



Positive Tracks: A Story of Generation Next Philanthropy

By Gioia C. Perugini and Nini Meyer

Much has been written about the “next generation” and its integration into family philanthropy. How will they get involved? Will their philanthropic initiatives look different from those of their parents and grandparents? What tools and resources can help them be most effective?

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EXPLORING KEY ISSUES IN FAMILY GIVING

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Nini Meyer was raised in a family that held philanthropy as a core value. From an early age, she observed her parents and her grandmother as they supported nonprofits in their communities and beyond. Her mother has been a trustee of their family’s foundation for many years, and Nini took on the role of trustee of one of the family’s charitable trusts nearly 10 years ago.

“Helping to deliver the philanthropic tradition my grandmother cultivated is an incredible honor, an important responsibility, and a key learning experience,” says Nini. “It’s also very grounding and humbling to see the yearly impact stemming from Jane Cook’s spirit of generosity; each year, I become more awestruck by the opportunity she created for family members to truly make a difference through the vehicles she built.”

Even with this level of involvement, philanthropy remained at “arm’s length” to Nini in many respects—it was a meaningful thread, but one that lacked a passionate, personal connection. That all changed when Nini saw first-hand the power of an emotionally charged, forward looking and professionally organized effort. Her philanthropic epiphany happened organically—outside of a boardroom—through an experience that demanded support and commitment beyond traditional charitable giving.

Two driving factors made this change possible: Nini’s personal commitment and the innovative and proactive environment of her family office which provided “one-stop-shop” support. Nini’s idea quickly evolved from vision into reality through a combination of hard work and timely, skilled, outside expertise. With these





guideposts in place, Nini suddenly found herself defined as a philanthropist and founding director of Positive Tracks.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF SPORT FOR GOOD

Positive Tracks is a national, youth-centric nonprofit based in New Hampshire that helps young people get active and give back using the power of sport. Positive Tracks works with existing charitable athletic efforts and benefits charities by matching the fundraising efforts of youth participants, ages 23 and under. Beyond helping young people turn athletic achievement into meaningful philanthropy, the Positive Tracks program provides athletic events, charities, and youth participants with tools, materials, and support to boost youth fitness and engagement. Positive Tracks spokespersons include Bode Miller, Patrick Dempsey, Ethan Zohn, Travis Roy, and Majka Burhardt.

Programmatic impact is measured through the number of youth reached, miles traveled and charitable dollars raised through youth fundraising efforts. By October 30, 2013, Positive Tracks reached over 14,000 young people directly through partner athletic events, and hundreds of thousands more with its broad call to action. Youth participants will have traveled over 133,000 miles via various sports (22 different athletic activities, to date) to raise over \$2.6 million for multiple Positive Tracks charity partners.

“Our measured impact is tangible and exponential,” Nini says. “But what’s also exciting to me about the impact of our program is that we’ve found an amazingly motivated, global community of young people, charities, and funders who are all working to use the universal language of sport to tackle issues ranging from environmental stewardship and protecting our oceans, to tackling obesity, poverty, hunger and disease, to reaching across boundaries to champion peace, change, and social integration. A very rewarding aspect of this experience is the ability to share learnings, hope, and enthusiasm between charities, youth, and multiple generations. Because all of our missions are aligned, we collaborate daily through sharing tools, models, ideas, and youth ‘aha!’ moments.”



Positive Tracks began as a grassroots effort in a small New Hampshire community. The concept was conceived in 2009, when Nini’s two sons came home from school wanting to help Cam, a classmate recently diagnosed with Leukemia. The question was: How do we show Cam that we care? How can we help him enough to actually make a difference? Recognizing that her sons felt powerless, Nini sought the means for this group of friends to show authentic compassion and support. Together with the backing of Cam’s community and school, they founded a walk named Cam’s Course, which became the youth component of an existing Half Marathon benefiting the Children’s Hospital at Dartmouth (CHaD), the hospital where Cam was being treated. The best news was: every dollar raised by a young person age 23 and under would be doubled and given to CHaD. Soon, other neighboring communities joined the athletic tribute to Cam, and the gesture became a learning experience for the greater community.



Using athletics to teach and activate philanthropy is constructive on many levels—ranging from personal health benefits to global solutions. The build and launch of Positive Tracks itself was transformational to Nini because it sparked passion, demanded creativity and enthusiasm, relied on teamwork, and employed a healthy degree of risk-taking and physical effort.



Not surprisingly, Positive Tracks relies on these same principles to inspire young people, to teach active philanthropy, and to foster the essential peer-to-peer connection that builds the success of youth-powered civic activism. Once young people can identify how to sink their teeth into building a platform that others can use too, an amazing sense of accomplishment sets in to forever change how a young person views his/her role in the world. This sense of ownership cultivates passion, enthusiasm and teamwork; and has a multiplier effect, creating more youth activism.

TAKING AN IDEA FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

How did Nini take the Positive Tracks concept from idea to reality? First, she found crucial partners in local leadership and donors who were eager to help young people tap their community spirit and sense of social responsibility. After the first \$100,000 Positive Tracks Youth Challenge Grant was successfully matched for CHaD in New Hampshire, word spread to local and national celebrities; a second charity using a large-scale biking event as a fundraising platform signed on as a Positive Tracks charity partner.

Over the next two years, Positive Tracks cultivated several more partnerships with national and global charities to engage youth audiences across the nation and to impact a broader audience internationally. In 2014, 10 Positive Tracks charity partners will host 165 athletic events in 30 states and 4 countries.

Building an effective funding, giving, and money-holding mechanism took a year of hard work from all involved, as well as indispensable guidance and expertise from the team at Hemenway & Barnes’ philanthropy advisors. Nini’s family office provided strategic planning and program development guidance, legal consultation and logistical coordination, plus an essential dose of confidence and emotional support. Equally important, they helped Nini select the appropriate legal structure to house Positive Tracks, creating a private operating foundation and overseeing the application for exemption to the IRS. This operating foundation houses a pool of funds called the Positive Tracks Matching Grant Fund, which subsidizes Positive Tracks Youth Challenge Grants, as well as Positive Tracks centralized marketing, curriculum development, and administrative support.

Positive Tracks’ sense of ownership cultivates passion, enthusiasm, and teamwork.

“Our partnership with Positive Tracks has been effective for two reasons. First, we focus on meeting our clients where they are—Nini wanted to be hands-on in executing her dream for combining athletic events and youth to create powerful philanthropy. We kept her in the driver’s seat but used our insight and expertise to guide her throughout the process. Some might call it “driver’s ed,” but we like to call it partnership. Our long relationship with Nini’s family helped,” commented Nancy B. Gardiner, Director of Family Office and Philanthropy Services at Hemenway & Barnes.

Nini’s family’s foundation, Jane’s Trust, provided the original seed capital for the Positive Tracks Matching Grant Fund, while Positive Tracks broadens its



base of funding support by cultivating the Positive Tracks Funding Alliance, a group of philanthropic and corporate entities committed to youth development initiatives surrounding youth health and wellness, leadership, social entrepreneurship, and volunteerism. Lisa Steele, a trustee of Jane’s Trust, remarks on Positive Tracks, “As a supporter and funder of Positive Tracks, the crucial thing to me is the innovative model, the double whammy effect. By giving to Positive Tracks, I’m supporting several charities through leveraged challenge grants, and I’m also changing how young people think about their role in the world. I’m helping kids use their own energy and creativity as change-makers and citizens. What also speaks to me is that creativity is stressed. I love that Positive Tracks teaches young people to use whatever they have, whatever they’re interested in, to help the world. It’s youth social entrepreneurship at play. This fits into our own family’s vision for how we want to invest in, and support, the next generation.”

Positive Tracks teaches young people to use whatever they have, whatever they’re interested in, to help the world.

BEYOND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Beyond youth development, Positive Tracks plays another essential role that brings Nini’s experience as a long-time donor into focus. From the inception of Positive Tracks, Nini’s intention was to create charitable leverage for donors like herself who were interested in empowering and educating next generation change-makers. Cultivating the Positive Tracks Funding Alliance not only enables donors to incentivize young people with Positive Tracks Youth Challenge Grants, but also lends donors the “double whammy” impact of empowering Positive Tracks youth participants and supporting multiple Positive Tracks charity partners with the same dollars.

This approach creates exponential donor impact and brings broad visibility to the Positive Tracks



Funding Alliance by providing messaging and incentives tied to large-scale athletic events. Athletic events provide their own built-in audiences, visibility platforms, and electronic fundraising mechanisms—all of which expand the broad reach of the Positive Tracks program and its Funding Alliance.

Together, Nini’s family, her family office, and the Positive Tracks Funding Alliance have enabled next generation philanthropists (both youth participants and funders) to activate four intentions simultaneously:

- Build a global youth development model that launches the concept of youth “philanthletics” and brings it to scale
- Demonstrate to our youngest generation the benefits of active, outdoor lifestyles, hands-on philanthropy, and global stewardship
- Help multiple charities engage and empower young people to achieve their mission and make the world a better place
- Build a community of families that can work together to introduce their children to philanthropy and community engagement.

BUILDING A SUSTAINED VISION

With ongoing support from her family, the Positive Tracks operations team, the Positive Tracks board, outside consultants, and her family office, Nini continues to help the Positive Tracks network of young people, charity partners, and athletic event partners build and sustain the Positive Tracks call to action. Bringing these values and opportunities into schools,



athletic clubs and teams, and family recreation show kindergartners through college students that they can help the world. “To me, the word philanthropy means leveraging what you do daily for the benefit of social good. I’m continually inspired by the power of philanthetics in delivering a fun, healthy dose of civic action to a broad-reaching youth demographic. As a mother of two boys myself, I’m looking forward to helping more charities, logging in more miles, and reaching more young people with outdoor adventure, leadership, and self-discovery that turns their “good sweat” into active change agent material—no matter what their occupation in life turns out to be. It’s a hopeful, sweaty vision!”

- To learn more about Positive Tracks, see their new promotional video, [Find a Starting Line](#).



- To hear additional perspectives from Nini Meyer and other Generation Next donors about the inspiration and vision for their giving, see the replay of the National Center’s January 2014 webinar, [Generation Next: Young Donors Inspiring a New Generation of Philanthropists](#).

TOP TEN TAKEAWAYS FOR GENERATION NEXT DONORS AND FAMILIES

1. **Follow your own passion if you want to make it happen.** Nini had philanthropy and athletics in her history, and Positive Tracks remains compelling to her because she has found a natural intersection between two interests.
2. **Use your personal assets and resources—whatever they are.** Nini recognized that being part of a philanthropic family provided her with a perfect spring-board to launch an ambitious project. Leveraging these resources and connections was crucial to project success.
3. **Be innovative and creative.** Just because one structure or mechanism won’t work for what you want to accomplish, seek another way. There are a myriad of models for philanthropy—and where there’s a will, there’s a way.
4. **Keep it simple.** If you can’t pitch your idea in 10 seconds or less, you need to go back to the drawing board.
5. **The millennial generation is unique and impressive.** They’re civic. They care. And they are worth an investment of time and energy.
6. **“Hands-on” is the cornerstone of philanthropic activism.** Making physical demands on your body and your brain not only increases service learning potential and personal transformation, but also infuses civic efforts with a sense of urgency and ownership. Positive Tracks grew quickly and solidly because of Nini’s commitment to use her own time and talent to grow it from idea to reality.
7. **Find supportive, positive, can-do advisors and use them.** Whether it’s the staff of your family foundation, your local community foundation, your family office or a close friend or colleague, trust the people around you to help you make good decisions and to structure your philanthropy in a way that ignites your passion and makes sense for your own situation.
8. **Enthusiasm opens doors and sparks action.**
9. **Treasure your family history** and use it to forge your own path, one that makes historical values personal and helps you transfer your values to your own children.
10. **Philanthropy doesn’t automatically require great wealth,** notable age, writing out checks, or sitting in a boardroom. Philanthropy can simply mean connecting what you do daily to helping others.

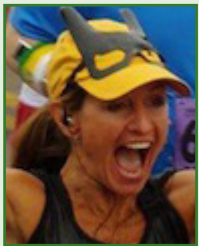


About the Authors



Gioia C. Perugini is Associate Director of Family Office and Philanthropy Services at Hemenway & Barnes, LLP. During her 14 year tenure at Hemenway & Barnes she has worked with dozens of families on their charitable giving. Her clients

rely on her to design and implement charitable giving strategies, research particular charities, negotiate gifts of cash or tangible assets and coordinate family meetings and community service opportunities. She is a frequent writer and speaker on a variety of philanthropic and nonprofit management topics, and is active in her local community. She has been an advisor to Positive Tracks since its inception and also has been an active participant in Positive Tracks events with her own family.



Nini Meyer is the Founder/Director of PositiveTracks, a national, youth-centric non-profit that incentivizes young people to be active and philanthropic using the global platform of sport. Nini is a Trustee of the Jane B Cook Charitable Trusts;

member of Friends of CHaD Board; Overseer of Hopkins Center For The Arts At Dartmouth; Community Engagement Director of the CHaD HERO Half Marathon; and Overseer of Lebanon College in NH. Through Positive Tracks, Nini helps thousands of Millennials and multiple charity partners turn hours of athletic achievement into transformative philanthropy and doubled dollars. She graduated from CU Boulder with a degree in theatre.

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national network of giving families every step of the way on their philanthropic journey. Families learn how to transform their values into effective giving that makes a positive and enduring impact on the communities they serve. *Together, we make great things happen.*

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