children and young people could get in and have a meal on the house. This meant that parents and carers had one less thing to worry about – their children could be fed and safe in the youth centre. Other donors keen to respond to the cost-of-living crisis rapidly came to join in, and the offer was hugely extended – through the worst of the difficult days of that summer and the following Winter.

In total, from the Ajaz.org idea and with the other donors,

7,700

young people were supported,

49,000

meals were provided, and

1,759

free visits were enjoyed.

A young person expressed the vital difference this grant made:

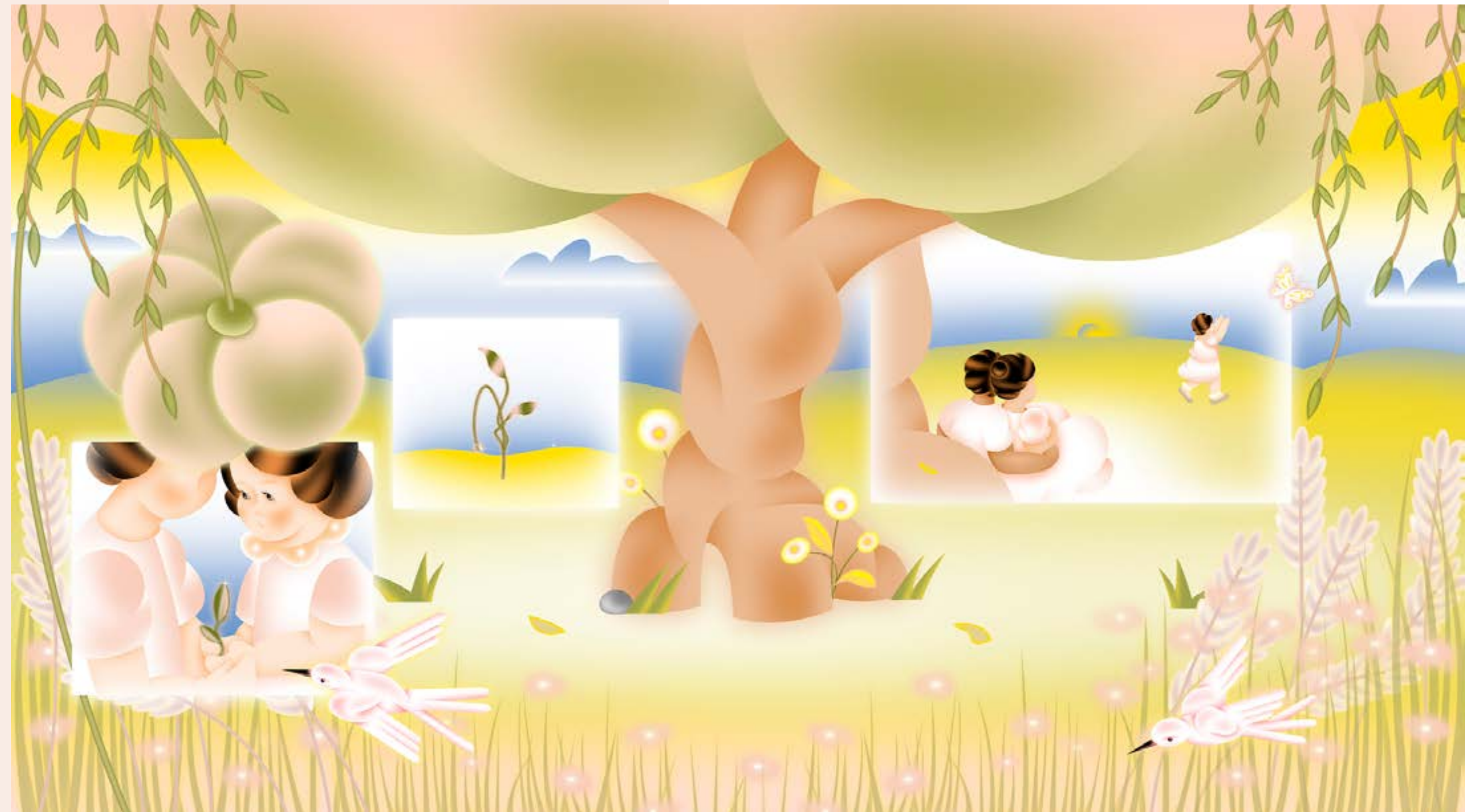
“...Tom, my Youth Worker... is very encouraging, kind and a little bit silly...I found I could confide in him... When my family were having trouble paying for food, it was my trust and confidence in Tom that helped me to come forward and share that stress with him. I was able to get free meals whilst I was at the Youth Zone but also, I was able to take home food for my family and ensure we didn't starve, and we were sorted for as long as we needed. This made all the difference.”

Added Value

Beyond funding, donors often have wider networks and expertise to share.

While it does not work for everyone, Ajaz.org wanted to bring all we could to support the charities we were funding and others in the sector who needed help but struggled to resource advice.

We created the Fellowship; we brought the CEOs and their senior colleagues together for events, and we provided support on social media and other advice where it was sought.



The Fellowship

“The others in the Fellowship provided help, inspiration and ambition – the rooms we were in were full of it – cool people that I hadn’t and probably wouldn’t otherwise have met – and their energy was infectious. I was wrestling with an issue that I needed to raise with my board to expand the work we do coming out of Covid. I had a target to ask to draw down from the Endowment, and after one of the Ajaz Fellowship meetings, I felt inspired to ask for more. It causes ripples like this”.

- The Parent Rooms

Leadership can be a lonely place, and opportunities to meet with peers can be restricted to development programmes that not all charities can afford. We wanted to take the opportunity to offer the CEOs and other members of their teams the opportunity to get together to talk, network, find shared ground and hear from speakers on subjects that we hoped would be useful. Opening our networks, we spoke about AI, communications, strategy, people and culture.

The CEOs joined in, sharing their expertise on fundraising, storytelling and access to justice.

Lots of funders have get-togethers, and we wanted ours to add value and not risk imposing a burden on those we work with. There was never any requirement or expectation to come – only a warm welcome to those who felt the agenda offered, session by session, was useful.

“You made a space and invited people in – people who share a role in addressing complex issues and who share the belief that great relationships change the world. Our encounters at the Fellowship were always wise and structured – no other donors offer this – an occasion that is about helping the leaders of the charities with issues that they are grappling with. The environment was one of support, shared experience and understanding that we could be ourselves, that it was ok to be vulnerable and not have all the answers”.

- Shift

“Ajaz.org understands how tough it can be, and, in the Fellowship, it was about us and what we needed. We know that sometimes funders can inadvertently look to benefit themselves from asking charities to join things and present, etc, but with Ajaz – it really felt all about us”.

- Little Village

“Lots of donors gather the charities they support, but not all of them, by a long way, are clear about why – either their giving or the gathering. For Ajaz.org – this was never the case – it was immediately clear that the giving was driven by purpose and meaning, and that came across in the meetings, in the communications, and in the way the funding flowed to children and families. The gatherings were good – very helpful topics. The AI one was really timely and saw me taking the lessons and ideas to another charity CEOs group I was on – where most of them were completely unaware of some of the tools that were available at the beginning. It got them thinking, too”.

- Buttle UK

“The Gatherings were helpful – particularly the one on people and culture – it really informed development sessions for the team. Being part of this community was positive, it supported me through a difficult time”.

- Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust

“A big difference was the Fellowship – a true collective with the joint purpose for children and families and shared vision – a place and a space where we could all be open and honest with each other, and there was no sense of competition or the money – the people in the room were thinking about each other in a positive way – we would look out for each other – it was a place where we could come and find support, advice and solidarity. Creating that as Ajaz.org did was a real art form – I’ve not seen that from other donors’ charity get-togethers. The sessions gave me time out from the busy-ness and a space and time for reflection – again, a rare thing”.

- Candlelighters

“Being part of the Fellowship of charities meant a huge amount – it was a safe space where we could be honest, we could be vulnerable and share how we really felt about things – we didn’t have to fix a smile on our faces and pretend everything was fine. Our meetings were a chance to take time for ourselves, take a breath and see how others were sharing the same challenges and asking the same questions”.

- The Miscarriage Association

“I found the meetups helpful as they added another dimension – it exposed me to all sorts of information and support that I didn’t otherwise have access to. It gave me confidence as a leader to meet up with other CEOs – being a CEO myself gave me the ticket to get in. And while some of the other organisations were much bigger and more established than we were, the issues we are all grappling with were the same, so this was a big boost for me”.

- The Bodie Hodges Foundation

Advice

“Ajaz was our first major donor and you helped us to understand and learn about what really matters to help build relationships and stewardship for donors – the importance of storytelling, of the opportunity to see, feel and experience the culture and the values of the organisation and what makes it tick – to build that sense of connection. This started to give us confidence in what we were doing – in ways we hadn’t had before because we didn’t have this insight. We invited a donor in – someone who had given to a single campaign – following this advice. [After seeing a spontaneous and particularly beautiful Candlelighters moment], the donor committed a substantial sum to us – as she could see and experience Candlelighters us exactly as we are”

- Candlelighters

There are many ways donors can add value to the charities they support. We provided advice on what works for donors in terms of communications and staying in touch, as well as insights on marketing, communications, brand and governance. The aim was always to add value to give support that would help the charities to develop, grow, to reach more families and children.

At Ajaz.org, we just came up with what we had to hand – funds, experience, and our network – and made these available to the charities if they felt these things would help. In chatting to the CEOs over the past year, it became clear that this was so important – far more than we may have realised:

“The exposure to the world that Ajaz comes from helped us so much. We had help very early on regarding marketing and communications from Sam Kelly, and it really helped frame our approach as we moved forward. Since that session, we step by step considered and refreshed our brand, we hired a marketing and communications specialist – that advice really stayed with us”.

- Little Village

“Ajaz helped us with funds and provided communications support for the launch of the National Family Centre and the wider Multibanks expansion. His team helped us with the logo design, and we were able to provide insights to the designers into the stories behind the people who need the help and the difference the items make. The team really listened and created a design that really helps to capture the heart of the whole thing and will help the movement go further, faster than ever”

- The Cottage Family Centre

Often, donors can offer a unique perspective into the work of charities they support. We did this on several occasions to help support matters like fundraising, profile-raising and more. While we researched values-based governance, we talked to a trustee of Candlelighters. He described an experience with the charity that we knew was powerful and one that would inform and strengthen the link between organisational values and day-to-day operations. We just didn't realise just how far those ripples would go. Emily, the CEO, takes up the story.

In your research, you spoke with an incoming trustee about why he was coming to support Candlelighters, and he opened up about his experience as a patient when he was a child and how important Candlelighters was to him when he was going through tough treatment. He treasured the memories of the play workers and the safety they offered from the hard stuff. Getting back in touch with Candlelighters after years of treasuring the memories felt risky to him as he didn't want it to be spoiled by someone taking the call who didn't behave in the way he remembered.

When he finally called, the way he was greeted and engaged by the colleague who took the call showed him that nothing had changed and that the touch and feeling were the same. This was beyond important for him.

You saw the learning for us as an organisation in this moment and, with his permission, shared it with us. He came to our staff day to share this story and the insight into the importance of

all jobs, the reason for the values and living them because no one can know what is happening to the person on the other side of a call – or the cup of tea you make someone. The trustee shared how he remembered his mum had smiled for the first time in months all those years ago when she came back from “having a cup of tea with the woman in pink”. As you knew he would, he shared this to great effect with colleagues – that every job matters, and no one ever “just makes someone a brew” – it is so much more than that. Everyone has the power within them to make or break someone's day through the way they choose to show and live their values. It was the top session of the day – everyone loved it. It helped the leadership to think about how we can develop this across the wider training and development.

Not only that, but this was also a stimulus to the trustee to start his own resilience/ motivational speaking business – sharing how adversity can lead to strength and personal development through life's later challenges – depending on how people choose to look at something. All this from a conversation with Ajaz.org and your spot of the magic that he was sharing – it's the effect you are having – it goes way beyond what you might think”

- Candlelighters



Finally, we have seen how Boards play a vital role in driving the success of a charity – the way Trustees show up for the charity and each other makes a direct difference to the work, and it shows. Advice and support in governance matters was something Ajaz.org could offer, and these two examples show how providing more than money can lead to so much more:

“The Miscarriage Association was lucky enough to receive unrestricted funding from Ajaz. Alongside that came the equally precious gift of non-grant support in the form of a governance review. It was invaluable – I would go so far as to say transformative – for us as a board. Nicola really listened to the views of trustees and senior staff and was able to synthesise these in a way that achieved consensus on what needed to be done. It opened new conversations on the board and led to important steps forward, such as open recruitment for trustees. It strengthened our governance and increased my confidence as Chair. Ever since, I have been evangelical about governance reviews, provided they are carried out by someone with the experience, knowledge and diplomacy that Nicola brought to ours”.

- Amy Braier, Chair of the Miscarriage Association

For The Justice Desk, we spent a morning with the Board, helping the Governors reflect on and reconnect with the purpose of the charity and think of ways to work more effectively as a team.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you! That session was truly amazing and feels like the start of something really special. I could tell it sparked so many important questions and reflections, which is exactly what we need as a board. Everyone was incredibly moved by it, and I’ve already received so many WhatsApps from people saying how much they enjoyed the session and how it’s led them to reflect deeply on their level of commitment. They’re eager to get more involved, and it’s so exciting to see. I cannot thank you enough for giving us your time today. Your insights have strengthened us and our collective mission, and I know this is just the start! 😊.

- Jessica Dewhurst, Founder and Governor, The Justice Desk



Conclusion

The last three years have been extraordinary – the giving, the receiving, the benefits and the learning flowing freely throughout. Most importantly, thousands of children and families have received support, kindness and nourishment in so many ways.

The key to it all, for the charities and for *Ajaz.org*, has been the values-based leadership, absolute alignment to purpose and a belief that no matter what if we stand together, things can get better.

Ajaz.org has established itself as a wise giver, a good friend, and a partner who understands that the business of giving is selfless and all about the pursuit of purpose.

Its greatest work is yet to come.

