



Article in the Big Issue

Countdown star Susie Dent: Why 'willanthropy' is my new favourite word

The mashup word will change the way we look at wills and help charities

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W I L L A N T H R O P Y

I've always loved linguistic mashups. These are new words created by blending parts of existing ones together, such as 'bromance' or 'brunch'. It's true that some of them – like 'chillax' – now grate on the nerves, and others can feel a little ungainly (I'm thinking 'mansplaining' here), but this has become by far the most popular method of inventing new words, and there's no denying their usefulness.

The writer Lewis Carroll named them 'portmanteaux', likening them to two parts of a folding suitcase. And he himself gave us some of the best: 'chortle', for example, is a perfect blend of 'chuckle' and 'snort'. But my favourite mashup in a long time is much more recent, and not only is it smoothly creative, but it also carries a powerful message. Let me introduce you to 'willanthropy'.

'Willanthropy' is the creation of [Remember a Charity](#), a consortium of around 200 wonderful charities who are on a mission to change the way we talk about wills. It is of course a portmanteau of 'will' and 'philanthropy', and so it does exactly what it says on the tin. 'Willanthropy' replaces the more formal expression 'legacy giving', which might suggest leaving a bigger pot of money to a charity than we are capable of. By contrast, 'willanthropy' nicely conveys altruism in all its forms and, crucially, in any amount, large or small, for such gifts can be alongside, not instead of, those we leave for our loved ones.

Many of us have been close to a charity or community project at some point in our lives. It might be a local food bank or hospice, an animal rescue centre or sports foundation. We might want to support medical research or support for those going through illness. 'Willanthropy' allows us to freely choose any organisation with which we feel some

connection. It also enables the precious work of that charity to carry on so that, bit by bit, we can make the world a little better.

I remember my surprise at learning that six out of 10 lifeboat launches are dependent on money left to the RNLI in wills, while the British Heart Foundation receives over 50% or more of their funding from these important gifts. The NSPCC also receives a significant amount of their funding (an average of over £20m per year) from the wills of those who would like the charity's vital work to carry on for generations to come. While it's great to see the strides taken, there is much more work to be done.



Susie Dent. Image: Ken McKay / ITV / Shutterstock

Of course, death is far from a popular subject for discussion. Death *and* money make for a double whammy: a combination of two of the greatest taboos today. Research conducted by Remember a Charity suggests that one in three of us have struggled to tackle conversations about death, despite two thirds of us agreeing that they are so important to have.

I have spent my life exploring language, and I've seen at first hand the power of words to change our mindset, however insignificant they might at first appear. Expressions such as 'body positive' and 'age positive', for example, have reframed our thinking about these issues in quite profound ways.

I see 'willanthropy' as another, powerful, step in the right direction. The making of a will, and conversations with our loved ones about the wishes and hopes we would like to reflect in it, can be a hugely positive and empowering experience. Bit by bit, and through the medium of words, we can destigmatise the subject of death and how we plan for it. Even the smallest amount of money can collectively bring about incredible change for the good.

By the way, if you're interested in learning my favourite blend of all time, it would have to be a 'snaccident': the inadvertent eating of an entire packet of biscuits when you meant to have just the one. If I had the power to nudge that into a dictionary, I would. But English is entirely democratic, and it's up to all of us to move it forward. I hope that very much, before long, 'willanthropy' will find its way into our lexicons too. After all, at the heart of philanthropy is the Greek word for love.

What better way to show love towards our fellow humans than keeping our connections to them alive?

Remember a Charity wants to make talking about making your will easier.

Use your will power

An initiative to highlight how vital legacies are for many charities is taking place this month

Nobody likes thinking about death, particularly their own. But there's a more inspiring way to approach this taboo subject: how people will remember us and the legacy we can leave behind. This year's Remember a Charity Week, from 9-15 September, is themed on the funny moments, interesting hobbies and quirks for which each of us will be remembered by our loved ones.

But Remember a Charity - a consortium of more than 200 organisations that rely on donations in wills to continue their work - also wants to highlight how you can deepen those memories with a legacy.



The lexicographer Susie Dent

It has teamed up with Countdown star Susie Dent to explore the power of language, and has come up with the word 'willanthropy' to inspire us to leave a gift to charity, after we have first looked after our family and friends. Research commissioned by the charity found that almost 35% of people associate wills with money.

It also revealed that more than a third of us avoid conversations about them because we don't like to think about death. Yet nearly two-thirds agreed it is important to have these conversations with loved ones.

The survey also confirmed that most people believe words can transform hearts and minds. By adopting the term willanthropy, Remember a Charity hopes to reduce the stigma around wills and to help us see them as hopeful and inspirational.

UK charities have become increasingly reliant on gifts in wills, which generate about £4

billion a year in vital funding. Remember a Charity's partnering charities, such as the British Heart Foundation and Dogs Trust, say that at least 50% of their funding comes from legacies. The NSPCC receives an average of £20 million a year from wills.

'Willanthropy aims to bring positivity into an area that can be a source of anxiety for many,' says Dent. 'We want to move the conversation instead towards one of inspiration and hope.'

Lucinda Frostick, director of Remember a Charity, confirms this is working. 'The willanthropy movement is growing, with around 100 people a day across the UK now choosing to leave a gift to charity in their will. It's wonderful to see how many people want to leave the world a better place. We all have different touchpoints with charities throughout our lives, and a gift in your will - no matter how small - can make a vital difference.'

Many people will choose a charity with which they have a particular connection. Sisters Nicola and Karen decided to leave gifts in their wills to Dementia UK to thank the charity for helping them to care for their father. 'Mum and Dad were married for 60 years, and my sister and I always lived at home - we were unusually close and thought of ourselves as the Four Musketeers,' says Karen

'Dad had vascular dementia, and was doing quite well until about ten months before he passed away. He had a number of falls and was in hospital, so we were advised to contact Sue, a local Admiral specialist nurse, through Dementia UK. She was calming and able to put us at ease. 'After Dad passed away she was a tremendous support, and even came to his funeral. After his death we took part in a Time for a Cuppa event for Dementia UK, which raised over £1,000. Through my work as a dance teacher I also organised a show to raise money for the charity.

'My sister, my mum and I have all decided to leave gifts in our wills to Dementia UK. We have so many wonderful memories to look back on. Leaving gifts in our wills is just one way in which Dad's memory will live on.'

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