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# NZ's answer to Robin Hood: Not giving to the rich to give to the poor

[Josephine Franks](#)

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Margaret and David Allis have given up luxuries this Christmas with a simple mission: to save lives. .

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You won't find lavish decorations, a groaning Christmas table or a pile of presents under the tree at David and Margaret Alis's place.

It's not because they're stingy though, Margaret says - they're trying to be as generous as they can.

They've just chosen to spend more on those who need a helping hand than on those better off at Christmas.

As part of that, the Auckland couple have set aside \$2000 for a [Christmas fundraiser](#). The catch is, they'll be match-funding other people's donations - the money won't be donated unless others give too. If not, it's going on chocolate and beer.

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A dozen Kiwis are involved in the fundraiser, committing \$17,300 between them - money that would otherwise be spent on gambling, holidays and crypto-assets.

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Almost \$14,000 has been raised so far and if they reach their goal, a total of \$34,600 will go to the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF).

That's enough to buy 10,000 anti-malarial bed nets, to protect 20,000 people and save several lives. Not a bad trade-off for holding on the scorched almonds and craft brews, David reckons.

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Charity was already a big part of their lives. About 15 years ago they started to incorporate it into Christmas using "gift for life" programmes: one parent received a goat, their son got a toilet.

Since then, their budget has shrunk. The family does presents Secret Santa-style, so everyone only has to buy one gift. The focus is on items that are secondhand, Fairtrade or ethically made.

They also give a "big chunk" of money away, David says - over and above what they've pledged for the fundraiser.

Thousands of dollars isn't small change, but they acknowledge it's easier to take this approach now their six children are mostly grown up.

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Instead of spending on a huge pile of presents, the Allis family will donate to those in need. Photo: ANDREW NEEL / UNSPLASH

"The answer is always five more."

The same applies to giving, he says: "We can always give more and we can always push ourselves".

It's easier when you know just how much of a difference your money makes, David says. With the charities they donate to, they know they can change a life "really, really quickly".

Three dollars is enough to buy a bed net, \$6000 is enough for AMF to save a life, according to [charity evaluator GiveWell's estimates](#) - which makes donating to AMF one of the most cost-effective ways to save lives.

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Choosing a cost-effective charity is a crucial part of the Allis's "[effective altruism](#)" approach to giving. The premise is that rather than just giving your time and money to what feels right, you should aim to do most good.

That philosophy of "maximising good" can be applied widely: to what career you choose, where you spend your money, your lifestyle choices, what charities you donate to.

David and Margaret have made a lifelong commitment to doing as much good as they can. About eight years ago, they sold their business into a charitable trust. Now all the profits - hundreds of thousands of dollars a year - go to charity. David also donates a proportion of the salary he is paid from the business.

Tall poppy syndrome might stop many Kiwis from boasting about their generosity, but it's "good to talk about giving," David says.

"One of the things that can help other people is hearing what other people have given."



You can get involved in the [Effective Altruism Christmas fundraiser here](#). Donations will be matched up to a total of \$17,300.

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