

# GENERATIONS OF GIVING

At 93, **Annette Wallis** is about to take well-deserved retirement from her role as a trustee at the Southall Trust. She talks to Sarah Myers about her six decades at the family-run grant-maker, which was founded by her grandfather Wilfred Francis Southall in the 1930s.

## Could you tell us about your grandfather, Wilfred, who set up the Southall Trust?

He was quite a personality and a real people person. He had a big house on the outskirts of Birmingham and was quite 'well to do'. He was a good man. He wanted to use the money he'd made [from the family pharmaceutical company, Southall Bros & Barclay] to do something positive. I remember he had a particular interest in helping people in the poorer housing estates of Birmingham.

My grandmother once wrote a humorous poem about him called 'The man who came to Sunday dinner', because he was so busy and involved in his social work that he never seemed to be at home.

## Did charity and social justice play a significant role in your childhood?

Yes, it did. Charitable giving, peace and human rights were very much part of our upbringing and our Quaker faith. My father, Corder Catchpool, was a pacifist. During the first world war he'd served voluntarily in the Friends Ambulance Unit, which was founded by the Quakers. But when conscription came in, he'd been a conscientious objector and was imprisoned for more than two years for his pacifist views. During the second world war, he set up the Bombing Restriction Committee with Vera Brittain [which called upon both Britain and Germany to stop bombing civilians]. So, working for peace has always been important to me.

## When did you first become involved with the Southall Trust?

My mother Gwen ran the trust with her brother, Kenneth Southall, and I was invited to help them. That was over 60 years ago now and I've been involved ever since. Even today, I've been reviewing funding applications. I consult with my



daughter who's now a trustee. The trust is run by members of the extended family.

## You must have seen a lot of changes since you joined...

The trust has changed enormously. It began as a small-scale, localised trust for the Birmingham area. I remember my

mother and uncle consulting each other about cheques for amounts like £40 or £50. That's enormously different from what it is today. It's grown in an amazing way. It has a real power to help change things.

A lot of the funding we've been giving recently has been for poverty-related projects. That's just how circumstances are at the moment. I particularly enjoy supporting efforts to do with working for peace – I'm very glad when we get those applications.

I believe the trust can make so much difference and really alter lives for the better. It's very worthwhile – and not a bit boring!

## How do you feel about stepping down after 60 years?

I do feel a little sad. The trust is important to me, and I've always spent quite a lot of time thinking about the funding applications and investigating some more closely, as well as going to meetings with the other trustees. It's always felt like a useful thing that I could do for others.

But I'm in my 90s now, so I think it's the right time. It feels appropriate, because we have new trustees joining – another granddaughter and my great niece. They'll bring in some new, young thinking and it'll be really interesting to have them there.

The trust will be looking at new directions and new ways of working. I think there's exciting changes coming and exciting times ahead. I'll watch with great interest. But I will miss it.

**The Southall Trust** awards grants totalling around £350,000 a year to charities focusing on environmental action and sustainability, peace and reconciliation, social action, or Quaker work.