

00:00:00,120 --> 00:00:13,840 [speaker_0]

Join us and let's party. We're dead and hidden by your side. It's stories of love and giving. Feel the heart cry.

00:00:15,320 --> 00:00:15,760 [speaker_1]

Henrik.

00:00:16,260 --> 00:00:16,640 [speaker_2]

Tad.

00:00:17,400 --> 00:00:21,160 [speaker_1]

It's time to dive into the big money today.

00:00:21,440 --> 00:00:52,260 [speaker_2]

Yeah, we're going to throw ourselves into a sea of money. There's been a lot of big money. We had the emergency fund and all that—he picked up the phone and a huge amount of money came in. And then in the last episode, the fundraising drive—there were galas and the foundation gave extra money and so on. But now we've finally gotten in touch with the Akelius Foundation, perhaps the largest private donor in Sweden.

00:00:52,900 --> 00:01:06,060 [speaker_1]

Yes, and it hasn't escaped anyone's notice that these fundraising campaigns—like the one for Ukraine—have been a huge success, but there have been other crises as well that the Akelius Foundation has highlighted.

00:01:06,180 --> 00:01:10,320 [speaker_2]

There was Gaza earlier with them, and Somalia this past Christmas.

00:01:10,360 --> 00:01:10,759 [speaker_1]

Sudan.

00:01:10,840 --> 00:01:11,580 [speaker_2]

Sudan, sorry.

00:01:13,480 --> 00:01:17,200 [speaker_1]

But now we've got a huge teddy bear as a gift here.

00:01:17,960 --> 00:01:40,860 [speaker_2]

Yes, and that got us so interested that we decided to contact Kerstin Engström, who is the chairperson, as we say in Swedish. I think she'll introduce herself when she gets here. But I suppose this is a good time to bring her in and ask her our questions. I have a lot of questions on my screen right now.

00:01:42,600 --> 00:01:45,880 [speaker_1]

Kerstin Engström, a warm welcome to the Fundraising Podcast.

00:01:45,940 --> 00:01:46,580 [speaker_3]

Thank you very much.

00:01:47,280 --> 00:01:59,200 [speaker_1]

We're so happy to have you here. And we wanted to dive right into these 800 million for Gaza, but we felt we might need to rewind a bit first and start with: who are you?

00:02:00,120 --> 00:02:07,360 [speaker_3]

Well, who am I? I'm a happy girl from the West Coast, where I've lived most of my life.

00:02:08,259 --> 00:02:08,820 [speaker_2]

You can tell.

00:02:09,000 --> 00:02:09,940 [speaker_1]

Good thing you're happy, then.

00:02:10,660 --> 00:02:36,900 [speaker_3]

David usually says that, but I don't think so. And I have a background. So I studied law when I was old enough to do so. I worked extensively as a lawyer for 25 years. Then I got a little curious about what they did on the other side of the courtroom and worked as an appellate judge. So I have a legal background.

00:02:37,200 --> 00:02:42,959 [speaker_2]

Okay, and now you're the chair of the board for the Akelius Foundation.

00:02:43,540 --> 00:02:44,200 [speaker_3]

That's right.

00:02:44,380 --> 00:02:45,040 [speaker_2]

That's right.

00:02:45,160 --> 00:02:50,600 [speaker_3]

We don't say "board of directors"; we say "council" because it's a foundation, but yeah.

00:02:51,720 --> 00:02:53,340 [speaker_2]

So how did you end up there?

00:02:53,660 --> 00:03:00,960 [speaker_3]

Yeah, that's also a very long story, and it goes back to the late '90s.

00:03:01,260 --> 00:03:01,520 [speaker_2]

Wow.

00:03:02,900 --> 00:03:21,020 [speaker_3]

At the time, I was working at a large law firm in Gothenburg that had high-profile clients, and one of them was Roger. When you're a wealthy person like he is, there are people who might think they can take advantage of that. They try to get some money by suing him in various ways.

00:03:22,080 --> 00:03:23,560 [speaker_1]

You've watched too many American movies.

00:03:23,680 --> 00:03:45,800 [speaker_3]

Yeah, kind of. And that's where I ended up at a fairly young age and became his representative. And then when I decided to switch agencies, people usually didn't follow along from a big, well-known agency. But Roger said, "Well, you've started this, and it's gone well, so I'd be happy to continue."

00:03:46,220 --> 00:03:47,950 [speaker_1]

Okay, so you defended him, in other words.

00:03:48,880 --> 00:03:55,260 [speaker_3]

That's for him to answer, not me. But there must have been something to it, since we've stayed in touch ever since.

00:03:55,780 --> 00:04:00,440 [speaker_2]

Okay, but when did you start working for him, if you can call it that?

00:04:00,900 --> 00:04:06,160 [speaker_3]

So, when I started working for him—or rather, for the foundation—it was in 2019.

00:04:06,440 --> 00:04:07,040 [speaker_2]

Okay, yeah.

00:04:07,100 --> 00:04:39,360 [speaker_3]

And at the time, I was still a judge on the Court of Appeals, but back then, charity work was seen as something you were supposed to do on the side. It wasn't really part of the business world in that sense. But after a year, Roger contacted me and said, "No, now you should quit that job and work with me instead, or with my foundation." And even when I started, Roger didn't have any role or position on the board at all.

00:04:40,280 --> 00:04:41,340 [speaker_1]

When was the foundation established?

00:04:41,960 --> 00:04:44,820 [speaker_3]

As far as I know, it was founded in 2007.

00:04:45,580 --> 00:04:47,600 [speaker_1]

So it had been around for a few years when you joined?

00:04:48,080 --> 00:05:04,200 [speaker_3]

It had been around for a few years, but I think the focus had shifted somewhat. I believe that, from the start, part of the mission included charitable work related to staff training as well. That has changed over the years.

00:05:05,140 --> 00:05:44,060 [speaker_2]

But let's move on to this big one, because I think we'll come back a bit to Roger and how the foundation itself works. But we've always wondered, really, that as soon as you've taken action to give money to Swedish civil society and Swedish organizations, we've always thought, "We have to include them." But now you just completely threw us off guard with the announcement that 800 million is going to children in Gaza via UNICEF. There are, of course, many questions surrounding that. What was your thinking? That's the first question.

00:05:45,020 --> 00:07:28,488 [speaker_3]

First and foremost, the reality is that Gaza is a terrible place on earth right now, based on what we understand and all the information we're receiving. The Akelius Foundation has been involved in this area for a long time. I think it was in 2014 that we opened an orphanage in partnership with SOS Children's Villages, located in the southern part of Gaza, in Rafah. And when these terrible hostilities broke out initially, we kept a close eye on what was happening to the children at this orphanage that we were funding. It was an area that wasn't initially affected by the conflict, but then it got worse and worse. Through a political initiative, they eventually managed to evacuate the children to Bethlehem. And we also contributed a donation that covered the costs of moving them and the expenses incurred in Bethlehem and so on. Unfortunately, the orphanage was still needed in the Gaza Strip because

children who had lost their parents were arriving practically every day. So this is an area where we at the Akelius Foundation have been involved for a long time, and that's perhaps why we felt it so strongly—that this was truly a very, very vulnerable situation and that many people needed help.

00:07:29,568 --> 00:07:35,478 [speaker_1]

And these 800 million—that's a lot of money. How did you arrive at that figure, and how quickly?

00:07:36,068 --> 00:08:18,648 [speaker_3]

Well, let's rewind a bit: in the first half of 2025, we actually held a so-called "double-the-donation" fundraiser for Gaza. And we were prepared to donate—or had hoped to be able to double—much, much more. It has been a politically charged issue, and those who didn't dare to donate at that time—it was actually those who had a lot of money, various companies—didn't dare to, but it was mostly private individuals. And we doubled the amount, of course. But we could have given much, much, much more.

00:08:19,168 --> 00:08:19,568 [speaker_1]

Even back then?

00:08:19,868 --> 00:09:00,068 [speaker_3]

Even back then. So this hasn't been a new idea. Then I got a call from my contact at UNICEF. We work together a lot, and she called to say she was happy that the Swedish government had decided to support them and make a donation to Gaza. And then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—I suppose that's who she was in contact with—had asked if we had any partners in the business community who we thought might be willing to contribute a little as well?

00:09:00,468 --> 00:09:02,348 [speaker_1]

So the matching proposal came from the government?

00:09:02,377 --> 00:09:43,068 [speaker_3]

No, matching proposal—we didn't get a matching proposal, and we didn't really find out the exact amount. But, uh, let's just say that. We got a rough estimate of what it would be so we'd know we could afford it. [laughter] And then we said, "No, but then we won't double it—we'll double it, double it." And so we've been in touch about it—those of us on the council—and we've decided that we can afford it and we wanted to go for it. And as I've already said, we'd wanted to do this before—

00:09:43,628 --> 00:09:44,108 [speaker_1]

Do this.

00:09:44,728 --> 00:10:36,187 [speaker_3]

Donate money. And we thought it was so wonderful to be able to do this together with the Swedish government. Because it's a huge challenge just to get the aid there. We've donated not only to UNICEF in Gaza, but we're also collaborating with Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, and an international organization called We World. All of them have previously received donations from us for Gaza, but it's difficult to get the aid through. For the simple reason that it's a political issue in the region regarding what aid is allowed in and which borders are opened. And of course, we hope that the Swedish government will have a little more leverage than we do as the Akelius Foundation.

00:10:36,828 --> 00:10:46,728 [speaker_1]

The fact that this is a political issue in the region—and it is here at home as well—is something you've experienced too. So, how do you respond to that?

00:10:47,608 --> 00:11:22,148 [speaker_3]

We are a completely non-political organization. We have no religious ties either, even though we do sometimes donate money to organizations that essentially have some kind of religious affiliation. In our fundraising campaign for Sudan in December, Act and the Church of Sweden were among the participants. But that doesn't mean any money goes to prayer meetings or anything like that; they're just a good organization, good people, and good contacts on the ground.

00:11:23,248 --> 00:11:31,108 [speaker_1]

You wanted to give more, as you said, even when you did this fundraising campaign for Gaza earlier. Were you surprised that it didn't amount to more back then?

00:11:32,728 --> 00:12:02,708 [speaker_3]

No, unfortunately not. I had, I had hoped that it would, uh, be easier than it was. And I can probably say here, without mentioning any names, that there were organizations that, for various reasons, didn't dare to participate. They were afraid that their ability to, for example, provide on-site assistance in the area would be hindered.

00:12:03,208 --> 00:12:03,448 [speaker_1]

Oh.

00:12:03,728 --> 00:12:05,228 [speaker_3]

Mm, that's how tough it is.

00:12:05,468 --> 00:12:29,368 [speaker_1]

Yeah, then you really get it. If you think about UNICEF, which received this money. How, how do you work with them on this? Is it that you trust that, as you say, it's difficult for organizations to work in that kind of area, but they do it and you trust that they'll do it? Or how involved are you in the follow-up and the work they do with this money?

00:12:30,428 --> 00:14:26,088 [speaker_3]

That has changed quite a bit over the years. But, um, the single biggest partner we have—and the one to which we've probably made the largest donations—is UNICEF. The Achilles Foundation works very closely with them because they were the first to help us bring our languages and language education to the world. The Achilles Foundation doesn't have its own organization to go out and provide on-site assistance; instead, we rely on strong partners. And UNICEF became one of those strong partners early on. They had the connections with the countries, people on the ground, and so on. Well, and today our collaboration works such that a language program runs, perhaps initially, over three years. And then we simply receive a proposal submitted by UNICEF in Sweden, but also by the country in question—that is, the local organization. It details how much technical equipment they need, how many teachers will be involved, which languages the children will be taught, how many hours per week, and a whole host of other detailed facts. And then we go through it together with them. Often, we also have an online meeting with the country's local staff. And then maybe we tweak things a bit—like, is it really necessary to have so many administrators? Or I say that because that's usually how it goes. Um, and, um, then when we come up with something we're all happy with, we finalize it.

00:14:26,588 --> 00:14:44,488 [speaker_2]

And there, how—are you the one sitting in those negotiations, or in those discussions, perhaps? Or what does your organization look like? Now you're sitting here, and we're talking about Roger, who's been involved in starting it all and is the foundation of everything. But what else is there?

00:14:44,848 --> 00:14:52,108 [speaker_3]

No, but at the moment—when I started in 2019—there were four of us on the council.

00:14:52,388 --> 00:14:52,608 [speaker_2]

Okay

00:14:52,968 --> 00:15:22,128 [speaker_3]

And back then, it was me and one other person, a man based in Berlin, who had most of the contacts. And usually, we both join in on these negotiations because we almost always meet with them online. And then we discuss things. We've grown a lot in recent years. We've done a really fun project—since Achelius started out as a real estate company—

00:15:22,728 --> 00:15:22,988 [speaker_2]

Yes

00:15:23,208 --> 00:15:50,748 [speaker_3]

Which has offices in various parts of the world. And so, one person at each office was tasked with gauging whether there was interest in the local community in language training. After all, there are many of these places with large immigrant populations, for example, where people want to learn the local language. We operate in Canada. There are certain areas there that are bilingual—French and English.

00:15:51,328 --> 00:16:01,007 [speaker_2]

We were in Montreal last fall, and we worked on school French there. There was a lot, a lot of French there.

00:16:01,588 --> 00:16:04,968 [speaker_1]

Yeah, it didn't really feel bilingual. It felt like French was the main thing.

00:16:05,328 --> 00:16:37,208 [speaker_3]

As I understand it, you're either the ones who speak French or the ones who speak English, and so you need to learn a little of each other's languages to be able to connect better with one another. So that, among other things, has been appreciated. But in that way, the number of projects at the Achelius Foundation increased. There are quite a few projects, but they're fairly small. I think we've launched about forty of them in a year.

00:16:37,488 --> 00:16:37,628 [speaker_2]

Wow

00:16:38,088 --> 00:16:39,928 [speaker_3]

Two people can't handle that.

00:16:40,088 --> 00:16:42,648 [speaker_2]

It's one a week. That's almost it.

00:16:42,708 --> 00:16:43,368 [speaker_3]

Almost.

00:16:43,468 --> 00:16:44,488 [speaker_2]

With a little vacation.

00:16:44,588 --> 00:16:59,388 [speaker_3]

Yes, and so we've started; we have a project manager here in Stockholm and also a junior project manager or two—one and a half here in Stockholm and one in Gothenburg.

00:16:59,988 --> 00:17:00,208 [speaker_2]

Okay

00:17:00,508 --> 00:17:04,408 [speaker_3]

Because we need administrative help.

00:17:05,948 --> 00:17:11,318 [speaker_1]

But isn't the language the basis for, like, the purpose of the foundation?

00:17:11,888 --> 00:17:17,128 [speaker_3]

Language was the foundation from the start. The purpose is education.

00:17:18,528 --> 00:17:32,828 [speaker_2]

That's right, why has education become your focus when—given the state of poverty and the drought—you were in Sudan doing that kind of work? But you've really committed to the education track. What's the reason behind that?

00:17:34,128 --> 00:18:14,738 [speaker_3]

It's just that, I mean, once you've had your most basic needs met—some sort of makeshift roof over your head and food in your stomach—what's the next thing you need to move forward in life? It's education. And those who don't get an education—and we have a huge deficit of children in the world who aren't getting any education right now—they have no future. It's kind of our way of providing the opportunity for a future where people can take care of themselves, and also giving hope that we're not just focusing on the children's survival, but that they'll also have a good life ahead of them.

00:18:15,116 --> 00:18:27,196 [speaker_2]

But now that you have UNICEF as a partner, how long-term do you see this kind of work being, for example, with these 400 schools in Gaza?

00:18:27,656 --> 00:18:51,296 [speaker_3]

Well, 400 schools in Gaza—that's a very long-term project. Um, and of course we've established certain frameworks with UNICEF, and it's not something we think can be done in a year, but perhaps over a five- or ten-year horizon. If we're being realistic.

00:18:51,716 --> 00:18:55,036 [speaker_2]

And you have to be. Otherwise, it's just a bit of a flash in the pan.

00:18:55,066 --> 00:19:27,536 [speaker_3]

Exactly. And then, of course, it's a troubled part of the world. So neither we nor UNICEF can know when it will be possible to start rebuilding again. But in the meantime, we'll set up what are called temporary learning spaces. I mean, they're usually tents, or I saw a presentation this morning where the ground floor of a nearly bombed-out house could serve as a suitable classroom.

00:19:28,916 --> 00:19:36,436 [speaker_2]

And are there any other organizations you work with on this kind of long-term basis, and are there any other large-scale projects like this elsewhere in the world?

00:19:36,596 --> 00:20:19,996 [speaker_3]

Yes, we've had—we have some large projects with UNHCR, but not on the same scale when it comes to education. There's been a lot of overlap in humanitarian aid, most recently with Sudan. Well, we've quite recently—it's been a couple of years now—started a collaboration with Save the Children. There's also been a lot of support for Gaza in that project. But Save the Children is also active here in Sweden. So we've launched a pilot project

with them in the eastern or northeastern suburbs of Gothenburg.

00:20:21,216 --> 00:20:22,856 [speaker_2]

And also with the Rescue Mission in Gothenburg?

00:20:23,236 --> 00:20:44,396 [speaker_3]

No, we haven't provided any support to the Rescue Mission in Gothenburg yet. However, the Akelius Foundation is currently working with Chalmers University of Technology to develop a math education program. We believe that's the next big thing in universal education: language and math.

00:20:45,856 --> 00:20:46,436 [speaker_2]

Those are the key areas.

00:20:46,916 --> 00:21:27,776 [speaker_3]

Yes, but you have to put this in context. We are, or rather Akelius is, an organization that has tried to operate in many different places around the world. We can't really expect that we from Sweden or Germany can teach history or social studies. A lot of knowledge is very regionally rooted. But language isn't like that. You have to learn languages. And math is kind of a language of its own, if you know what I mean. Like, one plus one equals two no matter where you are.

00:21:28,156 --> 00:21:29,116 [speaker_2]

It's the same all over the world.

00:21:29,156 --> 00:21:40,816 [speaker_3]

And those are fundamental skills that will take you a long way. If you want to run your own small business and know how to do the math, that's obviously better than not knowing how.

00:21:41,916 --> 00:21:43,456 [speaker_2]

You won't get taken advantage of as easily then.

00:21:43,576 --> 00:21:43,876 [speaker_3]

No.

00:21:44,956 --> 00:22:05,816 [speaker_2]

If we go back a bit to how you got started and how you work—do you seek out projects? I imagine you get a ton of organizations calling you. Is it intuition or strategy that drives your actions?

00:22:06,576 --> 00:22:08,416 [speaker_3]

It's probably a mix of both.

00:22:08,856 --> 00:22:09,136 [speaker_2]

Is it?

00:22:09,276 --> 00:22:44,546 [speaker_3]

Yes, and it's not like we sit with a map and think, "We've already been to these areas, over there." No, when it comes to expanding our collaboration with UNICEF to new countries, we often receive what's initially just a tentative inquiry from them saying, "This is where it's needed." Do you think this seems like an interesting place? And then they explain to us why it's needed. And I can give an example of a project—

00:22:44,636 --> 00:22:45,626 [speaker_2]

Yes, please do!

00:22:46,196 --> 00:23:07,836 [speaker_3]

Which I didn't really understand at first, and that was that we were asked if they would need English instruction at a monastic school in Bhutan. And that, well, it sounded good and all, but maybe compared to other projects.

00:23:08,676 --> 00:23:09,336 [speaker_2]

A bit niche.

00:23:09,516 --> 00:24:09,436 [speaker_3]

A bit narrow. But then it turned out that for these children who have been taken into care in these schools, the background is often that they have lost one or both parents. In other words, they are mostly orphans. They are well cared for. They receive food, clothing, and an education. But that education was very traditionally religious. It focused primarily on what we used to call learning the catechism by heart. So they memorized various religious rites and the like. They never progressed beyond that. They couldn't have a life outside the monastery unless they received some other kind of education. It was absolutely clear that this was truly a valuable project.

00:24:09,476 --> 00:24:10,436 [speaker_2]

Yes, that's how it turned out.

00:24:10,476 --> 00:24:15,436 [speaker_3]

So that's how it turned out. Then I understood exactly why we should help there.

00:24:16,244 --> 00:24:17,064 [speaker_1]

So that's when you got the feeling.

00:24:17,924 --> 00:25:00,264 [speaker_3]

Yeah, kind of. And, I mean, the education is partly digital on a tablet like the one you're holding. Which I'm sure many of them had hardly ever seen before. But that alone—and this is the case in many countries—is significant. Here, even three-year-olds are sitting around playing games. But that's not how it is in other places. For many, and especially for girls, this might be their first contact with this kind of digital equipment. And that, too, becomes a form of knowledge—not just what you learn by using the equipment.

00:25:01,464 --> 00:25:13,544 [speaker_1]

Oh, we didn't know you had projects like this. How many projects do you have going at the same time? Do you know, do you know that? How many, like, no, but we've funded this many right now.

00:25:14,064 --> 00:25:17,543 [speaker_3]

No, I actually don't know off the top of my head. Now that you ask.

00:25:17,554 --> 00:25:18,364 [speaker_1]

I'm not asking, I'm just...

00:25:19,164 --> 00:25:38,154 [speaker_3]

I'd say, well, it must be around a hundred. That includes these ones—we have a number of long-term process projects with SOS Children's Villages involving their villages in various parts of the world. And then we have, well, no, that's probably not enough.

00:25:39,384 --> 00:25:41,574 [speaker_1]

There are many projects and it's, uh—

00:25:41,664 --> 00:25:42,663 [speaker_3]

A lot of money.

00:25:42,684 --> 00:25:45,504 [speaker_1]

A lot of money. Exactly, you saw my dock there.

00:25:45,624 --> 00:25:49,704 [speaker_3]

I knew it myself because that's the automatic follow-up question.

00:25:49,804 --> 00:26:05,044 [speaker_1]

Yeah, exactly. But if we go all the way back to the Akelius Foundation, Roger—as you mentioned—doesn't play a role in it. But like, what is the foundation, and how is it structured? Where does the money come from?

00:26:05,064 --> 00:26:05,864 [speaker_3]

Where does the money come from?

00:26:05,884 --> 00:26:11,864 [speaker_1]

And how much money is there? And is more money coming into the foundation? Or what? Yeah, it works.

00:26:12,184 --> 00:26:13,924 [speaker_3]

That was a lot of questions.

00:26:14,984 --> 00:26:15,424 [speaker_1]

Tough.

00:26:15,564 --> 00:26:17,344 [speaker_3]

But I think we should start from the beginning.

00:26:17,384 --> 00:26:18,664 [speaker_1]

Yeah, let's do that.

00:26:19,704 --> 00:26:35,064 [speaker_3]

Roger, he established this foundation a long time ago. And he did so by donating eighty-five percent of the shares in his company, the real estate firm, to the Akelius Foundation. So most of...

00:26:37,044 --> 00:26:41,084 [speaker_1]

So the majority of the company is owned by the Foundation.

00:26:41,164 --> 00:26:42,524 [speaker_3]

Yes, and then...

00:26:42,564 --> 00:26:44,824 [speaker_1]

So it's money that never runs out. It just keeps coming.

00:26:44,884 --> 00:26:52,664 [speaker_3]

I mean, we're hoping for that. So that the Akelius Foundation is at the top of, uh—

00:26:52.984 --> 00:26:53.464 [speaker_1]

The companies.

00:26:53,804 --> 00:27:12,024 [speaker_3]

All the companies around the world, and, um, we try to make sure that, um, the real estate company makes money that they can distribute to us, and we can do good with it around the world. So everyone who works in this—

00:27:12,064 --> 00:27:13,564 [speaker_1]

I had no idea about this, Serru.

00:27:13,593 --> 00:27:44,024 [speaker_3]

Everyone who works at this company is involved and contributes. So the hard work our staff does at Akelius Real Estate eventually contributes to a better world. And it's fantastic to be able to motivate employees with that. It's not like you're working hard here just so the boss can get a new car every year.

00:27:44,564 --> 00:27:52,443 [speaker_1]

Exactly. I had a question about that, but first, I guess it's time we let Disa and the Fundraising Lab in.

00:27:52,624 --> 00:28:04,684 [speaker_4]

[Singing] The Fundraising Lab. We test and we see. Oh, oh, oh, oh, new paths ahead. How the giving goes. Hi!

00:28:05,224 --> 00:28:12,164 [speaker_3]

The Fundraising Lab with Kivra. And as usual, Disa Jernudd is here. Her friend Louise.

00:28:12,764 --> 00:28:13,404 [speaker_5]

That's right.

00:28:13,604 --> 00:28:20,504 [speaker_3]

She's here too. But you've really gotten into the habit of bringing guests along, Disa. Who's here today?

00:28:20,764 --> 00:28:37,224 [speaker_5]

Yeah, I feel like nobody wants to be alone. I'm here with Lotta Winter from WWF, and I'm really happy to have an organization that has tested and helped develop this with us. So, a very warm welcome indeed.

00:28:37,584 --> 00:28:37,984 [speaker_4]

Thank you.

00:28:38,364 --> 00:28:48,064 [speaker_1]

And I'm also really happy that you brought Lotta along, because I work at an organization that doesn't use Kivra. So tell me, what have I been missing out on here? How do you work with Kivra?

00:28:48,664 --> 00:29:36,544 [speaker_4]

So, how do we work with Kivra? We started about two years ago, and we began on a fairly small scale. We saw that some of our donors wanted to go more digital. So we started collaborating, talking with Kivra about how to do this in the best way possible. I'd say we made a somewhat bold choice, because we started with our fundraising letters, which isn't exactly the most common approach. And we began testing things out on a small scale. We targeted specific groups

specifically—we thought these might be people who had come from the web, for example. We were pretty cautious about age, so we stuck to a fairly younger target group. And then, well, I tried things out, tested them.

00:29:36,704 --> 00:29:38,504 [speaker_3]

And now I have two questions at once.

00:29:38,684 --> 00:29:39,974 [speaker_1]

Just two—I have ten more.

00:29:39,974 --> 00:29:50,643 [speaker_3]

Yeah, you have ten more, but it's my birthday, so I'll start. You mentioned a younger target audience—how old were they? And also, it was a pretty small sample. How small was it?

00:29:50,744 --> 00:30:32,852 [speaker_4]

Well, our fundraising letters are currently divided into different target groups. We chose—I don't remember exactly how many there were—but we chose a group that I think numbered in the thousands. And this age thing is a bit interesting too, because I think we went with fifty-five or something like that. Which we later learned was a bit of a misstep. You know, you kind of think—you often have your own perception that things are a certain way. And the only way you can really see how things work is by testing them. It's kind of a trial-and-error process. And that's exactly what we've done. We started out that way. Then we kind of raised the age range and saw that it worked out just fine there, too.

00:30:33,512 --> 00:30:41,412 [speaker_1]

And you mentioned that you've developed this together. How did your collaboration begin? Who reached out to whom, and how has this come about?

00:30:41,432 --> 00:31:40,992 [speaker_6]

No, but actually, I think it was Lotta—my colleague Martina, who was or is the account manager for you—who, well, we, we realized, we saw that there were many opportunities to work more with you as organizations, but also that there was, well, we hadn't quite found the right approach yet. We have our invoices, and we have opportunities to reach out, but perhaps not specifically for your segment and you—that is, fundraising organizations. And then you were happy to step up and held a workshop with us where we actually bounced ideas back and forth about how to reach out to donors, what it should be called, and what it should look like. And we didn't arrive at a conclusion very quickly; there was a bit of back-and-forth about what it should be called. And that's where you—or rather, with your help—we ended up with a fundraising letter that has been very well received, I'd say today. But we were considering a donation letter at the beginning. How did that feel? But you quickly sensed that it wasn't quite landing right.

00:31:41,172 --> 00:32:15,952 [speaker_4]

No, and that's because for us, a thank-you letter is something you receive after you've made a donation. So it just didn't feel right. When we started this, this type of fundraising letter didn't exist yet; there was only the standard approach. And even back then, we began discussing that we didn't think it was a good idea to include a due date. It shouldn't feel like an invoice in any way. It was very important to us that donors felt secure in their giving. That they didn't feel like, "Oh no, did I get an invoice?" Instead, it should be clear that it's a gift.

00:32:16,432 --> 00:32:17,312 [speaker_2]

What a smart move!

00:32:17,772 --> 00:32:25,732 [speaker_4]

Yeah, yeah. And that's when we felt that Kivra really understood us on this point—that they realized it was important to us when we were doing this.

00:32:27,412 --> 00:32:33,692 [speaker_6]

Mm. And we've even added little hearts and stuff like that. Once you've paid, you kind of get a little love thrown in for free.

00:32:34,192 --> 00:32:34,202 [speaker_2]

Oh.

00:32:34,232 --> 00:32:38,472 [speaker_6]

So it's really nice, like, the interface too, I'd say.

00:32:38,592 --> 00:32:39,912 [speaker_4]

Yeah, that's it.

00:32:40,092 --> 00:32:41,132 [speaker_1]

And how well does it perform?

00:32:41,432 --> 00:33:15,352 [speaker_4]

It performs well. There was also the issue of cost. That was one of them. We talked about why we were doing this. There was a request from the donors. But it was also a cost issue, since postage and mailings are getting so expensive, and it didn't go out as often. We also had the option with Kivra to choose. You can choose which day you want it sent out. You can't do that with postal mailings in the same way either. So yes, there was that reason as well.

00:33:15,612 --> 00:33:22,652 [speaker_1]

You touched on that at the beginning, Lotta—the reason you joined Kivra, that part of it was because donors were asking for it. How has it been received, then?

00:33:23,592 --> 00:33:50,732 [speaker_4]

No, but we were probably more afraid that it would be received negatively. So we had prepared ourselves very carefully. We had talked to Givarservice, we had talked to another organization that had done this. We had prepared ourselves to respond to the donors who reached out and explain. And we felt that it was received very well. We—it wasn't as many people as we thought who reached out. There will always be people who have opinions about things, but that's the case with mail-in donations too.

00:33:51,172 --> 00:33:51,372 [speaker_2]

Oh, yeah.

00:33:51,552 --> 00:34:01,592 [speaker_4]

As an environmental and nature conservation organization, we have to keep these things in mind all the time. We have to be credible in what we do.

00:34:01,612 --> 00:34:07,972 [speaker_1]

It feels like a checklist is starting to emerge here. Do you have any final thoughts to share?

00:34:08,832 --> 00:34:26,492 [speaker_4]

No, but check with other organizations. I mean, prepare thoroughly and test things out. And I also think it's good to have a printing supplier you can rely on. Because that

actually made things a lot easier for us.

00:34:27,012 --> 00:34:44,792 [speaker_6]

I can, I can chime in here too, because I hear Lotta from you and also from Marie, who you work with—we've been in close contact with them regarding this—and you often say to take a chance and come back to it. You have to take a chance and be brave, but take small steps.

00:34:45,691 --> 00:34:46,131 [speaker_4]

Absolutely.

00:34:46,592 --> 00:34:47,392 [speaker_1]

What a great finish.

00:34:47,772 --> 00:34:56,412 [speaker_2]

That was a really great checklist you put together. I think we should turn it into a mini playbook and post it in the Fundraising Podcast newsletter.

00:34:57,032 --> 00:34:57,632 [speaker_6]

Wonderful!

00:35:00,492 --> 00:35:19,332 [speaker_2]

Tell us how you've done it. Do you get questions, and do you teach other people with massive amounts of capital how to do it? This is how we built the Achelius Foundation. These are the things that drive us. This is how we make sure the money never runs out.

00:35:19,852 --> 00:35:20,412 [speaker_6]

No.

00:35:20,532 --> 00:35:20,912 [speaker_2]

Never?

00:35:21,112 --> 00:35:21,912 [speaker_6]

Never. We actually haven't—

00:35:22,912 --> 00:35:24,232 [speaker_2]

Not been asked by anyone either?

00:35:24,332 --> 00:35:31,612 [speaker_6]

I hardly think so. It's probably been more about, in that case, how do we get someone like you to give us money?

00:35:32,352 --> 00:35:32,732 [speaker_2]

Yeah, yeah.

00:35:34,192 --> 00:35:35,432 [speaker_1]

We have that question.

00:35:39,692 --> 00:35:41,252 [speaker_2]

It's included as well.

00:35:42,672 --> 00:35:43,652 [speaker_1]

Let's save that for a bit.

00:35:45,212 --> 00:35:55,912 [speaker_2]

I felt that just now. But, well, it would still be a bit strange if people never mentioned that I see you as a pattern. I'd like to build this up myself.

00:35:57,172 --> 00:36:06,972 [speaker_6]

Yeah, but on the other hand, there are those who reach out and ask: When are you doing a rerun next time? I usually set some money aside.

00:36:07,112 --> 00:36:07,652 [speaker_2]

Yeah, but there.

00:36:07,752 --> 00:36:21,392 [speaker_6]

And when you, when you double it, I assume it goes toward something good. And then I usually go in and make a donation, and I know it's worth twice as much.

00:36:21,452 --> 00:36:45,212 [speaker_2]

But I think that's interesting. Because doubling means so much for campaigns and for initiatives. When you know that my one krona is two spann. A hundred kronor for me is two hundred spann. And then those who get in touch have set aside a little bit. Two hundred fifty thousand for me is half a million. My math works, right?

00:36:45,572 --> 00:36:46,172 [speaker_1]

One plus one, yes.

00:36:46,292 --> 00:37:12,472 [speaker_2]

One plus one all over the world. Because you've been working on matching campaigns for quite some time now. There's been Children of the World, and it goes back even further. Then there's been SOS and UNHCR, and so on. UNHCR even sent you a love letter. We did a podcast about that. But how much do you realize that means? And has it become a strategy for you to now run a matching campaign instead of just contributing a fixed amount?

00:37:13,452 --> 00:39:11,332 [speaker_3]

Yes, when it comes to a topic that is very close to our hearts—such as the Achilles Foundation—or where there is a perceived great need but funding is problematic. And if I take as an example the two relief efforts the Achilles Foundation was involved in last year, those were the Gaza and Sudan crises. Historically, I wasn't really involved in the very first matching campaigns. And back then, it was perhaps more open-ended—these organizations were involved, and they work on a variety of different issues. We're matching everything they receive now through Christmas. The organizations love having the Achilles Foundation as a partner in a matching campaign. We think it's a good way for the Achilles Foundation to raise more money for very important causes. But we at the Achilles Foundation usually want more control over how the money is managed. So we had a matching campaign for Christmas 2023, and that was focused on education. So everything the organizations raised, they were also supposed to earmark for education, but they were kind of free to do that however they wanted. And then the money we matched was earmarked for education according to the Achilles Foundation's principles. So then we launched a lot of new projects around the world with the organizations that participated that time.

00:39:11,432 --> 00:39:13,292 [speaker_2]

You've simply become a more assertive setter of requirements.

00:39:13,332 --> 00:39:15,072 [speaker_3]

Yes, we have become a more assertive advocate.

00:39:15,732 --> 00:39:20,012 [speaker_1]

How far in advance do you decide? As you mentioned, you've done this a few times for Christmas.

00:39:20,592 --> 00:39:22,972 [speaker_3]

It depends. The biggest—

00:39:23,112 --> 00:39:24,772 [speaker_2]

Is it feeling or strategy?

00:39:24,852 --> 00:39:45,012 [speaker_3]

Yes, no, but I mean, the biggest fundraiser we've had—the one the Achilles Foundation launched—in terms of results. That was when the war in Ukraine started. I had three days to get that matching campaign up and running. We decided on a Friday; we were going to launch on Monday.

00:39:45,032 --> 00:39:45,892 [speaker_2]

There was a bit of setup to do then.

00:39:46,112 --> 00:39:46,832 [speaker_1]

You didn't take the weekend off?

00:39:47,372 --> 00:40:13,592 [speaker_3]

No, I didn't take the weekend off. And I was actually supposed to be doing something else online in my personal time. So I was keeping one eye on that and holding the phone in my other hand. And, well, it turned into a huge... I guess it's the biggest—it's the biggest fundraising campaign in Swedish history. Everyone really pitched in then.

00:40:13,632 --> 00:40:15,732 [speaker_2]

How much did you guys chip in back then?

00:40:16,492 --> 00:40:35,792 [speaker_3]

I think we raised six or seven hundred million. And I have to say, I wasn't used to those kinds of numbers, and after just a week or so, you could see the numbers really starting to add up.

00:40:36,192 --> 00:40:53,772 [speaker_2]

Yeah, but that—when, that thing—that's exactly the kind of thing I've been thinking about. You shouldn't compare it to your own finances, and then to Ted's and my jobs. So, but still, Ted raises a quarter of a billion every year. When do those kinds of staggering sums start to feel real to you?

00:40:54,592 --> 00:41:01,212 [speaker_3]

Well, I'm just a regular person with a completely normal financial situation.

00:41:01,292 --> 00:41:05,072 [speaker_2]

Yeah, but I don't mean personal finances—I mean in a work context.

00:41:05,112 --> 00:41:32,852 [speaker_3]

Work context. Well, I think you always have to be mindful of how you spend your money. Especially in these situations. Because if I make a bad decision there, it means some other poor soul somewhere else won't get the help they need. So we, we try to be very careful. And not everyone thinks we're always so much fun when we're negotiating.

00:41:34,752 --> 00:42:00,472 [speaker_2]

But I was thinking about that too, what you said earlier about how you've gotten better at setting requirements. Have you, have you

You've learned through your past collaborations that "no, that won't work; it works like this." Is it also the case that you're now telling the organization—not just as the ones setting the requirements—but saying, "Hey, that just takes a lot of time. Instead, work this way. We've done this three times before. It works really well."

00:42:00,672 --> 00:42:01,792 [speaker_3]

That could be the case.

00:42:01,832 --> 00:42:02,832 [speaker_2]

That could be the case.

00:42:03,232 --> 00:43:07,384 [speaker_3]

Well, yes, and that's the thing—things look very different in different parts of the world. And you learn a great deal by being involved in a situation like this, given that I'm in this position. And sometimes you just have to accept that. I can give an example where we negotiated with a country where we thought this technical equipment—these tablets—was way too expensive. So we'd rather buy them in Europe and ship them down. It'll be cheaper. "Yes," they say, "that's true, but customs clearance here will take a year and cost this much." And you can't really grasp that when you're sitting here. And then, suddenly, we understand a budget constraint. So there are many things that don't look the way they do from our vantage point in the world.

00:43:08,124 --> 00:43:32,584 [speaker_1]

But you're obviously, as you say using Ukraine as an example, very quick to act. But as I said, you've timed some fundraisers around Christmas because many people donate then. So that aspect is also part of it. But it's not like you're sitting here thinking, "What should we do for Christmas?" Rather, it's very much about a crisis arising and then...

00:43:33,384 --> 00:44:51,964 [speaker_3]

Yes, it varies a lot. The year we did, um, the fundraising campaign for education, we actually started a little earlier than usual in the fall. That's because we had a very specific vision of how the Akelius Foundation wanted that kind of campaign to look and be used. And so it took a while to discuss that with the organizations. A matching campaign like the one we had last Christmas for Sudan wasn't decided that far in advance. Instead, it was something we felt. We received requests from many different sources for donations specifically for Sudan. And we had also received, well, information about what the money could be used for and so on, and felt that, no, it was time. And then it usually doesn't take that long. Sometimes, I mean, sure, the organizations probably start their planning earlier than we do at the Akelius Foundation. So obviously, if they've already launched their ad campaign, they won't be too happy if they'd planned to have a different cause in mind when we show up.

00:44:52,684 --> 00:44:53,444 [speaker_1]

I think they'll be happy anyway.

00:44:54,404 --> 00:44:56,474 [speaker_2]

You show up and say, "By the way, have you thought about..."

00:44:56,904 --> 00:44:58,014 [speaker_3]

Have you thought about it? Yes.

00:45:00,104 --> 00:45:10,544 [speaker_2]

What's Roger's role in all this? How much is Roger involved? You didn't mention him among the members of The Council or anything like that. What is Roger's role?

00:45:11,144 --> 00:45:26,524 [speaker_3]

Roger's role is that he founded this foundation a long time ago. And, uh, when you found a foundation, you write a kind of document that outlines what the foundation is supposed to do.

00:45:26,684 --> 00:45:27,384 [speaker_2]

The bylaws.

00:45:27,504 --> 00:46:42,364 [speaker_3]

Yes, yes. Or, in our language, it's called a charter because this is a foreign document, so all our documents are in English. And there is, of course, a letter of intent. It's largely about the Akelius Foundation working to promote education and support people in vulnerable situations due to war, natural disasters, or similar circumstances. And that's something we on the Akelius Foundation Council always have to adhere to. And we can't, for example, support cultural or sports activities. That's not included in—in—but the charity that the Akelius Foundation provides is of a more fundamental nature. So if someone asks us to sponsor a soccer team or something like that. No matter how much we'd like to, could do it, or want to do it, we can't. We're prohibited from doing so.

00:46:43,404 --> 00:46:48,304 [speaker_2]

But the thing is, he started this, and then it took on a life of its own.

00:46:48,584 --> 00:47:13,624 [speaker_3]

And then, of course, Roger is still around. And if there's anything—well, that we on the board feel is borderline, or something like that—then we can actually still ask him. "Did you think we could do it this way?" And he usually says, "Sure."

00:47:14,364 --> 00:47:16,204 [speaker_1]

Can we train someone on that soccer team?

00:47:18,604 --> 00:47:19,564 [speaker_3]

Yeah, sort of.

00:47:20,824 --> 00:47:42,794 [speaker_1]

But this is the Fundraising Podcast, after all. It reaches the fundraising community and all kinds of organizations. And what about those organizations Henrik mentioned here? I'm sure you'll get a lot of people reaching out.

If you work for an organization and are involved in education in some way, how do you get in touch with you? And how do you want organizations to contact you?

00:47:43,784 --> 00:48:18,744 [speaker_3]

Then you write to our email address. It's on the Akelius Foundation website, and, uh, you should have a very—preferably a fairly detailed—description of your project, of what you want to achieve. And we're also very selective when it comes to someone who's just started out because, well, we'd like to see a bit of a track record of what you've done before.

00:48:19,404 --> 00:48:27,504 [speaker_2]

Have you noticed that ever since Sida cut funding, all these small organizations that used to receive a lot of money from Sida have been contacting this email address?

00:48:28,996 --> 00:48:37,796 [speaker_3]

Of course we've noticed that. We've noticed the shutdown in the U.S. even more. All—

00:48:38,356 --> 00:48:40,056 [speaker_1]

That mailbox is full.

00:48:40,796 --> 00:48:47,436 [speaker_3]

That one, yeah, but that one—it was such a disaster, especially for many of the major players.

00:48:48,476 --> 00:48:49,636 [speaker_1]

Yeah, yeah, that's true.

00:48:49,916 --> 00:48:57,596 [speaker_3]

And, and unfortunately, that has perhaps led to a bit of a closer scrutiny from our side.

00:48:58,096 --> 00:49:14,856 [speaker_1]

From your side. How do you see the future of the Akelius Foundation and civil society? We're getting into that. Cuts to aid and all that, and an increasingly troubled world. How do you see the Akelius Foundation's role in that?

00:49:17,036 --> 00:50:10,236 [speaker_3]

In an ideal world, I had hoped—though I know it's completely unrealistic—that the Akelius Foundation's work wouldn't be necessary. Frankly, I don't see that happening anytime soon, or even in the foreseeable future. And since the Akelius Foundation's core funding is based on housing—something most people need and for which there is hopefully a demand—the idea behind the Akelius Foundation is that it should be able to survive many crises in the future and, hopefully, give a great many children a better future than they would otherwise have.

00:50:10,776 --> 00:50:16,176 [speaker_1]

What a closing remark. It's been great having you here. It's been informative and interesting.