



Famous and Celebrity Philanthropists

The Mockingbird Foundation

Read our interview with Kristen Godard, current funding committee chair for the Mockingbird Foundation, a grantmaking organization started by a group of fans of the band Phish that supports music education programs for children.

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Hello Kristen. Thank you for talking with *Youth in Philanthropy* about the Mockingbird Foundation and providing tips for how other groups of fans can get started with charitable activities.

Youth in Philanthropy (YIP): What is the Mockingbird Foundation?

Kristen Godard (KD): The Mockingbird Foundation, Inc. is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization founded in 1997 by fans of the band Phish. The Foundation has released *The Phish Companion*, a 928-page book about the band and its music, and *Sharin' in the Groove*, a double-disc tribute album. All net proceeds go to charity, supporting music education for children.

YIP: How did the foundation get started?

KD: The Mockingbird Foundation, Inc. was formed by fourteen fans who decided to compile a book that would represent the entire community of fans. The group first got together in the Fall of 1996 and having seen a thread on PhishNet about the various books that have been written about the band, decided to create their own. We legally incorporated in the state of New York as a nonprofit corporation.

YIP: Where does the name Mockingbird come from?

KD: Fans creating the book found inspiration in the PHISH song "*Famous Mockingbird*."

YIP: What fields does the foundation support?

KD: The Mockingbird Foundation is particularly interested in projects that encourage and foster creative expression in any musical form (including composition, instrumentation, vocalization, or improvisation,) but also recognizes broader and more basic needs within conventional musical instruction. The Foundation encourages applications associated with diverse or unusual musical styles, genres, forms, and philosophies.

Our support for education includes the provision of instruments, texts, and office materials,



and grants for learning space, practice space, performance space, and instructors/instruction. The Foundation is particularly interested in projects that foster self-esteem and free expression, but we do not typically fund music therapy.

The Foundation is also interested in targeting children up to eighteen years of age, but will consider projects that benefit college students, teachers, instructors, or adult students. We are particularly (though not exclusively) interested in programs that benefit disenfranchised groups, including those with low skill levels, low income, or little education; with disabilities or terminal illnesses; and in foster homes, shelters, hospitals, prisons, or other remote or isolated situations.



YIP: Are there any limitations?

KD: Grants range in size from \$50.00 to \$5,000.00 and are made on a one-time basis. The Foundation is particularly interested in organizations with low overhead, innovative approaches, and/or collaborative elements to their work. Grants are typically made only to nonprofit organizations with tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service code, or that have a sponsoring agency with this status. Public schools are tax-exempt and are eligible for funding, although grantees cannot be independent of the school, the project must take place at the school, and must be supervised by the applicable municipality. (Organizations selected to submit a full proposal will be required to submit documentation of their status as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt institution or as a public school.) The Foundation does not normally consider grants to individuals or to fund research, fundraising organizations or events, programs that promote or engage in religious or political activities, or organizations outside the United States. It is hoped that nonprofit organizations that apply for support are operated and organized without discrimination in hiring staff or providing services on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin or disability.

YIP: How does the foundation actually operate?

KD: The Mockingbird Foundation collects revenue from two principal products: *The Phish Companion*, a 928-page book about Phish published by Backbeat (formerly Miller Freeman), and *Sharin' in the Groove*, a two-disc release of 23 acts covering the music of Phish. Since there is no paid staff, a board of directors oversees all administrative activities. Individual projects are conducted and managed by working groups of volunteers. No member of the board or any working group, and no one contributing material to the Foundation's projects, receive any salary or wages.

YIP: Tell us more about the book.

KD: *The Phish Companion* is the most comprehensive and authoritative book available to Phish fans, an encyclopedic desk reference including an unprecedented compendium of setlists, song histories, and show reviews, covering all facets of the band's mystique. The tremendous 928-page tome [credits nearly 1,500 distinct contributors](#). Additional support was provided from official sources, including the band's archivist and the band's main [lyricist](#) (who wrote the book's foreword.) The book includes extensive information that has never before been made public, and elegant treatment and integration of information which had been available, but inconsistent among several other sources. The book's accessible tone and fascinating content appeal to casual fans as well as well-versed veterans. Its crown jewel is the [setlist file](#), which is easily the definitive record of Phish's concerts from 1983 to the present. It is chock full of [reviews](#), statistics, [song histories](#) (discussions of the origins, interpretations, and evolution of each of Phish's songs,) [creative texts](#), [photographs](#) and [artwork](#).

YIP: Can you tell me more about the CD?

KD: It was produced independently. The artists played for free, and all our net revenues go to music education for children. The contributors represent influences on Phish, rather than the other way around. It includes 18 genres, including rock, pop, folk, bluegrass, jazz, symphony, marching band, barbershop, punk, ambient, and drum 'n bass. The tracks are organized like a live show, with two sets and an encore.

YIP: What would you tell other groups of fans that are interested in trying something like this?

KD: When fans get together they can do great things! Get a group together and get creative. We are lucky to have the Internet to act as a vehicle for work on our projects. It allows fans from all over the United States (and even the world) to contribute their time and talent for a good cause. The Mockingbird Foundation has now contributed almost \$200,000 to music education for children, and is already preparing to disburse new grants in early 2004. If you care about something, it is possible to make a difference!

YIP: What advice would you give to young people who are thinking of doing charitable work?

KD: Give it a try, it is a great way to learn new skills, meet people and help your community! For example, the Bay Area, the base of the Foundation's operations, has such a large, diverse nonprofit community that you are bound to find an organization right for you. The [Volunteer Center of San Francisco](#) has a "Youth Empowerment Program" to

promote youth service. They have an online guide called "Guide to Youth Volunteer Opportunities" and other terrific resources. Even if you don't have a lot of time to "go" someplace to volunteer, you can still help out. Go to the [Virtual Volunteering Program of Volunteer Match](#). You will see a bunch of links to organizations that have virtual projects. There are so many ways you can give back and it is amazing how much of a difference even one person can make. Look at what a bunch of fans were able to do!

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