



Raquel Natalicchio/Staff photographer

Avani Narang works for her family's company, Indus Cares Foundation, which serves the tenants in the apartment complexes the company owns. She says she is thrilled to be making a difference.

# Young philanthropists change the way they give

Focus turns to nonprofits, includes hands-on work by those who donate

**By Nusaiba Mizan**  
STAFF WRITER

When Houston's Avani Narang was younger, she realized that volunteering could help her get established in a new town when she moved for her job as a consultant.

Narang devoted evenings, weekends and even her lunch hours to charitable organizations, such as the foundation supporting the local public library.

"I was at a crossroads in my career where I knew I wasn't doing the things I wanted to be doing with my career, with my life job-wise," Narang, 36, said.

She got the opportunity to leave her consultant job in 2017, when her father, Ajay Gupta, asked her to lead the family's

Houston-based Alka and Ajay Gupta Foundation, also known as the Indus Cares Foundation, which provides services for tenants of the 37 apartment complexes the family's company owns in southwest Houston and Spring Branch.

"It was so freeing to think about: I would suddenly get the ability to work on these different areas of the company, which I had the background and education for, but also get to move into social impact and work on something that my dad had created and my family was spearheading," she said.

Narang, among the "millennial" cohort born from 1981 to 1996, is among a generation of philanthropists more involved with nonprofits than previous

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Jon Shapley/Staff photographer

Beau Beaudette, right, sorts clothes with Rose Hedderman, a software engineer, at Montrose Grace Place on June 17 at Kindred church in Houston. Beaudette said he has been volunteering at the organization for four years.

## GIVE

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birth cohorts. Houston organizations say millennials' interest in giving back present new opportunities for nonprofits in need of leadership and financial support.

### Increased donations

Giving USA, which produces annual reports on philanthropic trends, found in its 2022 survey of 1,400 donors that millennials increased their annual household donations by 40 percent, to \$1,323 on average from \$942 in 2016.

Millennials were the only generation surveyed to report an increase in giving. Baby boomers (born from 1946 to 1964) on average gave 12 percent less in that period, though their annual total was the most of surveyed cohorts. And Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) gave 4 percent less. Gen Z, in the report comprising those born from 1997 to 2012, was surveyed for the first time in 2022.

Houston philanthropic organizations, trusts and nonprofits say they see this trend of hands-on millennial donors on the local level. They are likely to give their time in addition to money, and are more interested in knowing how their donations affect people's lives.

Younger generations are happy to give but want to know more about where their money is going and whether it made a difference, said Annie Hurwitz, senior manager of Next Gen Engagement at the Greater Houston Community Foundation. The foundation, with almost \$1.3 billion in assets under management and its Center for Family Philanthropy, work with individuals, families and corporations to direct dollars according to those donors' intentions.

The foundation started running a program in 2011 for Gen X and millennials, gaining 160 participants overtime. The program covers information like ways to hold and channel money for future donations and how to evaluate grant applications.

Narang, who went through the program, said it helped her access a network of donors and people knowledgeable of nonprofits as she grew her family's



Elizabeth Conley/Staff photographer

**Dressed as Spider-Man, James Crandall prepares to rappel down the 26-story DoubleTree Hotel Galleria for "Rappel for a Reason" last November. Sixty United Way Supporters participated in the event, which raised \$120,000.**

foundation.

"Our work here with our Center for Family Philanthropy really started because the older generations said, 'I want to bring my kids into my philanthropy, but I don't really know how. I don't really understand them. I don't know that they care.' Just lots of family dynamic assumptions," Hurwitz said.

It's that family focus across generations that drives Chris Weekley, chairman of the Greater Houston Community Foundation and president of David Weekley Homes, a Houston homebuilder, to stay involved with the foundation.

He said he's trying to create "a culture of philanthropy" in his family, which includes five children. "I have parents that are very philanthropic," Weekley said. "And so, (I'm) trying to instill those values in my family. So there's learning for myself

but there's also learning for our family, which GHCF has helped facilitate with different volunteer opportunities, etcetera, for different aged children."

### Deeply involved

At Houston Trust Co., which offers philanthropic advisory services and manages about \$1 billion in foundation, endowment and charitable trusts, President and CEO David Lummis said the younger generation is more data-oriented and wants to see metrics to be able to evaluate grant requests.

As a result, Lummis said, those younger givers are willing to consider supporting newer organizations with different missions and may break from the traditional beneficiaries of their families' support. They tend to view philanthropy by cause rather than by geography or institution, he added.

Wealth managers say younger donors also seek to give their time in addition to, or rather than, donating money. Volunteering, in concert with financial support, allows millennials to see the effects of their donations, said the Greater Houston Community Foundation.

Angel Harris, chief advancement officer for United Way Greater Houston, said young donors like events where they can volunteer, learn about community needs, experience something new or socialize.

For example, the nonprofit is hosting its second "Rappel for a Reason," for which participants each raise \$1,500 to descend a 26-story building by rope. The program had 50 participants in 2022.

"They told us pretty clearly that they want to do something different than what their parents are doing," Harris said.

"They want to experience United Way in a way that's different than what they've seen in the past. That's driven the changes that we've made. It's driven the programs that we offer, the activities that we host."

Doug Suggitt, executive director of the Periwinkle Foundation, a Houston organization that develops programs to support children affected by life-threatening illnesses, said millennials, especially in smaller organizations, may take on leadership roles, which is key to growth and leadership succession. The foundation has a group of active young professionals with its own board.

"A lot of these members that are on this board," Suggitt said, "will typically become advisory board members and hopefully, one day in the future, board members and leaders of the organization."