Last year at the volunteers event I spoke about volunteers and paid staff being two sides of the same coin, two lungs, in a symbiotic relationship and needing each other in order to be the best versions of ourselves. Im proud to say that this is a reality in our day to day dealings – one Compassion Acts team, with different hours, responsibilities and roles, but sharing the goal of changing lives.

Today I want to reflect on the nature of ‘Celebration’ itself. Why do we do this for volunteers? Is it because some text book says its good thing to do?. Surely there is more than that? What is there to celebrate?

I’ll tell 3 short stories to illustrate the dilemma we face when considering ‘celebration’ – especially in our reticent British culture.

* A year or so ago someone gave me some feedback, now I do enjoy receiving feedback and I promise you that I always take time to reflect on it. What we need to get better at is coming back to the feedback giver with some response. Anyway, this feedback said that in our publicity or messaging we needed to watch out for being ‘too self congratulatory’. That really struck me.
* A few weeks ago we had a really rubbish week in the office. A part time member of staff had passed away in the same week we had been supporting a much loved colleague who had experienced personal tragedy. Now if Im honest, for a brief moment considered cancelling this celebration. For me in that moment I was not feeling it, there was really nothing to celebrate.
* Recently I went to visit the boss of another charity in the North West, and within moments, even before we could settle into the meeting we were told that he runs *the best foodbank in the country*. No self doubt or room for growth there! It did though leave me wondering, if we could just borrow a little bit of that confidence and gratitude.

These three states of mind come at the concept of celebration from their own angles – and they all fall short.

The truth is that there is a lot to celebrate – no matter how we may feel in a given moment when overwhelmed by the brokenness of stuff.

Its true that being overly self congratulatory in tone, is off-putting. But is saying nothing of value or interest the answer?

The response to exaggerated or outlandish claims is not to downplay our achievements at all . There is great value in speaking out clearly and confidently – maybe especially in these uncertain, fearful and unkind times.

Now, we are humble enough to know we are not always perfect and are constantly learning and improving. But we sell ourselves short if we don’t celebrate. So lets all raise the cheers and the applause for each of us. Today’s award nominations list is a reminder, in case we were feeling overly self conscious and self effacing – that there are real and tangible achievements to celebrate. Lives are being impacted and changed. So lets throw off our caution and applaud all of volunteers.

American author Marianne Williamson writes “ Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine”

Richard Owens, CEO 12th March 2024