



Creating A New Social Contract

Sam Jacobs

New York City • USA

Sam Jacobs is a philanthropic activist committed to ending inequality. He has the highest of hopes – to truly change the way we think about wealth redistribution. Coming from a long line of philanthropists, this is something Sam understands well.

“My grandpa founded a multinational tech firm and accumulated a lot of wealth. My dad followed in his footsteps. That created a childhood for me with a lot of privilege. Every opportunity was available to us. I went to a great private school in San Diego. I grew up in a beautiful home with a view of the ocean. It was a picture-perfect childhood.”

Through his travels, Sam learned early on that he was privileged, and his parents reminded him every step of the way. “I knew I had a privileged position in the world. And because of that, I had a great responsibility too,” he explains. “That sort of wealth doesn’t come from nowhere. It’s only possible because of the community.”

Sam’s grandparents were influential philanthropists, and their giving planted a similar seed in him. They supported all kinds of cultural institutions, museums, universities, and arts programs. And one Chanukah, they shifted the focus of their giving to Sam.

“When I was 18 my grandparents gave me some money to give to charities of my choice,” Sam explains. “This is when I really started thinking seriously about philanthropy. At first I was pretty overwhelmed. It was a lot of responsibility! There were so many questions. Who deserves my help? What causes are worthy of addressing? Mainly, I wondered, what were my values as a donor?”

At the same time, the Occupy Wall St. movement was unfolding. Sam’s English teacher, Mr. Hendrickson, was teaching a class called the Art of Protest. He brought the class to downtown San Diego, where for the first time Sam could really see the way people were feeling about – and suffering from – income inequality.

“It really affected me,” says Sam. “It made me wonder what were the root causes of this inequality. And how do we combat them?” Sam admits, “It took me a long time to get a hold on that,” he says, adding, “I’d been shielded and protected. After a lot of deliberation, I realized something important. Despite my elite education, I wasn’t actually in the best position to solve these problems. Actually, the solution should come from the people who’d been dealt the short end of the stick. That’s when I realized that what I really wanted to do was to take the money I’d been given, and help lead people affected by economic inequality out of their situation. And I also wanted to invest it, and allow those resources to build lasting political power...So I decided to unite the wealthy, and towards a transformative common goal: upending inequality.”

A few years later, Sam found the missing piece of this puzzle at Resource Generation (RG). RG is a community of young people with wealth and/or class privilege who are committed to a more equitable distribution of wealth, land, and power.

“At RG I finally found people doing really powerful work in philanthropy,” Sam says. “I met young people with wealth, in a similar situation to mine, which helped me combat feelings of isolation. And we were fighting on important fronts. This was important for me.”

Now Sam works with RG hosting workshops, learning exchanges, and meeting groups where people can get together, and share feelings about their class and wealth. “It’s important to have a shared space with mutual understanding,” Sam says. “We nurture strong accountability relationships. It’s crucial to be open and transparent with partners who don’t come from wealthy backgrounds too. Honesty has to be key. We’re so often discouraged from talking about these things that we get all twisted up inside about what wealth is for, and what it’s supposed to do.”

That’s why Sam signed the RG’s Giving Pledge. This is a commitment to giving a significant portion of your money to social justice movements over a set period of time. Sam hopes that by setting an example by giving to Grassroots International and Third Wave Fund, and creating funds like the Works in Progress Fund, he can inspire others with wealth to get on board and support these causes.

Sam’s work isn’t exclusively philanthropic. He’s involved with a variety of non-profit organizations that fight against disparities in social, economic, and criminal justice. In the fight for housing justice, Sam has partnered with the New York chapter of the Right to the City Alliance (RTTC). With RTTC, one of Sam’s areas of focus is helping communities respond to gentrification, and to halt the resulting displacement of low-income people, people of color, LGBTQ people, marginalized communities, and others from their neighborhoods. “Everyone has the right to dignified and affordable housing,” Sam says. “We work in support of tenants’ rights. And we try to ensure that alternative housing is available, by buying land and building affordable housing. It’s a problem a lot of well-off people overlook. But it’s important.”

Sam works diligently to support green advocacy during Earth Week. In April 2020 he will be guiding rallies in support of the Green New Deal, leading acts of civil disobedience, and directing volunteers.

Sam has also been closely involved with the NBA (National Basketball Association). It started with a family connection to the Sacramento Kings, whose larger community was in turmoil. In March of 2018, the Sacramento community was deeply affected by the tragic shooting death of Stephon Clark, an unarmed black man who was shot in his own backyard. Sam decided that he could use his Works in Progress Fund to partner with the NBA, and help bring some semblance of healing to the community.

In the wake of this tragedy, Sam partnered with the team, who hosted the Team Up For Change Summit. The goal of this Summit was to address social injustice, and create partnerships with law enforcement and the community to aid in increase police accountability. The Summit resulted in more than \$50,000 in scholarship pledges, to be awarded by the Sacramento Police Foundation Criminal Justice Magnet School Academy and the Sierra Health Foundation.

In 2019, Team Up For Change expanded to include the Milwaukee Bucks, and support of cultural figures, including Kida the Great, and seven-time Grammy award winning rapper, songwriter, and producer Antwan “Big Boi” Patton. With such a positive response, Sam hopes to continue his involvement with the Summit for years to come.

While Sam has accomplished some amazing things with his philanthropy and his community involvement, he doesn’t want other young people to feel overwhelmed at the idea of getting involved. “People might say that you are inexperienced, or that you don’t know the way the world works,” Sam says, adding, “Just remember—*we* get to decide, *together*, how the world is going to work in the future. We, as young people, are really powerful, and always have been.”

For young people with wealth, Sam had a similarly uplifting message. “It’s important to think about the messages we’ve received about managing money, and think forward. So much we’re told about money is about safety, or security. Or the ability to use your money to get into a good school, to get a good job, and to make more money. Everything is in the service of money – not the community. That sort of story really covers up the fact that we are the most safe, secure, and able to flourish, when we are in deep community, and interdependent on each other. That’s not to say that wealth is a bad thing: it’s not. Neither is creating wealth. I just want everyone to have access to the same options that I did. And we can make that kind of American dream possible for anyone. It’s just going to take those with wealth sharing that prosperity much more equally than we do now.”

Sam will continue to give all that he can to issues of social justice, great and small. But he stresses that it’s important to understand that giving isn’t just about dollars and cents. It’s a mindset. It’s a way of life. And as far as Sam is concerned, being a giver is the only way to fully live one’s life.

Wealth is not to feed our egos but to feed the hungry and to help people help themselves.

Andrew Carnegie

Call to Action: Invite your friends to join Resource Generation - and take the RG Giving Pledge:

<https://resourcegeneration.org/contact/>

Stone Soup Leadership Institute
www.stonesoupleadership.org
www.soup4youngworld.com