



By Des Worthington, columnist



‘HELPLESSNESS TO HOPEFULNESS’

Positive giving trends during adverse times

There has been so much bad news during the past 18 months – disease, death, destruction, conflict.

By watching, reading and listening to the media, it can seem that everyone is angry, fearful and preoccupied with their own needs. However, even as the pandemic and politics have stolen the headlines, people have sought out ways to help the most fragile among us. It has become an active pastime for many.

The evidence of people helping people is all around us. One concrete example is charitable giving. According to Giving USA, which publishes a comprehensive report on charitable giving within the United States, financial contributions increased by 5.1% in 2020 to more than \$471 billion. The most significant boost was given to human service organizations, including food banks, homeless shelters and other safety-net charities.

But what about northern Michigan? Many safety-net organizations in our region saw this generosity first-hand. Charlie Bumb, board president of Leelanau Christian Neighbors (LCN), talked about the fantastic support the organization experienced over the last year. LCN found ways to continue its work safely and in doing so, helped donors, volunteers and those they serve feel more hopeful.

“There was an uncertainty and fear at the beginning of the pandemic. Volunteers were isolated at home, and more people needed help. Thankfully we were able to keep services going,” he said. “When you see what you are doing is making even a small difference, then helplessness turned to hopefulness.”

LCN not only experienced increased support, they found that people were giving during this time without being asked. Donors rallied to help their neighbors in need.

“People wanted to learn how they could help their neighbors who were struggling,” Bumb said. “That increased the awareness of the LCN mission, which in turn creates more support for the organization, which means more support for our neighbors, which creates a better quality of life for everyone.”

Another emerging trend is that more people are giving in an unrestricted

manner. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos’s ex-wife Mackenzie Scott is known most recently for giving billions – yes, billions – to various nonprofit organizations dealing with some of the most difficult challenges, including homelessness.

She stated in a June 15 Medium post, “Because we believe that teams with experience on the front lines of challenges will know best how to put the money to good use, we encouraged them to spend it however they choose. Many reported that this trust significantly increased the impact of the gift.”

Goodwill Northern Michigan was fortunate to receive a \$5 million unrestricted grant from Scott.

“The unrestricted nature of Mackenzie Scott’s gift allowed us to think beyond our normal operations,” said Deb Lake, Goodwill’s director of communications.

“We know that complex challenges require systematic community solutions. We are rallying the whole community, including our partners, to come up with creative approaches to ending homelessness locally.”

Nonprofits in northern Michigan play an essential role in the region’s quality of life. When people share what they think makes northern Michigan special, typical responses include the beautiful natural landscapes, robust arts and culture, quality education, access to healthcare, and safe communities.

These quality-of-life factors are enhanced significantly by various nonprofit organizations. When charities like Leelanau Christian Neighbors and Goodwill Northern Michigan are supported generously, they take those resources to figure out ways to improve our communities.

It’s good news and gives hope for a better future for all of us.

Finding a way to make even a tiny difference can bring with it a sense of hope. In her recent book, “The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times,” conservationist Jane Goodall talks about how in the face of endless doom and gloom, there is a way to keep hope alive: Do something.

Even doing simple things such as volunteering at a food pantry or making cookies for the senior center can help. Of course, charitable giving is a very important way

to take action and make a difference. See my list of tips below.

Des Worthington is a Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) experienced in nonprofit governance, operations, and fundraising. She has spent 30 years working with charitably-minded families and organizations to achieve great things. She has led several campaigns for both start-up and large charities, resulting in preserving land for future generations, building medical facilities, and sustaining important community programs.

Tips for Value-based Charitable Giving

You worked hard all year to earn the dollars you have, and now you are thinking about making year-end charitable gifts. Here are some tips on how to feel great about where you make those gifts.

Think about the causes that reflect your values. Talk with family members. If you have kids at home, talk with them about what they think is important and how they want to impact the world. Then look for charities that reflect those values and goals.

Conduct some basic research. Make sure the charities you are considering have the financial capability to carry out their plans. Charity Navigator is a great online resource that evaluates nonprofit organizations’ financial and governance functions.

Discuss results and impact. Connect with the charity and ask about its accomplishments and dreams for the future.

Give. Consider a smaller one-time gift at first, but if a charity is doing a great job, consider making monthly gifts or a multi-year pledge. Nonprofit organizations are trying to change the world by tackling some of the most difficult challenges. Your loyal support will really help sustain their work.

Learn impact. Within six months of making a gift, you should receive information on how your gift is being utilized. If you are curious, connect with the charity and ask about their progress and accomplishments. No one is going to solve homelessness in a short period of time, but providing shelter to those who need it does make a BIG difference one life at a time. Charities are happy to share their successes with you.