

# Celebrities and charities

Bob Geldof, who you learnt about on p. 81, is not the only celebrity heavily involved in charity work.

## 1 Pre-reading

Are there any celebrities you admire for their charity work? Name the celebrities and their charities.

## 2 Four celebrities and their charity work

a) Now read the profile of each international celebrity below. Use a dictionary for any words you might not know.

b) Comprehension: In your own words, describe the stars' charities.



Leonardo DiCaprio (b. 1974)

Many celebrities are involved in a wide variety of charity organizations, but they often choose one area to become particularly active in. With superstar actor **Leonardo DiCaprio** (*Titanic*), the environment has become the cause he feels particularly passionate about. Not only is he active in a variety of environmental protection organizations, he also founded his own: *The Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation*, which focuses on fighting global warming.

The world's first national park was created in the United States (Yellowstone, 1872), and conservation organizations such as the Sierra Club are among the oldest in the world. However, it is also a fact that Americans still favor large, gasoline-intensive cars and SUVs to smaller, more economical models or public transportation.

So when a high-profile star like Leonardo DiCaprio started praising smaller cars in general and hybrid technology in particular, people began to listen and follow his example – first other celebrities, and then more and more average Americans. And it is the same with DiCaprio's support of solar power: Suddenly, installing solar panels to one's home as DiCaprio did with his own no longer seemed so unrealistic.



Mariah Carey (b. 1970)

Her 18 number-one hits on Billboard's famous 'Hot 100' pop chart is a record for a solo artist unlikely to be broken any time soon. And indeed, **Mariah Carey** (*Hero*), as one of the most successful singers in pop music, is regularly asked to take part in the world's big music events for charity, such as benefit concerts (9/11 in 2001, Hurricane Katrina in 2005) or Bob Geldof's *Live 8*.

Carey leads a glamorous, jet-set life and is frequently seen on the world's red carpets. Her early life, however, was far from glamorous. The singer-songwriter grew up in the New York suburbs, underprivileged and in a difficult family environment. Her background is a major reason she became involved in different charities which focus on helping underprivileged children. Carey once donated \$ 1 million to a single charity, *The Fresh Air Fund*. Since 1877, *Fresh Air* has been providing free summer vacations to poor New York City kids from rough neighborhoods – young people who otherwise might never have a chance to get outside the city, experience the freedom and enjoyment of the countryside, make new friends, and perhaps discover new hobbies.

**Sir Elton John**, British singer, songwriter and pianist (*'Yellow Brick Road'*), has been a best-selling artist and superstar for over 40 years. He has also been closely associated with charity work since the mid-1980s, and is best known for his work in the fight against AIDS.

Elton John has raised hundreds of millions of dollars over the years for AIDS research, in the framework of numerous different events and campaigns, and the entertainer has also donated large amounts of his own personal fortune to this cause. In fact, he takes this cause so seriously that he even founded a charity of his own in 1992: *The Elton John AIDS Foundation*. This foundation is active on a variety of fronts: It raises money for HIV/AIDS prevention programmes; it helps people living with HIV/AIDS in various ways; and the charity also tries to combat prejudice and discrimination towards people with HIV/AIDS and their families and friends.

Some would say the last point mentioned – working against prejudice and discrimination – is Elton John's major contribution to the HIV/AIDS cause, especially in the mid-80s when the disease was still so new and the atmosphere relatively hysterical: With their support, major celebrities like Elton John and Elizabeth Taylor did a lot to take away people's fears.



Elton John (b. 1947)

Singer, songwriter, actress and all-around multi-talent **Beyoncé Knowles** (known simply as Beyoncé) grew up in Houston, Texas. She first gained fame as the lead singer of the Grammy-winning R&B group *Destiny's Child* (*'Bills, Bills, Bills'*) before becoming a major solo star.

When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and other parts of Louisiana in 2005 and made tens of thousand of people homeless, Beyoncé decided she wanted to help. So together with friend and *Destiny's Child* co-member Kelly Rowland she founded *The Survivor Foundation*, which was able to raise money to provide many of the Katrina homeless with temporary housing.

*The Survivor Foundation* has grown to be more than 'just' a fund for the victims of that particular hurricane. To quote the *Survivor* website: "Our mission is to assist families and individuals whose lives have been affected by disasters, natural or otherwise, and have been displaced. We also help those in need by providing assistance to individuals suffering from HIV/AIDS and homelessness."

To this date, *Survivor* has raised \$2.5 million in donations in the Houston area alone.



Beyoncé (b. 1981)

### 3 Discussion

1. In America, one often hears the following saying regarding celebrities and their press agents: "All news is good news." Explain what you think that saying has to do with celebrity culture.
2. Do you think celebrities always want at least a little personal gain from charity work? Or is it impossible for an outsider to judge a celebrity's motives?
3. Why don't celebrities just make anonymous donations if they feel strongly about a cause?

### 4 Your country

Are there any celebrities in your country that you admire for their charity work? Which celebrities, and what charity work?

1. The saying refers to celebrities who are so eager/desperate to see their names in the media that they don't care even if a story is really negative: As long as the celebrity is being talked about, he/she is happy.  
 2. Individuelle Antworten  
 3. Many celebrities probably feel the more attention a charity can get, the better, and people pay a lot of attention to celebrities.  
 4. Individuelle Antworten  
 Lösungsvorschläge: