

## **Compassion in Politics Q&A**

### **What do you mean by compassion?**

It's a word that seems to have a lot of different meanings for different people but we use a quite simple and long-standing definition: having concern for other people and, when required and appropriate, of wanting to do something to help them.

### **Why does this campaign matter? There are lots of causes out there trying to make the world better**

There are and they do incredible and vital work and we've been lucky enough to work with some of them. But our own experience has taught us that while single issue campaigns do make a difference, unless we change the values behind policy making, we will never achieve long-lasting sustainable change.

### **And you think that current politicians don't have compassion?**

Actually our point is that everyone feels compassion but the space for it in our daily lives has been limited by the ideology of our government, big business, and media. Since the 1980s we've lived according to a political idea that says we are all inherently selfish and greedy and society has been structured to match those ideas: turning schools into exam factories, encouraging a fixation with wealth and property over community and wellbeing, blaming refugees, asylum seekers, the low-paid and benefit recipients for society's ills.

Unfortunately, not only is that system making the world more unequal, it's also based on a completely incorrect perception of human nature. We are all so much bigger and so much better than the story we have been told about us. Yes of course we can sometimes be selfish and greedy but we also have capacity for incredible amounts of generosity and compassion and we display that on a daily basis: when we give up our seat on the train, help someone cross the road, give money to charity, help a colleague at work, visit a sick friend, relative, or neighbour. Our lives would be so much happier and rewarding if those values were celebrated and given space to grow.

### **But there's no room for compassion (or any emotion) in politics, surely**

But the way that we operate now *is* built on emotions – an emotional attachment to ideas of greed and selfishness. What if, instead, we opened our minds to other emotions – compassion, empathy and cooperation? We are humans. We cannot escape our emotions. So rather than fixate on just one or two at the detriment of the wide range of emotions we feel, we believe we should be



cultivating and celebrating our innate compassion and empathy and using those emotions to help guide our political decision-making.

**But people *are* selfish – they kill, trick the benefits system (and other examples)**

As humans we give ourselves a pretty bad rap. Open any newspaper or turn on the TV and you will see images of destruction and hate. What you're not seeing is all the amazing things that people are doing – people like you. That's because it doesn't make dramatic news and it doesn't fit with the narrative that we're all greedy and selfish.

Yes, people can do terrible things to one another. Sometimes that's because they are unwell or they come under a lot of psychological pressure. And actually we think they are much more likely to in a world where politicians and the media spout so much hatred and pretend that as humans we can do nothing other than act selfishly. But those kinds of behaviour only represent a very small sample of human nature. Building a political system and society on that small example is highly irresponsible and damaging.

**Isn't compassion just weakness?**

We believe that calling for a world of compassion when every powerful person seems to tell you to be otherwise is actually very brave.

**What do you hope this campaign will achieve?**

In the short term it will put compassion back on the political agenda which will make it possible for leaders, politicians and policy makers to talk about compassion without appearing weak or soft. In the longer term the campaign will develop a compassion test for political actions, statements and policies leading over time to a more compassionate political system.

**What would a compassionate political system look like?**

It would be built on the following set of values:

- That no policy should adversely affect future generations - in fact it should enhance their wellbeing
- That the most vulnerable and needy must be helped and we all agree to look after those who have fallen on hard times.
- That policies should make life better for people, not just the economy.