Sponsor a mate

Sponsoring a friend who's doing something for charity will only scratch the surface, will probably only be a drop in the ocean... so what? Do it anyway.

Whether it's dressing up for World Book Day, challenging a world record, or hoping to change the way the world thinks, people do this for others.

Of course, they do it for themselves too. It makes them feel good about themselves and feel that they're making a difference to something that matters to them... but the bigger impact is on others.

Two challenges are on my mind at the moment, both personal in different ways.

Alison, my wife, is walking the 80 mile Pilgrim Way from Southwark Cathedral to Canterbury Cathedral to raise money to refurbish, rebuild and rethink our parish church in London.

It's easy to take our urban and community heritage for granted. Churches have always been there and always will be, no? No.

Ours was built with community funds as the railways ushered in the explosion of London's population 150 years ago. That's a long time for brickwork, guttering and roof tiles to keep a place of worship up.

The £20,000 the walkers hope to raise won't pay for everything, but will pay to start the work and, maybe more importantly, will show people what it takes to run a church in a 21st Century global city where we're all too busy to think, never mind pray.

So, put your hand in your pocket if you care for the community you live in... a church gives it a centre and a heart. Well worth the effort. (MyDonate page here.)
The other is a national media fest. Zoe Ball is cycling 300 miles from Blackpool to Brighton for Sport Relief to raise funds for mental health support. She'll be on Radio Two every morning giving updates and millions will hear about the cause.

She is doing it in memory of her boyfriend, Billy Yates, who took his own life after years struggling with depression. Billy was a close friend of one of my mates, Brad, so that makes it personal.

Mental health may be flavour of the month: from prime minister to radio presenters, everyone’s talking about it. But that conversation isn’t always heard where it matters… by the day to day distressed, by the longterm strugglers, by the anxious and fearful and their families and friends.

Mental illness is no more someone’s fault than cancer is.

Give her charity some money, then, for those people - donations here. The cash may not be the biggest issue; after all the NHS spends billions on mental health. But the more she raises and the more noise she makes, the bigger the impact on awareness and priority setting. If any administrator is thinking of backsliding on commitments to mental health, this keeps them on their public toes.

Nothing changes if you look the other way.

Alison and Zoe, thank you. And thank you to all those who back them in their challenges.

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