



Case study: Graham Spooner, Honorary Treasurer, at Diabetes UK

I served two terms as an Honorary Treasurer at Diabetes UK from 2005 until 2011 – a charity that is very close to my heart. My father died of diabetes at the age of 50 when I was just 15 years old and in 2000 when I too was diagnosed with the disease I decided to get in touch with Diabetes UK to see how I could support the charity. I was elected onto the UK advisory council in 2003 and have since helped the charity raise significant amounts of money by helping to launch their major donor programme.

It was from my initial involvement with Diabetes UK that I was asked to put myself forward as a trustee and later an Honorary Treasurer and was duly elected in 2005. It was because of my good understanding of the charity and my financial background that I was identified by the board of trustees and the chair of Diabetes UK as a suitable candidate.

Not everyone is suitable for the role of Honorary Treasurer because clearly it needs significant financial understanding and knowledge in order to prepare accounts, as well as broader business skills such as good communications and the ability to get on well and influence people. It is also important to possess a degree of confidence for the charity board to have complete trust in you.

My background is in finance and venture capital and after graduating from Cambridge in 1974 I joined ICFC (now 3i) as a graduate trainee and became a director of 3i plc in 1987. Subsequently, I was head of corporate finance at Olliff & Partners and HLB Kidsons, a director of Rea Brothers and Classic Fund Management. My non-executive appointments have included being a director of the listed Downing Classic VCTs, the AIM quoted Dowgate Capital Group and Dunn Line (where I was chairman of its audit committee), and as Honorary Treasurer of Diabetes UK and a trustee of its pension scheme.

My current roles are as an Associate with Amberley Advisory, a firm of corporate finance advisers authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, and my own consultancy, Mentor UK, which prepares emerging businesses and entrepreneurs to become investor ready for third party investment or flotation on AIM. Also, I have also just taken on the role of Vice Chair at NACUE, the National Association for College and University Entrepreneurs.

I don't believe that the role of Honorary Treasurer is like a busman's holiday. It's a very different type of working environment working with a charity or third sector organisation than the world of city finance, and it has its own unique set of challenges and opportunities. From my perspective, I wanted to work with a charity that means a lot to me and to use my skills and experience to help make it more effective and efficient.

During my time with Diabetes UK I not only helped raise over £1 million for diabetes research through the launch of their major donor programme, but also as Honorary Treasurer I also implemented a series of financial processes. I believe these have truly helped the charity become much more effective and efficient, as well as helping the other trustees understand and 'buy into' the finances, which is crucial as all trustees have a legal responsibility.

I am a great believer of 'what gets measured gets done' and of key performance indicators to be able to measure performance accurately. I implemented a series of relevant measurement tools, as well as looked at the percentage of income that was spent on different elements such as research and raising awareness to ensure the charity was using the money they raised to the best ends.

As well as my financial experience it was also important to have good communication skills for the role as Honorary Treasurer as it is necessary to present often complex financial data in a meaningful way to the board of trustees and other key stakeholders.

One of the key things I did whilst at Diabetes UK was helping the trustees understand the accounts and that we were all jointly responsible for these. When I joined the trustees, some would often say to me "if you are happy we are happy". It was important that they all fully understood their role and the legal responsibility they had, and for me to present the financial information in a way that they could easily understand.

For instance I brought a 30 page finance document down to six pages, and two pages for the board, making it much more manageable and meaningful for the trustees, many of which didn't have a financial background.

Anyone thinking of becoming an Honorary Treasurer needs to remember that they are also taking on an ambassador type role as well as an advisory role. I was able through my connections and the many public speaking events I do to work with companies who have since become corporate partners for Diabetes UK including the likes of Tesco and BUPA.

When you put yourself forward as an Honorary Treasurer it's much more than just doing the accounts. It's a chance to influence how efficient a charity is and making sure they use every penny they receive in donations wisely. It's also about meeting new and interesting people, that you wouldn't perhaps come across in your everyday life.

For me it was all of these things, but more important it was the knowledge that I was helping a charity that is working hard to help other diabetes sufferers like me. It's a terrible disease and I was privileged in my role there to be able to offer my knowledge, skills and experience to support such a worthwhile charity.