

Richard Down
Chairman – Elizabeth Finn Care

Chairman's Annual Meeting Speech

held on Tuesday 10th November 2009
at The Worshipful Company of Innholders,
Innholders Hall, EC4R 2RH

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Now, we are living in difficult times, but we also have a history and a tradition in this country, and in our charity, of rising to a challenge.

Not quite on the same level perhaps, but this has been a very challenging year, not only in the UK, but across much of the world as well. For a charity such as Elizabeth Finn, whose very reason for being is to help those who have fallen on hard times, this was always going to be a demanding year. And so it has proved.

Our challenge as an organisation through these times was to continue to offer a top quality service, with the personal care and attention for which we are renowned, whilst at the same time reacting to an unprecedented demand for our help and support. The fact that we are doing exactly what is required, and rising to the challenge, is a huge tribute to all involved, at every level.

During the past year EFC and Turn2us have seen more than ever the real "hidden poor" within our society. Not only those who have lost their jobs, but others who have fallen ill and found they cannot cope, pensioners who cannot heat their homes, people who have saved all their lives and now find their income reduced to almost nothing, and families who simply cannot make ends meet and have no idea where to turn.

Since our charity was founded in 1897, we have given away in direct financial assistance over £130 million. Today, we give grants totalling over £4 million a year to people from over 120 professions and backgrounds. But our particular strength is not just in giving grants – many charities do that! We like to understand people's individual needs; to ensure that the help we can

give is right for them. That help, whether in the form of a known and trusted caseworker on the end of a phone, or a visitor there to help, or in the fact that our financial support is individual to them – all these things help to make EFC stand out from the rest.

So often it is just the small things that make a real difference – the personal birthday or Christmas card or the hamper at Christmas. Each of these things are tiny in themselves but mean so much more to people struggling with everyday existence.

It seems unbelievable doesn't it that at such a time as that, the financial creditors are still circling, seemingly oblivious to a person's very real need. Thanks to our visitor on the ground, our ability to bring other agencies together, and the fact that we do not let bureaucracy come before need, EFC made a very real difference to a very real person.

Last year, you will remember, we worked hard to drive down our waiting times from application to grant, from 71 days down to just 34. That achievement was recognised with the Third Sector Award for Excellence in Grant Making. We are working to continue to keep it low and to ensure that we can be responsive to individual needs, when they arise. But that is of course only part of the story.

EFC depends hugely on the good will and hard work of our hundreds of people and supporters, up and down the country. Without their willingness to work with us, to spend time learning about what to look for, and to go and see people in their own homes, EFC would not be what it

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is today. The vast majority of our helpers are unpaid, and give us enormous amounts of their time, energy and expertise, and we are extremely grateful to each one of them.

Many of you will know also of the work going on, with funding from the John Ellerman Trust, to help us get the most out of the commitment and effort that our supporters put in. It's a new programme for Volunteer Case Consultants, and it's a great success.

But volunteering doesn't stop at Casework. Our Homes are also reliant on the good will of many who help and support. And of course the work that the various Friends Committees do for residents, is both tireless and hugely valuable, throughout the year. Many of our supporters have been with us for a long time indeed, and two of them, who you know well, Harry & Carol Montagu between them have now contributed 82 years of service. Last year I told you that they were Finalists in the Third Sector Awards, and of course they went on to win the Third Sector's Volunteer of the Year Award.

I am delighted also that our Volunteer Programme was accredited by Volunteering England this year, and their Chief Executive came to our reception at Number 11 Downing Street, especially to recognise Elizabeth Finn's work.

So Thank You to one and all, on behalf of all those who are involved with our Charity.

Good news though these Awards of course are, we also have to recognise that we will never be able to financially support any more than a fraction of those in the UK who fall on hard times. Regrettably, we will never have the resources, on our own, to attempt to do so.

When we discussed this as Trustees some 4 years ago, we were clear that within Elizabeth Finn we had an enormous amount of experience; we had expertise, resources and some cash reserves. As a Charity, we could so easily have just continued on a self-supporting path, not stepping outside what could be called our 'comfort zone'. But, we also realised that such a course would have eventually isolated us from the real world, and would have ignored the plight of some 13.5 million people in this country, who live at or below the poverty line.

When I look at what we as a Charity can do, 3 key words come to the fore.

Care, Help and Hope.

We already do Care very well. We also bring Help and Hope to thousands, that's true. But we also recognised the huge gap between the numbers of people that we could realistically help directly, and the many millions of people who do need Help and Hope.

That is why we created and funded Turn2us. When we came to realise the billions of pounds each year that remain unclaimed by people in real need, and to whom the money was actually due, we realised also that by making a relatively simple level of support and information widely available, we could Help and give Hope to a vast number of people. At the same time we also came to see that there are thousands of charities in this country who could also give Help and Hope, but without a central index or point of contact. It was then that we realised that we could create a service that would indeed make a big difference.

Turn2us is a forerunner, and it does do something that no other service does. It is also surprisingly straight-forward in concept, which is often the

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sign of a great innovation. Turn2us simply links the power of the internet, along with a dedicated helpline, to assist anyone with the process of access to the grants and benefits for which they are eligible – whether it be state benefits, or grants from other charities. To bring all this together in one place, and make it accessible to all, is truly groundbreaking, and we should all be very proud of what Turn2us is achieving. The website has received a quarter of a million visits in the past 6 months alone. The Turn2us service has seen demand more than double in its short life. All the signs are that demand will continue to rise, at an ever increasing rate. I am pleased to say that it is not only us that think this is hugely exciting, a certain Stuart Etherington, (CEO of National Council for Voluntary Organisations) described Turn2us as “the most significant Third Sector development for many years”. The Website has been awarded the Shaw Trust accreditation, acknowledging that it has been designed to the highest levels of best practice for people with disability. The Helpline, which is now expanding to take 30,000 calls, was also awarded with the prestigious Quality Standards Accreditation from The Helpline Association, and an independent evaluation has shown that over 80 % of callers were highly satisfied with the support they receive.

Turn2us is also the first part of the EFC Group to receive Government funding, through the Department of Children, Schools and Families, to run a project working with ‘Home Start’ which enables families with young children to access financial help.

I believe that what Elizabeth Finn and our Turn2us team have achieved is truly excellent, and remarkable.

But I also want to emphasise the need for us to get the balance right. The balance between what Elizabeth Finn stands for in terms of service, quality and heritage, and the value of linking into innovation, new technologies and wider audiences.

A couple of people have asked me if I see a danger, in the success and interest generated by Turn2us possibly being detrimental to Casework, or the other things we do. Far from it, I see the increased visibility and recognition of what we are achieving with Turn2us, as directly contributing to our ability to raise the funds and support we need to maintain and develop all our services. The very nature of Turn2us, as a provider of information and referrals, is complementary to what we, and incidentally a large number of other charities, do. It may indeed have been a simple concept, but the difference is, we acted upon it, and large numbers of other charities, and sections of Government, will benefit. But most importantly, the Help and Hope we can bring to ever greater numbers of those at or near the poverty line, is dramatically increased.

As most of you will know, we have now completed the physical merger of Turn2us back into Elizabeth Finn. This enables us to pool our resources, and create a stronger organisation that the wider public will increasingly come to recognise and support. It is an important step in providing Care, Help and Hope, to ever greater numbers of people, particularly in these difficult times.

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This past year has been very exciting in other ways as well.

We have seen unprecedented media coverage, ranging from one of our Halliwell residents Dulcibella, celebrating her 107th birthday by racing around Brands Hatch – to multiple features in the broadsheets, and on Radio and TV. We even saw acknowledgment of our excellent staff from a somewhat unexpected source, when Paul O'Grady surprised Betty James live on his Channel 4 TV programme, in recognition of her many years service at the Cotswold Home.

EFHL Homes

As we all know, we have in our Homes, a truly superb asset. It wasn't that many years ago, that our Homes lost money year after year. Today they contribute around £3m a year towards the charity. They are simply amongst the best in the business, and they are recognised as such.

It is not only Business and Caring Awards which our Homes rack up with increasing frequency, but endorsements from the likes of Dame Christine Beasley, The Chief Nursing Officer for England, who recently visited Eversfield and said "The level of choice and care that the residents receive is of the highest standard".

I can feel the words of the song coming on, 'You're simply the best!'

But our desire to do the best by our residents is not limited to providing the highest standards of care, superb food and a lovely environment. We actively look for ways to ensure our residents get the most out of life. The world is a fast moving place and the role of the internet now features in everyone's lives – young or old. Merely because

someone is resident in one of our Homes, does not mean they should be shut off from the modern world.

Another important element of our new, merged organisation are the initiatives we are taking in research and policy, to support our work. It will also make sure that we, and others, truly understand the issues that are affecting people in poverty, now and in the future.

Our work in this area began at the time we established Turn2us, but recent news has highlighted the importance of what our teams are doing, for instance a move by government to implement an EU directive, would mean that mobility scooters became classed for tax purposes in the same bracket as a Formula One Racing Car! This would increase the cost of one of these scooters by 10%, something that would hit not only charities such as ourselves, who often pay for them, but those individuals who pay for them themselves. We were able to attract the support of amongst others Professor Stephen W. Hawking and in only a few weeks, we had cross party support, here and in Brussels; a County Council tabling its opposition, and moves afoot in the Scottish Parliament to oppose it as well. Only two months into the campaign I am pleased to be able to report that the bureaucrats are engaged in a partial climb down. This is just an example of how our organisation can mobilise support to help highlight an issue affecting those most in need.

We shall also shortly be launching the results of a ground breaking piece of research commissioned through Yougov amongst the 35–45 year old age group. It's called – 'My Generation'. This research, the first of its kind in this country, specifically looks

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at the effect of Debt on the current generation. These are, after all, the people who may one day end up coming to EFC for help, if they suffer a life changing episode in the future. The results of this research are stark and startling.

Finally, I have spoken about our Homes, our ongoing commitment to Casework; and the new systems and thinking we are adopting with the Turn2us service, but there is also an area of Elizabeth Finn's work that is often taken for granted; and that is the quiet efficiency of our management and administration systems. What we have found over the years is that other charities also see the opportunity to work with us, and to take advantage of the way we manage our operations. Charities like the Lloyds Support Group, or the Dresden Homes Trust, where we have taken on the administration and management function, and their assets have been combined with ours, to provide a more cost-effective way of working. If we refer to these as 'mergers' of other charities with Elizabeth Finn, we can expect that trend to continue, as both our profile and our capabilities increase. It is my belief, and hope, that Elizabeth Finn will not only continue to deliver the highest standards of Care, as well as Help and Hope, to an ever larger number of people in need, but that we will also increasingly be able to help fellow charities through both our Turn2us service, and in providing administration and management support, through mergers and partnerships, whenever it's appropriate.

So, our Charity and our Work advances on all fronts!

I am sure I can speak for us all, in saying, that we each recognise how fortunate we are to have had the upbringing, education and the opportunities that we have. Whether you refer to it as being privileged, or from a professional background, it comes to much the same thing. When our Charity was originally established, it was to help and care for people from a privileged background, who had fallen on hard times. But it was also the case, in those days, that the means to help millions of people just did not exist; except perhaps in the hands of governments.

In the 21st Century of course things are very different.

We will, and must, go on helping and supporting those from privileged and professional backgrounds, who have fallen on hard times. Both because their need is just as great as anyone else's, and because that has always been central to what Elizabeth Finn as a charity does. But, we are now in an age where technology and systems do enable information and support to be made available, to literally millions of people, from all walks of life. The new systems we have developed enable us to do exactly that; to make information and help available to all those in this country who need it.

By providing a focal point, through internet and phone, for those in need, and by linking in the thousands of charities that can also provide help, we can bring something uniquely valuable in the fight to alleviate poverty; and we can be justly proud of the role we can play.

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We will of course continue to financially support as many people as we can, from professional backgrounds. But we also now have the opportunity to put Elizabeth Finn, with Turn2us, at the forefront of the fight against poverty. The leadership profile we can build, and the support we can harness, will be invaluable in raising awareness of all our operations, and it will ensure that we are seen as not only relevant to today's society, and its needs, but that we are acknowledged as leaders in the role of providing solutions.

Thank you.

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